

# 5 Protracted refugee situations: the search for practical solutions

The majority of today's refugees have lived in exile for far too long, restricted to camps or eking out a meagre existence in urban centres throughout the developing world. Most subsist in a state of limbo, and are often dependent on others to find solutions to their plight. Their predicament is similar to that of the tens of thousands of refugees who stagnated in camps in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. The High Commissioner for Refugees at the time, Gerrit van Heuven Goedhart, called those camps 'black spots on the map of Europe' that should 'burn holes in the consciences of all those privileged to live in better conditions'.<sup>1</sup> If the situation persisted, he said, the problems of refugees would fester and his office would be reduced to 'simply administering human misery'.<sup>2</sup> The issue of displaced persons in Europe was finally settled some 20 years after the end of the Second World War; today's protracted refugee crises, however, show no signs of being resolved in the near future.

Since the early 1990s, the international community has focused largely on refugee emergencies. It has delivered humanitarian assistance to war-affected populations and supported large-scale repatriation programmes in high-profile areas such as the Balkans, the Great Lakes region of Africa and, more recently, Darfur (Sudan) and Chad. Yet more than 60 per cent of today's refugees are trapped in situations far from the international spotlight. Often characterized by long periods of exile—stretching to decades for some groups—these situations occur on most continents in a range of environments including camps, rural settlements and urban centres. The vast majority are to be found in the world's poorest and most unstable regions, and are frequently the result of neglect by regional and international actors.

Refugees trapped in these forgotten situations often face significant restrictions on their rights. At the same time, their presence raises political and security concerns among host governments and other states in the region. As such, protracted refugee situations represent a significant challenge both to human rights and security. 'The consequences of having so many human beings in a static state,' argues UNHCR, 'include wasted lives, squandered resources and increased threats to security'.<sup>3</sup> Taken independently, each of these challenges is of mounting concern. Taken collectively, and given the interaction between security, human rights and development, the full significance of protracted refugee situations becomes more apparent.

*Karen refugees from Myanmar in the Tham Hin camp, Ratchaburi Province, Thailand. Many of the ethnic Karen refugees in this camp fled their homeland in 1997. (UNHCR/K. Singhaseni/1997)*

Despite the gravity of the problem, protracted refugee situations have yet to feature prominently on the international political agenda. In the vacuum, humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR try to care for forgotten populations and mitigate the negative effects of prolonged exile. These efforts are not enough, however. In the past, similar crises in Europe, Southeast Asia and Latin America were resolved through comprehensive plans of action involving humanitarian agencies as well as political, security and development actors. Such an integrated approach is also needed today.

## Nature and scope of the problem

The difficulty of defining protracted refugee situations has arguably frustrated efforts to formulate effective policy responses, and a more detailed understanding of the global scope and importance of the problem is clearly necessary. UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as ‘one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance’.<sup>4</sup>

In identifying the major protracted refugee situations in the world in 2004, UNHCR used the ‘crude measure of refugee populations of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries’.<sup>5</sup> The study excluded Palestinian refugees, who fall under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and represent the world’s oldest and largest protracted refugee situation.

The definition above accurately describes the condition of many refugees in protracted situations. What it does not reflect is that many of these refugees are actively engaged in seeking solutions for themselves, either through political and military activities in their countries of origin or through onward migration to the West. Furthermore, evidence from Africa and Asia demonstrates that while population numbers in a particular protracted situation may remain relatively stable over time, the composition of a population often changes.

A definition of protracted refugee situations should therefore include not only the humanitarian elements of the phenomenon but also its political and strategic aspects. In addition, a definition must recognize that countries of origin, host countries and the international community are all implicated in the causes of protracted refugee situations.

In protracted situations, refugee populations have moved beyond the emergency phase—where the focus is on life-saving protection and assistance—but cannot expect durable solutions in the foreseeable future. These populations are typically, but not necessarily, concentrated in a specific geographic area, and may include camp-based and urban-refugee populations. The nature of a protracted situation will be the result of conditions in the refugees’ country of origin, the responses of and

**Figure 5.1** Major protracted refugee situations, 1 January 2005

Country of Asylum	Origin	end-2004
Algeria	Western Sahara	165,000
Armenia	Azerbaijan	235,000
Burundi	Dem. Rep. of Congo	48,000
Cameroon	Chad	39,000
China	Viet Nam	299,000
Congo	Dem. Rep. of Congo	59,000
Côte d'Ivoire	Liberia	70,000
Dem. Rep. of Congo	Angola	98,000
Dem. Rep. of Congo	Sudan	45,000
Egypt	Occupied Palestinian Territory	70,000
Ethiopia	Sudan	90,000
Guinea	Liberia	127,000
India	China	94,000
India	Sri Lanka	57,000
Islamic Rep. of Iran	Afghanistan	953,000
Islamic Rep. of Iran	Iraq	93,000
Kenya	Somalia	154,000
Kenya	Sudan	68,000
Nepal	Bhutan	105,000
Pakistan	Afghanistan*	960,000
Rwanda	Dem. Rep. of Congo	45,000
Saudi Arabia	Occupied Palestinian Territory	240,000
Serbia and Montenegro	Bosnia and Herzegovina	95,000
Serbia and Montenegro	Croatia	180,000
Sudan	Eritrea	111,000
Thailand	Myanmar	121,000
Uganda	Sudan	215,000
United Rep. of Tanzania	Burundi	444,000
United Rep. of Tanzania	Dem. Rep. of Congo	153,000
Uzbekistan	Tajikistan	39,000
Yemen	Somalia	64,000
Zambia	Angola	89,000
Zambia	Dem. Rep. of Congo	66,000

Note: This table refers to refugee situations where the number of refugees of a certain origin within a particular country of asylum has been 25,000 or more for at least five consecutive years. Industrialized countries are not included. Data does not include Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

\* UNHCR estimate.

Source: UNHCR.

conditions in the host countries and the level of engagement by the international community. Furthermore, as the experience of the Sudanese refugees scattered across eight African countries indicates, members of the same displaced group in different host countries will experience different conditions.

Politically, the identification of a protracted refugee situation is a matter of perception. If a displaced population is seen to have existed for a significant period of time without the prospect of solutions, then it may be termed a protracted refugee situation. Indeed, it is important that the crude measure of 25,000 refugees in exile for five years should not be used as a basis for excluding other groups. For example, of the Rohingya who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh 12 years ago, 20,000 still remain. Similarly, there are 19,000 Burundians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 16,000 Somalis in Ethiopia, 19,000 Mauritians in Senegal, 15,000 Ethiopians in Sudan and 19,000 Rwandans in Uganda.

Long-staying urban refugees are not typically included in an understanding of protracted refugee situations. Yet tens of thousands live clandestinely in urban areas, avoiding contact with the authorities and bereft of legal status. There are almost 40,000 Congolese urban refugees in Burundi, more than 36,000 Somali urban refugees in Yemen and almost 15,000 Sudanese urban refugees in Egypt. Nearly 10,000 Afghan urban refugees live in India and more than 5,000 Liberian urban refugees remain in Côte d'Ivoire. These are only some of the largest caseloads. In addition, there are hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees throughout the Middle East.

## **Trends in protracted refugee situations**

Chronic and stagnating refugee situations are a growing challenge for the international community. Their total number has increased dramatically over the past decade, and host states and regions of origin feel their effects more keenly. More significantly, protracted refugee situations now account for the vast majority of the world's refugee population.

During the 1990s, a number of long-standing refugee groups that had been displaced by Cold War conflicts in the developing world went home. In southern Africa, large groups of Mozambicans, Namibians and others were repatriated. In Indochina, Cambodians in exile in Thailand returned home, while Vietnamese and Laotians were resettled in third countries. With the end of fighting in Central America, the vast majority of displaced Nicaraguans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans returned to their countries.

Nonetheless, in 1993 there remained 27 protracted refugee situations and a total population of 7.9 million refugees. Indeed, even as older refugee populations were being repatriated, new intra-state conflicts resulted in massive refugee flows. Conflict and state collapse in Somalia, the Great Lakes region of Africa, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s generated millions of refugees. Millions more were displaced by ethnic and civil conflict in Iraq, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia. As the global

refugee population mushroomed in the early 1990s, the pressing need was to respond to the challenges of simultaneous mass influx situations in many regions of the world.

More than a decade later, many of these conflicts and refugee situations remain unresolved. Indeed, the number of protracted refugee situations now is greater than at the end of the Cold War. In 2004 there were 33 protracted refugee situations with a total refugee population of more than 5.5 million (see Figure 5.1). While there are fewer refugees in protracted situations today, the *number* of such situations has greatly increased. In addition, refugees are spending longer periods in exile. It is estimated that ‘the average of major refugee situations, protracted or not, has increased from nine years in 1993 to 17 years at the end of 2003’.<sup>6</sup>

In 1993, 48 per cent of the world’s 16.3 million refugees were caught in protracted situations. At the end of 2004, the number of refugees had come down to 9.2 million—but more than 61 per cent of them were in protracted situations. And, as illustrated by Map 5.1, they are found in some of the most volatile regions in the world.

East and West Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East are all plagued by protracted refugee situations. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number, with 17, involving 1.9 million refugees. The countries hosting the biggest groups are Guinea, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. In contrast, the geographical area covering Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East hosts only eight major protracted situations but nonetheless accounts for 2.5 million refugees. At the end of 2004 the overwhelming majority of these—approximately 2 million—were Afghans in Pakistan and Iran. In Asia (China, Thailand, India and Nepal) there are five protracted situations and some 676,000 refugees. Europe faces three major protracted situations involving 510,000 refugees, primarily in the Balkans and Armenia.

## Causes of protracted refugee situations

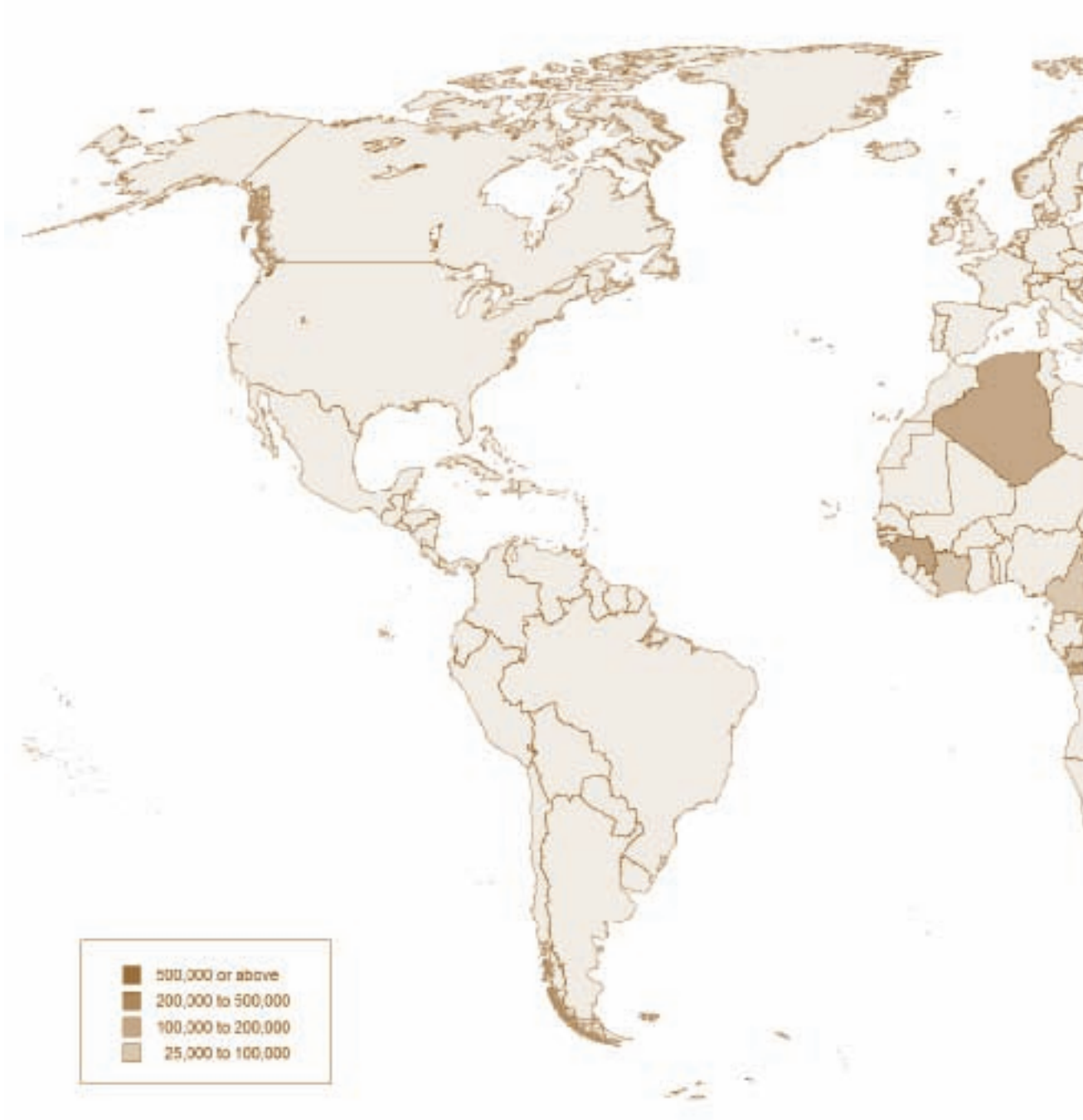
Long-standing refugee populations originate from the very states whose instability lies at the heart of chronic regional insecurity. Most of the refugees in these regions—be they Somalis, Sudanese, Burundians, Liberians, Iraqis, Afghans or Burmese—come from countries where conflict and persecution have persisted for years.

While there is increasing recognition that international policy-makers must pay closer attention to these countries of origin, it is also clear that resolving refugee situations must be a central part of any solution to long-standing regional conflicts. It is essential to recognize that chronic and unresolved refugee situations have political causes, and therefore require more than humanitarian solutions.

Protracted refugee situations stem from political action and inaction, both in the country of origin (the persecution and violence that led to flight) and in the country of asylum.<sup>7</sup> These situations are the combined result of the prevailing conditions in the country of origin, the policy responses of the country of asylum and the lack of sufficient donor engagement. They arise when peace and security actors fail to address conflict or human rights violations in the country of origin and donor

**Map 5.1**

**Major protracted refugees situations\*, 1 January 2005**



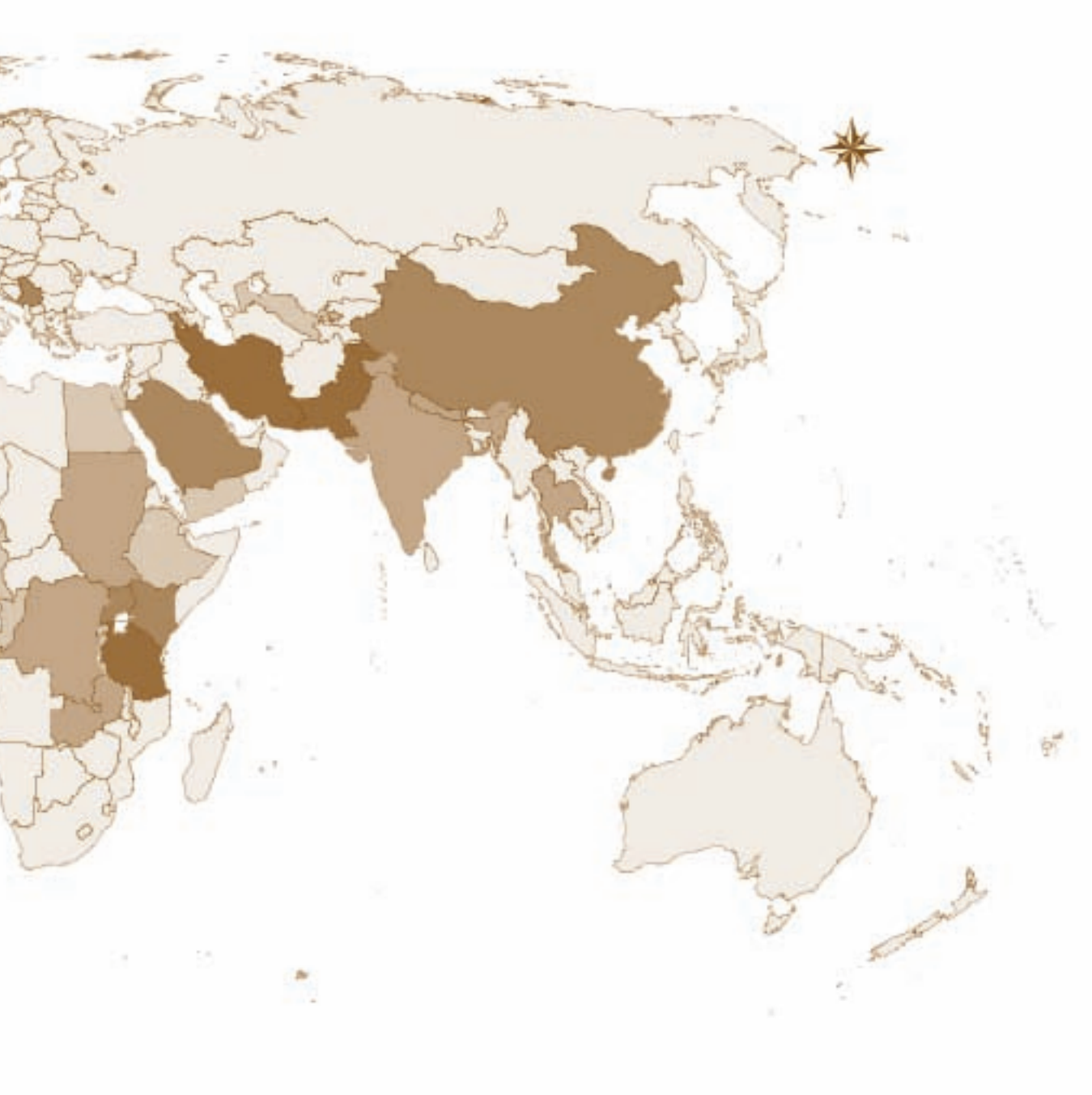
\*Refugee situations numbering 25,000 or more persons of a certain origin, which have existed for five or more consecutive years.

Industrialized countries are not included. Data includes both UNHCR assisted and non-assisted refugees. Data does not include Afghans in urban areas.

Statistical data source: UNHCR, 2004.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Geographical data sources: UNHCR, Global Insight digital mapping - © 1998 Europa Technologies Ltd.



## Box 5.1

## Palestinian refugees

By far the most protracted and largest of all refugee problems in the world today is that of the Palestine refugees, whose plight dates back 57 years. The UN General Assembly's Resolution 181 of November 1947 recommending the partition of Palestine led to armed clashes between Arabs and Jews. The conflict, which lasted from November 1947 to July 1949, led to the expulsion or flight of some 750,000-900,000 people from Palestine, the vast majority of them Arabs. The General Assembly's subsequent Resolution 194 of December 1948 stating that those 'refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss or damage to property,' was never implemented. Israel refused to allow the repatriation of Arab refugees, most of whose villages had been destroyed.

More Palestinians were displaced in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Israel's on-going construction of a barrier between its territory and the occupied West Bank is creating 'a new generation of Palestinian refugees', says John Dugard, the UN

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. Today, more than 4.2 million Palestinian refugees are dispersed across areas of the Middle East in which their forefathers originally took refuge, with others dispersed across the world.

Responding to the crisis created by the partition resolution and subsequent conflict, in December 1949 the General Assembly created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Its brief was to 'carry out in collaboration with local governments . . . direct relief and works programmes' for refugees from Palestine. The Assembly recognized that 'continued assistance for the relief of Palestine refugees is necessary to prevent conditions of starvation and distress among them and to further conditions of peace and stability' without prejudice to the rights of the refugees as affirmed in Resolution 194. This provided UNRWA with a broad humanitarian mandate. Over time, that mandate has evolved to focus on four main programmes: education, health, relief and social services, and microfinance. The agency operates in three states—Jordan, Lebanon and Syria—as well as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the absence of a just and durable resolution of the Palestine refugee

problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed UNRWA's mandate.

UNRWA defines a 'Palestine refugee' as 'any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.' This is a working definition for the purpose of determining eligibility for UNRWA services. There are other groups of Palestinians who do not meet this definition but are refugees nonetheless, such as the thousands who were displaced by the 1967 war.

UNHCR's mandate does not extend to the majority of Palestinian refugees by virtue of Paragraph 7 (c) of the organization's Statute which excludes persons who continue to receive from other organs or agencies of the United Nations protection or assistance. A similar provision excludes these refugees from the scope of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Article 1D of the Convention provides that it 'shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees protection or assistance.' Because refugees have to be physically present in UNRWA's area of operations to benefit from its

governments do not help the host country. Failure to address the situation in the country of origin means that refugees cannot return home; a reluctance to aid the host country reinforces the perception of refugees as a burden and a security concern, leading to encampment and a lack of local solutions. Humanitarian agencies are then left to shoulder the burden.

The protracted presence of Somali refugees in East Africa and the Horn, for instance, is the result of the failed intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s and the inability of the international community to help rebuild a failed state. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees have been in exile in the region for more than a decade. In the face of increasingly restrictive host-state policies, humanitarian agencies are left responsible for the care and maintenance of the refugees.



assistance, stateless Palestine refugees living beyond that area get no assistance from the agency. Therefore, under the terms of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention they are entitled to assistance and protection from UNHCR. This leaves a 'protection gap' affecting Palestinian refugees who are not registered with UNRWA but live in its area of operations. In most cases they do not receive protection or assistance from UNHCR or UNRWA.

With the exception of a small number of international staff, UNRWA's 26,000-strong labour force is drawn almost exclusively from the Palestine refugee community. Because of the prolonged nature of the Palestine refugee problem, the agency's efforts to provide education and health care have been pivotal in developing the refugees' full human potential. Indeed, education is the largest of UNRWA's main programmes, accounting for approximately 54 per cent of its General Fund Budget in 2005. The agency makes a special effort to maintain gender parity in primary and preparatory education.

UNRWA's Health programme accounted for approximately 18 per cent of its General Fund Budget in 2005. Among other services, the programme provides primary care focusing on the needs of women and children. The programme has been

crucial to improving environmental health. Some 10 per cent of UNRWA's 2005 budget went to its Relief and Social Services programme. This aims to alleviate poverty and hunger and fosters community-based efforts to promote gender equality. Another key programme is that of Special Hardship Case. It provides direct material and financial aid to families without a male adult able to earn an income or any other means of support. About 6 per cent of refugees require this assistance.

Finally, UNRWA's Microcredit and Microenterprise programme, created in 1991, offers credit to create employment. It provides loans to existing and start-up enterprises. The programme has developed credit products to improve the economic and social conditions of poor micro-entrepreneurs, small businesses, impoverished women and working-class families.

Since 2000, UNRWA programmes in the occupied territories have also tried to protect vulnerable refugees from the worst effects of the ongoing conflict and occupation. These effects have included death and injury, with more than 3,700 Palestinians killed and 29,000 injured; widespread destruction of property—both housing and agricultural land—and infrastructure; and the crippling of the local economy by Israel's complex

system of checkpoints and restricted access. The last also makes delivery of humanitarian aid more costly and difficult.

UNRWA's efforts to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the situation have included emergency job creation, whereby the agency both funds and directs temporary work projects to try and mitigate the socio-economic crisis. Between January and March 2005, UNRWA offered 6,449 temporary employment contracts under direct hire. The agency's emergency assistance to households in need of food and money has contributed to nutritional and financial security, particularly in the event of the death or injury of a principal breadwinner or the destruction of a home. The agency also helps homeless families by repairing or rebuilding shelters, through cash grants and self-help projects. Between September 2000 and June 2005 UNRWA had rebuilt 775 dwelling units for 831 families in the Gaza Strip.

The humanitarian aid and assistance that UNRWA provides to the Palestine refugees can never be enough. But it will be required as long as the issues of statelessness, prolonged military occupation, economic marginalization and vulnerability characteristic of the Palestinian refugee crisis are not addressed.

The failure of the international community and regional players to consolidate peace can generate a resurgence of conflict and displacement, leading to a recurrence of protracted refugee situations. For example, the return of Liberians from neighbouring West African states in the aftermath of the 1997 elections in Liberia was not sustainable. A renewal of conflict in late 1999 and early 2000 led not only to a suspension of the repatriation of Liberian refugees from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and other states in the region, it also gave rise to a massive new refugee exodus. Following the departure into exile of Liberian strongman Charles Taylor in 2003, there has been a renewed emphasis on return for the hundreds of thousands of Liberian refugees in the region. Though large-scale facilitated repatriation began in late 2004, it does not appear as if the lessons of the late 1990s have been learned. Donor support for the demobilization and reintegration of Liberian combatants has been limited, and there

is growing fear of fresh conflict as former combatants are again being recruited into rival factions.

As these examples illustrate, the primary causes of protracted refugee situations are to be found in the failure to engage in countries of origin and the failure to consolidate peace agreements. These examples also demonstrate how humanitarian programmes have to be underpinned by enduring political and security measures if they are to result in lasting solutions for refugees. Assistance to refugees in protracted situations is no substitute for sustained political and strategic action. More generally, the international community cannot expect humanitarian actors to resolve protracted refugee situations without the sustained engagement of the peace, security and development agencies.

Declining donor support for long-standing refugee populations in host countries has also contributed to the rise in protracted refugee situations. A marked decrease in financial contributions to these groups has security implications, as refugees and local populations begin to compete for scarce resources. The lack of donor support has also reinforced the perception of refugees as a burden on host states, which now argue that the displaced put additional pressure on the environment, services, infrastructure and the local economy. With the international community less willing to share the burden, host countries are reluctant to find local solutions to protracted refugee situations.

This trend first emerged in the mid-1990s, when UNHCR experienced budget shortfalls of tens of millions of dollars. These shortfalls were most acutely felt in Africa, where contributions to both development assistance and humanitarian programmes fell throughout the 1990s. Of greater concern is the tendency of donor governments to give vastly disproportionate amounts of aid to a few cases in the media glare and far less to dozens of other less-publicized refugee caseloads.<sup>8</sup> Declining donor engagement with long-standing refugee populations, or donor fatigue, has left many host states with fewer resources with which to address the needs of refugees and respond to increased pressure on local environments and services. According to UNHCR, 71 per cent of the world's asylum seekers, refugees and others of concern to the agency were hosted in developing countries at the end of 2004.<sup>9</sup> Given that these states are themselves heavily dependent on official development assistance to meet the needs of their own citizens, the additional burden of large refugee populations becomes all the more significant. Such concerns are exacerbated by the pressures of externally imposed democratization, economic liberalization and rising local expectations.

## Human rights implications

An increasing number of host states respond to protracted refugee situations by containing refugees in isolated and insecure refugee camps, typically in border regions and far from the governing regime. Many host governments now require the vast majority of refugees to live in designated camps, and place restrictions on those

**Figure 5.2**      **Longest protracted situations: major Palestinian refugee populations in the Middle East**

Country/Area	Number of Palestinian Refugees
Gaza	962,000
Jordan	953,000
West Bank	688,000
Syria	425,000
Lebanon	401,000
Saudi Arabia*	240,000
Egypt*	70,000
Iraq*	23,000

Sources: UNRWA as at 31 March 2005; \*UNHCR as at 1 January 2005.

This table includes only Palestinian refugee populations of 10,000 or more.

seeking to leave the camps for employment or education. This trend, recently termed the ‘warehousing’ of refugees, has significant human rights and economic implications.<sup>10</sup>

As highlighted by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, levels of sexual and physical violence in refugee camps remain of great concern. UNHCR has argued that ‘most refugees in such situations live in camps where idleness, despair and, in a few cases, even violence prevails. Women and children, who form the majority of the refugee community, are often the most vulnerable, falling victim to exploitation and abuse’.<sup>11</sup>

The prolonged encampment of refugee populations has led to the violation of a number of rights contained in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, including freedom of movement and the right to seek wage-earning employment. Restrictions on employment and the right to move beyond the confines of the camps deprive long-staying refugees of the freedom to pursue normal lives and to become productive members of their new societies. Professional certificates and diplomas are often not recognized by host governments, and educational, health and other services are limited. Faced with these restrictions, refugees become dependent on subsistence-level assistance, or less, and lead lives of poverty, frustration and unrealized potential.

UNHCR has noted that the prolongation of refugees’ dependence on external assistance ‘also squanders precious resources of host countries, donors and refugees’,<sup>12</sup> while ‘limited funds and waning donor commitment lead to stop-gap solutions’.<sup>13</sup> It adds that spending on care and maintenance ‘is a recurring expense and not an investment in the future’.<sup>14</sup> Refugees in camps cannot contribute to regional development and state-building.<sup>15</sup> In cases where refugees have been

## Box 5.2

**Bhutanese refugees in Nepal**

Approximately 103,000 Bhutanese Lhotshampas have been confined to several refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal since 1990. This protracted refugee situation is a source of regional tension between Nepal, Bhutan and India. If left unresolved, it may set a dangerous precedent in a region rife with ethnic and communal tension.

The Lhotshampas are descendents of Nepalese who moved to the southern lowlands of Bhutan in the nineteenth century. The Hindu Lhotshampas remained largely unintegrated with Bhutan's Buddhist Druk majority. However, under Bhutan's Nationality Law of 1958 they were allowed to hold government jobs and enjoy Bhutanese citizenship. By the 1980s, however, Bhutan's king and the ruling Druk majority expressed concern over the rapidly growing Lhotshampa population. The 1988 census revealed that Bhutan's population was 48 per cent Buddhist, 45 per cent Nepali and 7 per cent 'other'. Concerned about the influx of Nepali migrants into Bhutan and the higher birth rate of the Lhotshampas, the Druks feared that this demographic shift threatened their privileged position and traditional Buddhist culture.

During the 1980s, the Bhutanese authorities adopted a series of ethno-nationalist policies. In 1985, the government established new eligibility requirements for Bhutanese citizenship that effectively disenfranchised many ethnic Nepalis, depriving them of their citizenship and civil rights. In addition, the government introduced measures to enforce rigidly the Druk dress code and forbid the use of Nepali in the educational curriculum. Special permission was required for admission to schools and to sell cash crops.

When the Lhotshampa minority in southern Bhutan began to organize politically in the late 1980s to lobby against restrictive legislation, the authorities declared these activities subversive and unlawful. Some Lhotshampas became activists in the Bhutanese People's Party, which called for Bhutan's democratization. Large-scale protests broke out in 1990, resulting in violent clashes with the police and army and mass arrests.

The authorities increased their intimidation of the Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan by destroying their property and arbitrarily detaining and torturing activists. Individuals were

forced to sign 'voluntary migration certificates' before being expelled from the country. In December 1990 the authorities announced that Lhotshampas who could not prove they were residents of the country before 1958 must leave. Consequently, tens of thousands of Lhotshampas were made stateless and fled to Nepal and the Indian state of West Bengal.

Since the early 1990s more than 100,000 Lhotshampas have been confined to seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal. Donor governments have spent approximately US\$20m per year on assistance and protection programmes. Children are provided with education to the secondary-school level and the Lhotshampa leadership takes an active part in administering the camps. However, despite the relatively high standard of the camps, there is considerable frustration among the refugees over their prolonged exile. These frustrations are particularly pronounced among young people, who constitute the highest proportion of the refugee population and for whom there are few opportunities for further education and employment. As protracted exile has continued,

allowed to engage in the local economy, they have had 'a positive impact on the [local] economy by contributing to agricultural production, providing cheap labour and increasing local vendors' income from the sale of essential foodstuffs'.<sup>16</sup> When prohibited from working outside the camps, refugees cannot make such contributions.

**Political and security implications**

One of the most significant political implications of long-standing refugee situations is the strain that they often place on diplomatic relations between host states and the refugees' country of origin. The prolonged presence of Burundian refugees in Tanzania, coupled with allegations that anti-government rebels were based within the

suicide rates have increased in tandem with domestic violence, alcoholism and the trafficking of women and children.

There is only limited integration of the refugees with the local population. The Lhotshampa provide cheap labour, particularly in the construction industry, and have increased the quantity of goods in local markets. The local populace also benefit from access to health care in the Lhotshampa camps. Still, local villagers complain that the refugees compete for employment and drive down wages, depress prices in the markets by selling their food rations, and contribute to crime and prostitution.

A solution to the protracted refugee situation in Nepal remains as elusive as ever. Since 1993 there have been more than a dozen high-level meetings between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal to try and resolve the crisis. In December 2001, the two sides finally agreed on a joint nationality-verification process and began work in one refugee camp. However, the process has been plagued by problems and was severely criticized by observers for failing to meet international standards. The verification process

excluded UNHCR and involved only representatives of the governments of Bhutan and Nepal.

More than 70 per cent of residents in the only camp verified so far were classified as voluntary migrants on the grounds that they signed voluntary migration forms when leaving Bhutan. Yet most refugees claim that they were forced to sign such forms before being permitted to leave. In some cases, members of the same family were placed in different categories, risking separation in the event of eventual repatriation. Some refugees who were minors in Bhutan and did not possess identity documents before they fled were classified as non-Bhutanese even though their parents possessed identity papers. UNHCR was denied access by the government of Bhutan to areas of potential return.

UNHCR announced in 2003 that it would encourage and promote local integration in Nepal as the preferred solution for the Lhotshampas and support resettlement initiatives for vulnerable cases. It would also phase out care and maintenance assistance in the camps and encourage targeted assistance for self-reliance pending durable solutions.

As of mid-2005, however, it was unclear how effective this policy would be. The government of Nepal opposed local integration, preferring to work towards the refugees' eventual repatriation to Bhutan. The plan is also opposed by the majority of refugee leaders in Nepal; they too view repatriation as the only durable solution. International observers, particularly human rights organizations, say Bhutan's behaviour towards the Lhotshampas is ethnic cleansing. They believe that accepting such state actions would set a dangerous precedent for the region and might result in the expulsion of minorities from other South Asian countries.

UNHCR has recently started to promote resettlement for the most vulnerable categories in the camps. A comprehensive solutions package in which various options would be implemented simultaneously would be preferable. But lack of progress on repatriation and local integration should not block the possibility of resettlement, even though this will benefit a relatively small number.

refugee camps, led to a significant breakdown in relations between the two African neighbours in 2000-02, including the shelling of Tanzanian territory by the Burundian army. The presence of Burmese refugees on the Thai border has been a frequent source of tension between the governments in Bangkok and Rangoon. In a similar way, the elusiveness of a solution to the plight of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal has been a source of regional tension, drawing in not only the host state and the country of origin but also regional powers such as India (see Box 5.2).

Protracted refugee populations are a critical element in continuing conflict and instability and have obstructed peace and undermined economic development.<sup>17</sup> The long-term presence of large refugee populations has engendered conflict by causing instability in neighbouring countries, triggering intervention, and sometimes spurring armed elements within camps to begin insurgencies or form resistance and terrorist movements. The militarization of refugee camps creates a security problem for the country of origin, the host country and the international community. Arms trafficking,

drug smuggling, trafficking in women and children, and the recruitment of child soldiers and mercenaries occur in some of the camps hosting long-standing refugee populations.

Prolonged refugee crises not only raise direct security concerns but also have indirect security implications. Tensions between refugees and the local population often arise from the belief that refugees receive preferential treatment. This is especially the case when local people have difficulty accessing health, education or other services while such services are readily available to refugees in camps. As donor support for camp-based refugees decreases, however, competition between refugees and the host population for scarce resources creates insecurity. In the same way, reductions in assistance in the camps may lead some refugees to turn to banditry, prostitution and theft.

Protracted refugee situations are no less dangerous sources of instability than other more conventional security threats. The outbreak of conflict and genocide in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa in the early 1990s serves to show what can happen if solutions are not found for long-standing refugee populations. Tutsis who fled Rwanda between 1959 and 1962 and their descendants filled the ranks of the Rwandan Patriotic Front which invaded Rwanda from Uganda in October 1990. Many of these refugees had been living in the region for more than three decades. In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, it was widely recognized that the failure of the international community to find a lasting solution for the Rwandan refugees from the 1960s was a key factor behind the events that led to the genocide in 1994. According to UNHCR, 'the failure to address the problems of the Rwandan refugees in the 1960s contributed substantially to the cataclysmic violence of the 1990s'.<sup>18</sup> But more than a decade after the genocide it appears as though the lesson has not been learned; dozens of protracted refugee situations remain unresolved in highly volatile and conflict-prone regions.

Meanwhile, many host states, especially in Africa, see long-standing refugee populations as a security concern synonymous with the spill-over of conflict and the spread of arms. Indeed, host states are increasingly unwilling to see refugees as victims of persecution and conflict; rather, they are perceived as a potential source of regional instability.

The nature of less developed states and their often-peripheral place in the international system make them especially vulnerable to external shocks.<sup>19</sup> Given the regional dynamics of many conflicts in Africa and Asia and the inability of states in these regions to insulate themselves from the spill-over of conflict, the prolonged presence of refugees becomes an increasingly important political issue.

## Comprehensive solutions: lessons from the past

The contemporary response to protracted refugee situations stands in stark contrast to the international reaction to some of the major refugee crises during the Cold War. Then, the geopolitical interests of the West led to engagement with these crises and their resolution. This engagement resulted in comprehensive plans of action that drew on the three durable solutions of repatriation, local integration and third-country resettlement. Such an approach was central to resolving the situation of displaced people in Europe long after the Second World War, and of millions of Indochinese and Central American refugees in the 1980s. When dealing with the protracted refugee crises of today it is important to remember that by understanding the particular characteristics of each situation and by considering the needs of all the countries concerned, the international community has successfully resolved numerous refugee situations in the past half-century.

Towards the end of the 1950s, concerned individuals drew attention to the plight of the tens of thousands of people displaced within Europe by the Second World War who were still in need of durable solutions. Calls for action by refugee advocates, NGOs and UNHCR resulted in 1959 being declared 'World Refugee Year' by the United Nations and the initiation of a comprehensive response to those remaining both in camps and outside.<sup>20</sup> Following UNHCR's appeal to governments to provide funds and resettlement quotas, this protracted refugee problem was resolved by the mid-1960s.

The response to the European refugees was motivated by humanitarian concern for the people left behind after successive selection missions had picked those who were young and healthy and met rigid resettlement criteria.<sup>21</sup> It illustrates the potential of a comprehensive resettlement effort to address the needs of protracted and neglected refugee caseloads. This programme is an often-forgotten precedent for addressing the durable-solutions and protection needs of refugees for whom neither local integration nor repatriation are viable options.

The international response to the Indochinese refugee crisis in Southeast Asia is another important example of a comprehensive solution. It came in response to a public outcry over the dire conditions faced by the thousands of 'boat people' fleeing Viet Nam and refugees from Cambodia and Laos. Following dramatic steps by countries in the region to withhold sanctuary by preventing the entry of the asylum seekers, concerned states gathered at a conference on Indochinese refugees in Geneva in July 1979.<sup>22</sup> Western states agreed to dramatically increase the number of refugees they resettled from the region. In exchange, it was agreed that the boat people would be recognized as refugees *prima facie*, that illegal departures would be prevented, and that regional processing centres would be established. The result was a formalized *quid pro quo*: resettlement in Western states in exchange for assurances of first asylum in the region.

The immediate results were positive. But by 1988 the number of asylum seekers began to rise dramatically, drawn by the prospect of resettlement. The new arrivals

were a mix of refugees and economic migrants, and it was clear that a satisfactory solution could not be achieved without the co-operation of a wide range of actors. A second conference on Indochinese refugees was convened in June 1989 and concluded by adopting the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese Refugees.

The CPA contained five mechanisms through which the countries of origin, countries of first asylum and resettlement countries cooperated to resolve the refugee crisis in Southeast Asia. These were an Orderly Departure Program to prevent clandestine departures, guaranteed temporary asylum by countries in the region, individual refugee status determination for all new arrivals, resettlement in third countries for those recognized as refugees, and facilitated return for rejected claimants.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding a number of criticisms,<sup>24</sup> by and large the CPA achieved its objectives of reducing the number of clandestine departures, managing the flow of migrants and finding extra-regional durable solutions for recognized refugees.

Unlike the CPA, which identified resettlement as the primary durable solution, the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), also convened in 1989, placed the greatest emphasis on return and reintegration.<sup>25</sup> Following peace agreements that ended more than a decade of conflict in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, CIREFCA was an integral part of the wider objective of consolidating peace in the region. Through a series of development initiatives for returning refugees, capacity-building projects targeting states and NGOs, and the integration of refugees and returnees into national and regional development strategies, CIREFCA formulated a comprehensive solution appropriate to regional priorities.

These three examples demonstrate how comprehensive solutions could respond to the challenges of protracted refugee situations. While each approach used different combinations of the three durable solutions, all three shared the feature of concerted efforts by a wide range of actors to address particular refugee crises. This lesson is highlighted in UNHCR's Agenda for Protection, which emphasizes the need for 'more coherence in integrating voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement, whenever feasible, into one comprehensive approach.' Furthermore, such an approach must be implemented 'in close cooperation among countries of origin, host States, UNHCR and its humanitarian and development partners, especially NGOs, as well as refugees.'<sup>26</sup>

## Towards a more effective response

Throughout the 1990s, given its focus on refugee emergencies, the international community largely ignored the challenge of formulating comprehensive responses to protracted refugee situations. While significant progress was made in developing the responsiveness of each of the three durable solutions, as outlined in the following chapter, little attention was paid to their complementary nature or how they could be applied in the comprehensive resolution of long-standing refugee crises. With the



exception of a few key studies in the early 1980s, the problem of protracted refugee situations also failed to attract the attention of the research community.<sup>27</sup>

## Developments within UNHCR

The problem of protracted refugee situations was brought back onto the international policy and research agenda in 2000 and 2001. Supported by renewed donor interest in the question, UNHCR commissioned a number of studies to better understand the dynamics and implications of contemporary long-term refugee problems, including those of Sudanese in Kenya,<sup>28</sup> Sierra Leoneans in Guinea,<sup>29</sup> and Liberians in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>30</sup> and Ghana.<sup>31</sup> A summary of their findings was published as a UNHCR working paper.<sup>32</sup>

These studies contributed to the development of a working definition of protracted refugee situations and a better understanding of their causes, consequences and the necessary elements of a solution. In particular, the studies shed important light on the distinction between a 'basic needs' and 'minimum standards' approach to long-term refugee populations, and highlighted the benefits that could be derived from enhancing the refugees' own coping strategies. However, it was noted, 'it would be highly misleading to suggest that there are any quick or easy solutions to the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa'.<sup>33</sup>

It was in the context of these studies that the question of protracted refugee situations in Africa was addressed by UNHCR's Executive Committee in October 2001. Participants acknowledged that these situations 'pose serious challenges to the host country, the international community and the refugees themselves'.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, UNHCR highlighted its desire to 'improve responses by formulating a comprehensive and coherent strategy to address protracted refugee situations'.<sup>35</sup>

Three months later, in December 2001, more focused discussions took place on the question of protracted refugee situations in Africa during a ministerial meeting in Geneva. The discussions emphasized the need to place the problem within a historical and political context, to address the root causes of refugee movements, to support national capacity-building, and the importance of sustained donor engagement to resolve chronic refugee problems.<sup>36</sup>

The 2004 Standing Committee Paper is UNHCR's most comprehensive policy document on protracted refugee situations and includes a number of important innovations.<sup>37</sup> While highlighting that UNHCR is not a political actor, the paper argues that the agency must be aware of the political context of its work. The study also presents a number of options for responding to long-term refugee problems, including the need to focus on refugee well-being in the short term and the importance of linking a broad coalition of actors in the search for solutions.

The development of more systematic and structured responses to long-standing refugee problems has also been one of the stated objectives of UNHCR's Convention Plus initiative. There have been efforts to identify the roles that the agency and other governmental and non-governmental actors should play and the lessons that should be

## Box 5.3

## The story of one Somali refugee in Dadaab, Kenya

More than 2 million refugees in Africa are trapped in protracted situations. One of them is a young Somali student named Abass Hassan Mohamed.

Abass is the second of six children. His family and some 300,000 other people fled to Kenya in the midst of the violent implosion of Somalia in 1991–92. He was only ten years old when he fled his home. He says very little about his early days in the refugee camp, but remembers that it was dusty, hot and violent, and that people died daily.

Death and malnutrition rates in the Somali refugee population soared through 1992, while cross-border raids by Somali elements posed a significant security threat to refugees and aid workers. Malnutrition rates were as high as 54 per cent in some refugee camps. Death rates reached 100 a day per 100,000 refugees, five times the average level. At the same time, almost daily attacks by Somali bandits, known as *shifitas*, resulted in alarming numbers of murders and rapes.

Thirteen years later, Abass still lives in one of three remaining refugee camps near Dadaab in north-eastern Kenya, just 80 kilometres from the border with Somalia. The camps house some 135,000 other refugees. Abass' experience in Dadaab highlights the hardships faced by those trapped in forgotten refugee situations—but it also demonstrates the courage of individual refugees, the human potential they represent, and the dramatic difference when a solution to their plight is found.

In February 2004, Abass received his results from national secondary-school exams. Competing against students from across the country, Abass sat for exams in subjects as diverse as English, Chemistry, Commerce and Swahili, a language widely spoken in East Africa. His results were extraordinary. He ranked first in Kenya's Northeast Province and eighth in the whole of Kenya.

Although he does not brag, Abass overcame incredible odds to achieve this remarkable result. Of the 44 students in his class, only 32 graduated. His days were full of activities such as football, the debating club and the school environment club, but also with more demanding tasks such as standing in the blazing sun and 45-degree heat for hours to receive the family's fortnightly food rations. He tried to do his homework at night by the light of the family's only kerosene lamp, but his family often could not afford the fuel.

Abass learned to survive in one of the most violent camps in Africa, where rape, murder and armed robbery were almost daily occurrences. Physical and material insecurity have plagued the Dadaab camps for years. The refugees in these camps have existed with no legal status for well over a decade, compounding the challenge of finding a durable solution. In addition, they are required to remain within the camps and are, as a result, totally dependent on international assistance. This assistance is dwindling; refugees receive only 80 per cent of their food requirements and have limited access to water. Half the shelters in the camps are dilapidated.

Abass faced incredible challenges growing up as a refugee in Dadaab. He remained determined, however, not to let these difficulties get in his way. Throughout the long years in the camp, he tried to view his situation as temporary, and think instead of the day he would be able to leave to start a new life. Abass dreams of studying medicine. In a community with only one doctor for 135,000 people, he believes that is the best way to help his people.

Once again, Abass has beaten the odds and come one step closer to realizing his dream. In August 2005, he left Dadaab for the United States, where he will enrol at Princeton University with a full scholarship.

Abass is one of the very few Somali refugees in Dadaab who have found

a solution to an otherwise protracted situation. He leaves behind a family and community whose future is far more uncertain. Given the prevailing insecurity in southern and central Somalia, the region of origin of many of the refugees in the Dadaab camps, there are no prospects for their repatriation in the foreseeable future. Their lack of legal status and the policies of the Kenyan government mean they are unable to support themselves—let alone integrate—locally. Finally, there have been extremely limited resettlement opportunities for ethnic Somalis from the Dadaab camps in recent years.

As a result of the lack of solutions, some 135,000 refugees in the Dadaab camps live in limbo. Abass is one of the lucky few who will be able to start afresh. The rest can do little more than wait, try to survive on rapidly dwindling international assistance, and pin their hopes on the international community to resolve their situation.

There are some signs of encouragement. A range of programmes introduced by UNHCR and its partners in the late 1990s have seen a dramatic decline in the level of violent crime in the camps. From a high of more than 300 incidents involving rape, murder and armed robbery in 1998, cases of serious crime fell to just 36 in 2003. There have also been some positive developments, albeit tentative, in the restoration of a central government in Somalia. Finally, there has been some revival of donor interest in formulating a comprehensive response to the situation of Somali refugees in the region as a whole.

However, these positive developments are just a beginning. Abass' story demonstrates the incredible challenges faced by refugees in protracted situations, the skills and abilities that these refugees possess, and their desire to play an active role in rebuilding their lives. With the sustained support of the international community, they may yet realize their dreams.



*Somali refugees in the El Nino school in one of the camps in Dadaab, Kenya. Somali refugees have been living in these camps since they were set up in 1991. (UNHCR/B. Press/July 1999)*

drawn from past experience to develop a more systematic approach to comprehensive solutions.<sup>38</sup>

Efforts have been made to apply these conceptual developments to two of the world's most complex and protracted refugee situations, those of Afghans in South West Asia and Somalis in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. The hope is that through pilot projects to address these two situations, the 'strengths and shortcomings of the frameworks should be identified and necessary adjustments made' before their application to other protracted refugee situations.<sup>39</sup>

## **'Afghanistan Plus' initiative**

Launched in 2003, this initiative's goal is to build a comprehensive framework to manage population movements in the region. Specifically, UNHCR aims to reach agreement on key policy issues, such as repatriation, reintegration, migration, assistance, protection and institutional development. It hopes to achieve this through consultation and cooperation with governments of the region, key donors, technical-cooperation agencies such as the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration as well as a range of civil-society groups.

These approaches have been based on the understanding that population movements to and from Afghanistan are now primarily economic and migratory in nature and consequently require different administrative responses. The Afghanistan Plus initiative emphasizes the importance of sensitizing donors to the need for continued international engagement and support, especially for programmes within Afghanistan. The initiative also aims to build further consensus among regional actors on the need for new bilateral and regional mechanisms for both migration and repatriation. Finally, UNHCR has emphasized that development-assistance programmes and funds should play a bigger role in assisting reintegration inside Afghanistan and improving the conditions of long-staying Afghans still outside the country and their host communities (see Box 6.2).

## **Somalia CPA**

As with the Afghanistan Plus initiative, the lessons learned from a CPA for Somali refugees could be applied to other protracted situations. Its objectives are to identify durable solutions for Somali refugees living in the region's host countries. Given the continuing instability in southern and central Somalia, the focus of the CPA is on repatriation to Somaliland and Puntland, where conditions for returnees are more secure than in southern and central Somalia. However, it is widely recognized that for sustained returns more emphasis on reintegration and post-conflict recovery is required.

The second objective of the CPA is to examine how human rights and economic conditions for Somali refugees can be improved in host countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti. Local experts in the region will determine the gaps in protection and assistance that need to be addressed by the CPA. Given the difficult prospects for sustainable peace in Somalia, addressing the protection and assistance gaps in countries of asylum in the region would meet the short- to medium-term needs of Somali refugees (see Box 2.4).

## **Limitations**

The Somali-refugee CPA and the Afghanistan Plus initiative are commendable efforts to try and engage the international community. However, they do not adequately link humanitarian factors with underlying economic, political and security issues.

Resolving the problem of long-standing Somali refugees requires the restoration of stability in southern and central Somalia. Similarly, a solution for Afghan refugees requires the sustained engagement of development actors in rebuilding Afghanistan.

The lessons from past CPAs, such as those in Indochina and Central America, are that humanitarian efforts must be closely linked to political, diplomatic and development initiatives. Past CPAs also required the active involvement of viable and functioning countries of origin so that internal conflicts and refugee problems would not recur. Finally, successful CPAs relied on external political initiatives that preceded and laid the foundations for humanitarian and development programmes. Without strong political support and successful peace negotiations there is little prospect of resolving protracted refugee crises such as the Afghan or Somali situations.

### **The need for an integrated approach**

It is important to recognize that humanitarian actors cannot address the political dimensions of protracted refugee situations on their own. While it is essential that refugee-protection agencies are sensitive to host governments' security concerns, actions by humanitarian agencies without the support of both development agencies and the UN Security Council will not beget truly comprehensive solutions. As long as discussions on protracted refugee situations remain exclusively within the humanitarian community and do not engage the broader peace, security and development communities, they will be limited in their impact.

Despite the need for a multifaceted approach, the overall response of policy makers remains compartmentalized. Security, development and humanitarian issues are usually discussed in different forums, each with their own institutional arrangements and independent policy approaches. There is almost no strategic integration of approaches and little effective coordination in the field. Neither the United Nations nor the donor community has adequately integrated the resolution of recurring refugee problems with the promotion of economic and political development, conflict resolution and sustainable peace and security. International involvement in nation-building, reconstruction, and rehabilitation in war-torn regions is still piecemeal and under-resourced. Meaningful comprehensive solutions must overcome these divisions.

Such an approach needs to be rooted in an understanding of the relationship between forced migration and security since the end of the Cold War and the security concerns of Third World states. The nature of protracted refugee situations in the developing world has changed. During the Cold War, these situations were addressed because of the interest of the superpowers, primarily the United States. In recent years, however, declining donor engagement coupled with a new sense of vulnerability in host states has led to a changed environment within which solutions must be crafted. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the task is not simply to replicate past solutions, but to fashion new ones that draw on the lessons of the past but are appropriate to the new environment.

First, from the *peace and security* sector, sustained engagement is necessary not only from the UN Security Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) but also from the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations and foreign and defence ministries in national capitals. Second come *development* actors. Ranging from the UN Development Programme, the World Bank and international NGOs to national development agencies, they would play an important role at all stages of a comprehensive solution. Finally, *humanitarian agencies* such as UNHCR, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and NGOs need to bring their particular skills and experience to bear.

These three sets of actors should engage in a related set of short, medium and long-term activities to form a CPA. These activities should include a thorough analysis of the situation and the interests of the various stakeholders. This analysis should form the basis of related action plans for the three groups, which must be fully supported by the international community.

In the short term, the CPA should focus on the stabilization of the current situation, the establishment of dialogue between key stakeholders, and confidence-building activities in the country of origin and in host countries. Next should come a consolidation phase, focusing on a resolution to the conflict, the rehabilitation of refugee-populated areas and preparation for the various durable solutions. Once this groundwork has been laid, the CPA can be implemented. This would lead to a durable peace in the country of origin, the execution of long-term development strategies and the realization of a comprehensive solution through the complementary use of the three durable solutions.

Such an integrated approach to addressing refugee situations has been explored in the past. In fact, UNHCR, DPKO and the United Nations Development Programme all have experience of working together. While the effectiveness of such partnerships has sometimes been questioned, it is important to examine why some have been more successful than others. More generally, it is important to recognize that a solution cannot truly be comprehensive without the sustained engagement of all the three types of actors.

Addressing protracted refugee situations in a more consistent and comprehensive manner is one way for the United Nations system as a whole to demonstrate its relevance and usefulness. The decision of the UN General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit to create a Peacebuilding Commission is a step in this direction.<sup>40</sup> The main purpose of the commission is to bring together all relevant parties within and outside the United Nations to address the needs of a troubled nation. The commission is to improve planning for sustained recovery after war as well as coordination of the many post-conflict activities.

However, the success of such an integrated approach will depend entirely on the commitment of the international community to see it succeed. Comprehensive solutions are the best way to address the concerns of Western states, meet the

protection needs of refugees and respond to the concerns of countries of first asylum. In the long term, governments must consider how their trade, aid and development policies and strategic and diplomatic concerns may be brought to bear not only on addressing refugee flows but also on preventing them. Ultimately, it must be recognized that the most efficient, effective and humane approach to refugee situations is their prevention. The international community must realize that by engaging with failing states today, it is preventing the refugee crises of tomorrow.

## Chapter 5

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