

ERITREA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate and, depending on progress in the peace process, promote the voluntary repatriation of some 62,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan, and a small number from Djibouti and Yemen.
- Create an environment conducive to sustaining the return and reintegration of returnees and IDPs.
- In co-operation with the Government, other UN agencies and NGOs, provide approximately 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in and from the Gash-Barka Zone residing in IDP camps and temporary sites with some of the most essential relief items and help them to return to their homes whenever possible.
- While improving living conditions and treatment of Somali and Sudanese refugees in Eritrea, explore possibilities for facilitated voluntary repatriation of some of the Somali refugees and continue the Emergency Resettlement Programme for Sudanese Refugees.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Voluntary Repatriation Operation for Eritrean Refugees in Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti

Building on the comprehensive tripartite repatriation agreements and effective mechanisms established between the Governments of Eritrea and Sudan and UNHCR in 2000, the three parties met again in Khartoum in late March 2001 to prepare for the return of the remaining Eritrean refugees. They reaffirmed their commitment to voluntary repatriation, estimating that at least 160,000 refugees would take this opportunity to return home, 62,000 of them in 2001. It was expected that 20,000 would return before the onset of the rainy season in mid-July. By 8 July, 20,984 Eritreans (of

both the pre-1993 and the 2000 outflow) had been assisted to return home. More than 150 trucks, ambulances and buses were mobilised. Although little progress has been made in assisting the return of a few thousand Eritrean refugees currently in Yemen and Djibouti, UNHCR plans to begin the process in the second half of 2001.

The Government of Eritrea ensures national protection of returnees and has been allocating land for homesteads and agricultural use at the returnees' chosen destination. UNHCR has been providing returnee families with basic initial repatriation packages (dome-shaped shelter structure, two mosquito nets, a 90-litre water barrel, local mats to roof the shelter structure, a kerosene stove, agricultural hand-tools, soap and one blanket per person) and cash-grants to start agricultural and other income-generating activities. All concerned actors, including UN agencies, the Government and NGOs are working to ensure that mine awareness information is provided to the returnee population. In order to ensure comprehensive monitoring of the returnees, UNHCR has been undertaking monitoring interviews of five to ten per cent of the returnees from each convoy, followed by further interviews within two months at their final destinations.

Many villages and towns in western Eritrea have been receiving large numbers of returnees. In some places, returnees outnumber the resident population and reintegration issues have thus become the focus of attention. UNHCR, however, in line with the policy priorities defined in Actions 1 and 2 and due to the Office's financial constraints, has to limit its community-based assistance to essential services during the first phase of reintegration in some targeted areas of return. These reintegration activities are implemented in close collaboration with the local authorities, line ministries and the NGOs, and a Reintegration Co-ordination

Committee has been established at the zonal level. UNHCR is currently working on linking its activities concretely with larger-scale programmes funded and implemented by development agencies to address medium to long-term reintegration needs. As part of the UNDAF process, UNHCR and the Government of Eritrea have been co-chairing the National Recovery Working Group which deals with rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration (3R) issues for all groups of beneficiaries countrywide. This will facilitate the consideration of returnees needs in the different programmes. In the second half of 2001, UNHCR will continue its work to ensure that communal services in the key sectors such as water, health and education meet the needs of the increased population in the areas of return.

For the smooth implementation of the voluntary repatriation much depends on continued progress in peace process. Since

the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone along the southern boundary of Eritrea, relatively few security incidents have occurred. Nevertheless, the threat of landmines, unexploded ordnance and security incidents in the south of the country remains. Consequently, return movements have taken place only to the areas considered safe and secure. Refugees whose chosen areas of return are not yet considered safe have been requested to wait in Sudan.

UNHCR has been providing basic assistance (blankets, soap and sanitary supplies) to some 100,000 IDPs in and from Gash-Barka. The IDP assistance by UNHCR has been reduced as part of its strategy to complete the assistance to IDPs by the end of the year, and UNHCR's contributions cover only a small portion of the total assistance needs of IDPs. Other agencies are addressing the bulk of these requirements.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
62,000 Eritreans returned to Eritrea, and returned to their villages of choice, 20,000 set to return before the rainy season.	20,984 Eritreans repatriated to their villages of choice by 8 July 2001, rendering the operation slightly ahead of schedule.
One repatriation package distributed per family.	6,923 returning families have received initial reintegration packages, including cash grants. Due to difficulties in procurement, some returning families have not yet received dome-shaped shelter structures. It is expected to distribute them as soon as they become available. Interim measures are in place.
Donors and development agencies mobilised to "fill the gap" between immediate reintegration assistance and mid- to long- term development.	National recovery working group was set up to address the gap between initial reintegration and development.
Refugee return in safety and dignity.	20,984 Eritreans had returned by 8 July 2001 through the 2001 programme. Convoy escorts by ambulance and health services at the refugee reception centre were provided. National protection of returnees was re-established.
Comprehensive monitoring system developed to assess returnees' conditions and make appropriate interventions.	UNHCR has been conducting at random returnee monitoring interviews at the point of arrival and at their final destinations. Preliminary analyses indicate that the repatriation and reception process is proceeding smoothly.

Somali and Sudanese Refugees

With the recent changes in the political landscape and an increased level of stability in certain areas of Somalia, voluntary repatriation has become an option for some of the Somali refugees hosted in Eritrea.

Some 1,000 Somali refugees in the Emkulu camp has been provided with detailed information on the current situation in their areas of origin and have been asked whether they are interested in voluntarily returning to their country. On 20 June 2001, World

Refugee Day, 57 Somalis took the opportunity to return home, flying to Mogadishu. Another 60 have been scheduled to return in July.

As voluntary repatriation is not currently possible for the Sudanese refugees in Eritrea and as local integration is not encouraged by the Eritrean authorities, other options including resettlement have been explored.

In the first half of 2001, 33 Sudanese were resettled in third countries, while another 69 are awaiting departure. As voluntary repatriation and resettlement are an option for only a limited number of refugees, UNHCR continues to provide assistance to Somali refugees in the Emkulu camp and to some 700 Sudanese refugees in the Elit camp.

Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Durable solutions sought for Somali refugees in the Emkulu Camp. Number of Somalis repatriated.	Repatriation of 57 Somali refugees took place and another 60 will repatriate soon.
Resettlement options explored for eligible Sudanese refugees. Number of refugees resettled to third countries.	A total of 102 refugees either resettled or were accepted for resettlement. A further ten refugees have been considered.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY – DECEMBER

UNHCR will continue to assist the repatriation of over 40,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan, and begin the process of repatriation from Djibouti and Yemen. The Office will also pursue durable solutions for the Somali and Sudanese refugees in Eritrea and continue systematic efforts to engage other actors to undertake activities, which go

beyond UNHCR's mandate and means, but are crucial to ensuring essential services in returnee areas. At the same time, UNHCR will complete the process of responsible disengagement from the IDP assistance programme. Furthermore, the Office will continue the dialogue with the Government of Eritrea on how best to deal with those expellees from Ethiopia potentially at risk of statelessness.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available ¹	Total Funds Obligated
APB	2,839,179	2,908,781	1,171,127	1,160,700
SPB	24,685,500	19,497,877	11,394,442	8,665,877
TOTAL	27,524,679	22,406,658	12,565,569	9,826,577

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.