

Foreword

Foreword by the High Commissioner for Refugees

2003 was a good year for refugee returns. But in many ways it was a traumatic year for the humanitarian community, with the barbaric attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad and a series of other killings of humanitarian workers in different countries reminding us of the increased dangers to which UN personnel, including humanitarian workers, are now exposed. We were particularly touched by the loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a former colleague and great friend of many of us, and of Bettina Goislard, a much respected and experienced protection officer who was assassinated in Afghanistan.

Prior to the bombing in Baghdad, UNHCR had expanded its presence in Iraq in anticipation of the return of up to half a million refugees, in addition to participating in inter-agency initiatives to find solutions for the more than one million internally displaced Iraqis. Following the attack, international staff were withdrawn and UNHCR's activities curtailed. Repatriation from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia continued, however, and national staff did an excellent job in maintaining essential activities with support from a core group of international staff in Jordan and Kuwait.

In Afghanistan, despite continuing insecurity in parts of the country, there were many positive developments during the year. Almost half a million Afghan refugees and more than 80,000 internally displaced persons returned to their homes with support from UNHCR and its partners, bringing the total number of assisted returns since December 2001 to over 3 million.

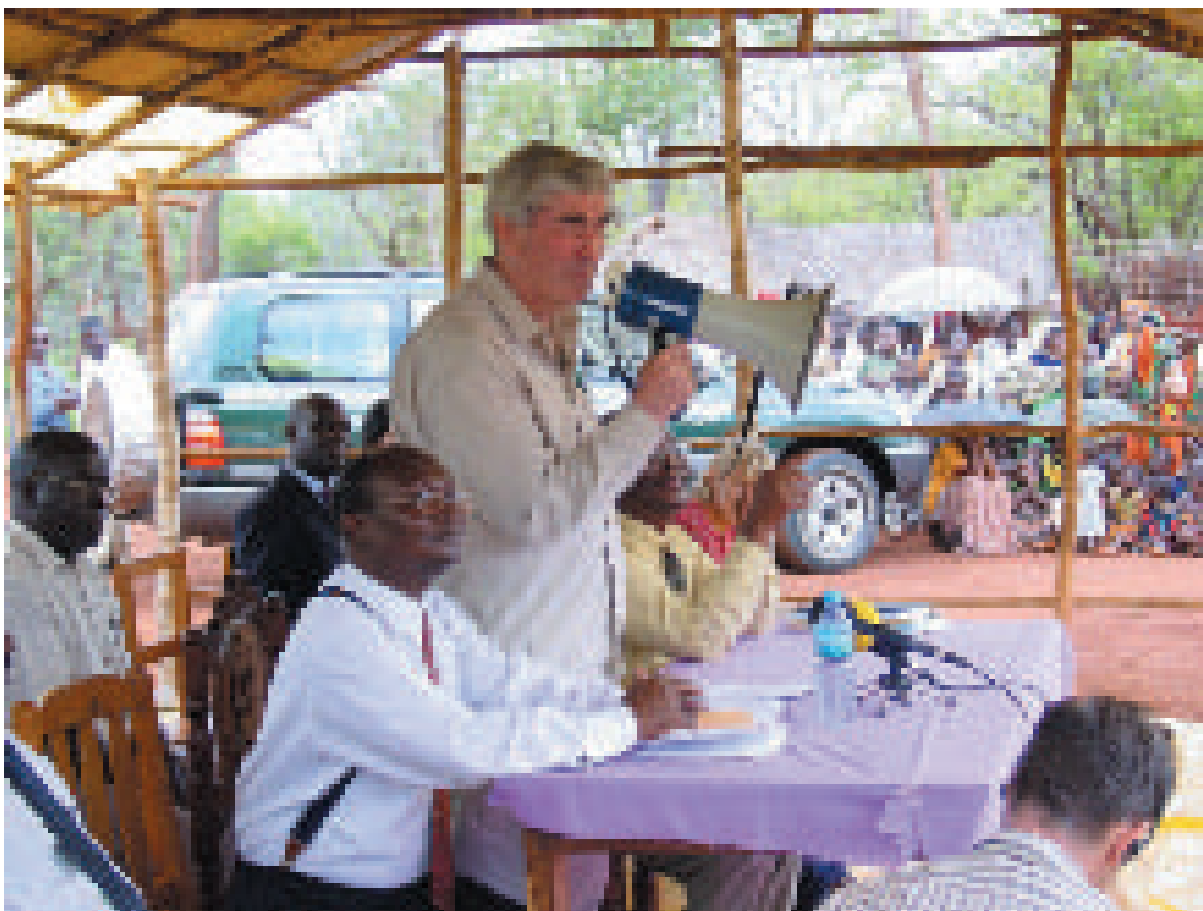
In Africa, our focus was largely on the repatriation of refugees to Angola, Eritrea, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Positive developments in countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sudan also led us to step up our planning for refugee returns. The resolution of conflicts in these countries could, over the next few years, lead to the voluntary repatriation of up to two million refugees and the return of several million more internally displaced persons. UNHCR also responded to a new emergency situation caused by the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan which led to the flight of over 100,000 refugees into Chad.

Other key areas which demanded our active engagement included Nepal, where we announced new measures to try to end the stalemate in finding solutions for the Bhutanese people still in camps; China, where we followed with concern the plight of North Koreans leaving their country illegally; the Northern Caucasus, where displaced Chechens in Ingushetia came under pressure to return to Chechnya; and Colombia, where the number of internally displaced persons rose to well over two million.

In 2003, I submitted to the General Assembly my report on "Strengthening the Capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to Carry Out its Mandate", having previously shared it with the Executive Committee. This led to a General Assembly resolution which addresses a number of issues aimed at strengthening UNHCR's multilateral character and ensuring that it is adequately equipped to carry out its mandate. The time limitation on the continuation of the Office was removed, reporting and funding arrangements were streamlined, and the Office's linkages within the UN family – particularly with development entities – were strengthened.

During the year, I launched the Convention Plus initiative. In line with our Agenda for Protection, this is about strengthening and complementing the 1951 Refugee Convention through the development of multilateral special agreements aimed at enhancing burden sharing and sharpening the focus on achieving durable solutions.

To ensure a more systematic approach to finding solutions, UNHCR also developed a Framework for Durable Solutions. This consists of three elements: first, the promotion of better targeting of development assistance to countries and areas hosting large numbers of refugees over protracted periods; second, the establishment of "4Rs" programmes in post-conflict situations, aimed at ensuring an integrated approach to repatriation,



Tanzania: High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers at Chogo Settlement, addressing Somali Bantu refugees, many of whom were selected for resettlement in the USA. *UNHCR/I. Unluova*

reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and third, the promotion, in those cases where local integration of refugees is a viable option, of a strategy of Development through Local Integration. These initiatives have led to concrete projects in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Zambia.

On funding, 2003 saw a further increase in contributions, partly as a result of our large Supplementary programmes. Many donors also responded positively to our request for contributions to be made early in the year, thus facilitating our work. However, although a budget of USD 836.3 million had been approved by the Executive Committee in October 2002, we were once again obliged to make two budget cuts during the year, first reducing the level of allocations by USD 54 million and freezing some USD 37 million of the Operational Reserve, and then making additional cuts to compensate for increased costs of some USD 42.9 million due to exchange fluctuations and UN salary increases.

We invited partners at the country level to work more closely with UNHCR in assessing needs, setting objectives and preparing budgets. The aim is to achieve a more needs-based approach to budgeting, making better use of partners where they are able to provide services more cost effectively, exploring opportunities for partners currently funded by UNHCR to continue the same activities with funding from other sources, and supporting – other than financially – projects aimed at addressing unmet refugee needs not included in the UNHCR budget.

An exercise was initiated during the year to reclassify a number of posts, since in the past many operational posts were inaccurately classified in UNHCR reports as administrative posts.

I hope this Global Report will provide a comprehensive review of UNHCR's achievements and the impact of its work on the lives of refugees over the last year. Moreover, that it will serve as an indicator of where future needs may arise. Above all, I hope it will encourage donors to continue supporting us in providing protection and assistance, and in finding durable solutions for refugees and other persons of concern worldwide.

Ruud Lubbers