

# MYANMAR

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Support the voluntary repatriation, reintegration and stabilisation of returnees in Northern Rakhine State, and monitor the situation in areas hosting them.
- Promote activities conducive to self-reliance, and provide special assistance to the most vulnerable within the Muslim population.
- Prepare for the United Nations Integrated Development Plan for Northern Rakhine State which will permit the gradual phasing out of UNHCR's assistance programme.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Owing to developments during the first half of the year, UNHCR was compelled to modify its primary planning assumption that it would be able to hand over assistance activities in Northern Rakhine State to other UN agencies by the end of the year.

A five-year UN Integrated Development Programme (UN-IP), led by the UN Country Team, was expected to take over UNHCR activities in January 2001. Although preparatory activities commenced to formulate the programme and initiate fundraising, by March, it became apparent that the UN-IP could not be launched in January 2001 as planned. After a review of the UN-IP process and in response to strong requests from some donor countries, it was decided that UNHCR would maintain its presence in Northern Rakhine State until the end of 2001, to manage the transitional phase before UN-IP becomes operational on the ground.

In June, the UN Country Team further reviewed the UN-IP and it was decided that assistance activities would be led by UNDP instead of jointly by the UN Country Team. The UNDP-led assistance programme is scheduled

to commence in June 2001.

Following the issuance of an instruction by the Ministry of Home Affairs in May 1999 stating that compensations be provided for labour requisitioned under the Towns and Village Act, there was a reduction in demands for compulsory labour in Northern Rakhine State, except in January-February when newly assigned military regiments arrived in the area.

The Myanmar authorities for the returnee population in Northern Rakhine State constructed two new model villages. The construction adversely affected the local Muslim population due to land redistribution and requirements for labour and material. The authorities, however, recently reimbursed surplus material to the communities that contributed to the construction of the model villages.

In June, the authorities imposed further restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Muslim population in Northern Rakhine State. To travel outside the area, they must henceforth obtain permission from the village authorities as well as from the authorities in their respective townships. UNHCR has taken up this issue with the central authorities in Yangon.

Only 905 Myanmar refugees repatriated from Bangladesh to Myanmar, bringing the total number of returnees to 230,900 by the end of June. The slow speed of repatriation is due to delays in clearing those scheduled to repatriate and limited interest in return. UNHCR continued to encourage the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to engage in a dialogue with the aim of accelerating the repatriation process and providing reintegration assistance to the returnees.

UNHCR procured over 4,300 tonnes of rice for Food-for-Work schemes for the construction of basic infrastructure and for the support of vocational training activities in Northern Rakhine State. Gravel surfacing of 18 km of village access roads and stone surfacing of 20

km of township roads has been undertaken. In addition, eight bridges and ten culverts were completed and additional ten bridges and four culverts are under construction. To promote food security, agro-chemicals and high-yield seeds were distributed to vulnerable families. Agricultural training for local farmers and outreach visits is scheduled to take place during the remainder of the year.

A total of 527 new micro-credit schemes assisting over 2,600 women were formulated to promote their economic self-reliance. UNHCR provided grants to 150 families to undertake agricultural activities. UNHCR supported Mag-saysay Centres for Women, which continued to provide returnee and local Muslim women with opportunities for literacy and skills training, in addition to providing a venue for discussion and peer support. At these 13 community centres built with UNHCR support, various training activities were organised for the extremely vulnerable. Some 2,000 women have completed a literacy-training programme and 2,200 children attended literacy-training courses. A total of 190 instructors and 80 teachers were trained.

In the health sector, an outreach education campaign was conducted in ten locations, benefiting some 300,000 persons. Training was given to 87 village health workers and 242 primary health care staff. In selected villages, 15 new centres for oral-rehydration therapy were supported. Vaccination equipment and sup-

plies were purchased for mass immunisation activities.

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

The initial overall objectives and priority activities remain unchanged, except for the timing of UNHCR's phase-out from Northern Rakhine State. UNHCR will monitor the development of the UNDP-led assistance programme for Northern Rakhine State to assess the continued need for UNHCR's field presence and activities in the area beyond 2001.

In the interim, through its field presence, UNHCR will continue monitoring public policy and governance issues affecting the Muslim population and engage in advocacy on their behalf. Particular attention will be paid to consolidate recent progress in limiting demands for compulsory labour and to promote the freedom of movement of the Muslim population. Discussions will continue with the authorities on the grant of citizenship to the Muslim residents of Northern Rakhine State.

UNHCR will continue supporting the bilateral dialogue between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar on procedures to accelerate the repatriation of Myanmar refugees from Bangladesh. Special attention will be given to the clearance of those willing to return and to expedite the repatriation of split families.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	10,647,822	9,935,673	9,113,219	4,947,900

\*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region, opening balance and adjustments.