

Malawi: COP 2003

Part I: Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)

The security situation in the Great Lakes Region and the DRC has remained the key variable causing movement of asylum seekers into Malawi and precluding the voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin. Prospects for return thus, appear quite remote in 2003. Nevertheless, the UNHCR office in Malawi (LO) is following developments in the region and will adjust its plans as needed.

The LO receives full co-operation of the Government of Malawi (GOM) in all refugee-related aspects. Asylum seekers/refugees continue streaming into Malawi in spite of the seemingly poor economy and the lengthy eligibility process.

The Dzaleka refugee camp in the Dowa district remains the only designated center for residency of asylum seekers/refugees. The general security situation in the camp has continued to be good. The camp has assumed a more cosmopolitan feature with all different refugee groups living in harmony. The Department for Disaster Preparedness Relief and Rehabilitation (DDPRR) represents the GOM on refugee matters and offers the overall administrative response. The DDPRR maintains a permanent presence in the camp, including a police post and administrative facilities. The surrounding local population has remained generally hospitable to refugees. The harmonious co-existence between the two communities is demonstrated by the joint participation in a number of social functions, including sporting activities in the camp.

As at 31 December 2001, the LO registered 6,920 refugees/asylum seekers under the Care and Maintenance programme. By the end of June 2002, the figure increased to 9,235 individuals. Most of them are staying at the Dzaleka refugee camp. The majority is from Rwanda, the DRC, Burundi and Somalia. There are also smaller numbers of refugees of other nationalities like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda.

The main border crossing point into Malawi is at the Tanzanian border in Karonga, some 750 Kms. from Lilongwe. Screening and eventual granting of refugee status is done in Lilongwe. LO in Malawi intends to establish a regular presence in Karonga to ensure adherence to the principle of non-refoulement and observance of a good standard of treatment of refugees. This will be closely co-ordinated with the DDPRR and the Malawi Red Cross Society (MRCS). The latter is the main partner charged with the responsibility of maintaining the reception facilities in the country.

UNHCR and GOM have been engaged in creating conditions for refugee self-sufficiency and the reviewing the Malawi Refugee Act, with the primary aim of recommending the withdrawal of some reservations made to the 1951 Convention, particularly those that may restrict access to public schools, work or economic self-reliance activities.

From the beginning of 1998, the authorities have become increasingly receptive to issues pertaining to local integration. A more eased attitude on access to public schools by refugees, work opportunities for professionally qualified refugees and

petty trading outside the camps was exhibited by the GOM. Some 201 hectares of land was also made available in 1998 to support local integration efforts. The capacity of the Dzaleka camp has however raised several concerns vis-à-vis the total number of families now being hosted at the center. The camp administration has indicated that at the current rate of population movement, the center will soon reach full capacity.

The LO will intensify efforts on capacity building of the implementing partners enabling them to efficiently manage the refugee programs. The LO will continue to be part of the UN country team, particularly in joint ventures with other UN Agencies to implement projects that will lay emphasis on the well being of young women, children/adolescents, environmental issues as well as efforts to combat poverty and HIV/AIDS in the camp.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

The LO will work with the Office of the Commissioner for Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Rehabilitation pursuing the official endorsement of the revision of the Malawi Refugee Act, as a means of redressing the issue of the reservations contained therein, and streamlining the refugee status determination process.

Durable Solutions for Refugees

LO will maintain a close watch on the recent peace initiatives being brokered by South Africa for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region, seizing every opportunity to promote repatriation, when feasible. Local integration will continue to be promoted for refugees who do not have yet prospects for voluntary repatriation. Activities in Crop Production, Income Generation and Shelter construction will be promoted in the camp. Resettlement to third countries will be pursued for a limited number of refugees.

Assistance to refugees

All refugees will be provided material support in the camp, including shelter, food, water, non-food items and health services, as part of the care and maintenance assistance. LO will continue to support the delivery of educational services, including vocational training, and income generating ventures to promote local integration. LO will also facilitate the creation of a database for urban refugees in order to determine the level of assistance to be given to them.

Assistance and protection to Women and Children

Refugee children will continue to benefit from basic health and education services. Refugee women, children and adolescents will continue to receive AIDS awareness and safe sex information in the camp. Essential financial support will be provided particularly to women groups for undertaking income-generating projects.

Urban refugees

The LO envisages continued support in 2003 for the urban refugee committee, whose membership is drawn from the IPs and mandated to look into the conditions of the urban refugees in the country.