

THE MIDDLE EAST

Bahrain
Jordan
Qatar
Yemen

Egypt
Kuwait
Saudi Arabia

Iraq
Lebanon
Syrian Arab Republic

Israel
Oman
United Arab Emirates

Recent Developments

Economic sanctions imposed on Iraq continued to have a negative impact on nationals and refugees alike and prompted UNHCR to increase its assistance to refugees formerly assisted by the Government. UNHCR continued consultations with the Governments of Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran to facilitate agreement on the modalities for the voluntary repatriation of Iranian refugees, particularly those wishing to repatriate from Al-Tash Camp.

The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon in May marked the end of two decades of occupation. Reports indicated that, in the aftermath of the pullout, some 6,500 Lebanese, mostly former members of the South Lebanese Army (SLA) and their families, opted to cross into Israel. Meanwhile, another some 2,200 ex-SLA soldiers surrendered to the Lebanese authorities.

Finally, on 27 June, UNHCR and the League of Arab States signed a Co-operation Agreement that should further enhance co-operation on refugee and migration issues in the Arab World between both organisations.

Strategic Objectives: Progress and Constraints

UNHCR's objectives and activities in the Middle East in the first half of 2000 continued to focus on protecting and providing material assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, with specific emphasis on meeting the needs of refugee women and children. UNHCR also continued to assist governments and local NGOs to develop national capacities for addressing the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees through

refugee law training, while actively promoting accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

Throughout the region, UNHCR implemented public information activities aimed at increasing awareness of refugee issues and garnering financial and other support from Governments, foundations and the public at large. These efforts had a modest but growing impact, notably in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Contributions from charitable organisations and individuals have increased, but large-scale growth in contributions will require a sustained investment of effort over time.

No assisted repatriation movements to the Islamic Republic of Iran took place from Iraq during the first six months of the year, although the Government of Iraq estimated that some 5,000 refugees returned spontaneously. By end June, some 130 Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin repatriated voluntarily to Turkey from northern Iraq.

In view of the limited scope for local integration and voluntary repatriation in the region, third country resettlement is the only viable solution for a large number of refugees and remained a high priority for the Office. To pursue progress begun in 1999, UNHCR offices in Egypt, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic hired national UNVs to continue resettlement processing and refugee status determination, whereas other arrangements were made in Jordan for this purpose.

The need to establish priorities owing to financial constraints led UNHCR to scale back a number of planned activities for the assistance of refugees in some countries in the region. For example, in Jordan UNHCR suspended the distribution of clothing allowances, voca-



tional and English-language training, training for implementing partner staff, and distribution of winter heaters. In Egypt, UNHCR postponed payments to medical facilities and pharmacies and temporarily halted vocational training. The amount of departure grants provided to repatriating refugees was also reduced and monthly subsistence allowances will be reduced during the second half of the year. In Iraq, an increase in assistance to Ahwazi refugees was made possible by reductions in other activities.

Activities until 30 June

In addition to UNHCR's country programmes in **Egypt, Iraq** and **Yemen**, which are described in separate chapters of this report, UNHCR has operations in seven countries in the region. Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates are not yet parties to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Major developments in UNHCR's operations in these countries, as well as Israel, are described below.

The promotion of UNHCR's objectives and policies in **Israel** was enhanced by the visit of the High Commissioner in late May. Progress was made in the promotion of refugee legislation and towards the creation of a national refugee board. Long-term solutions were also identified for a few individual cases, while oth-

ers were granted living allowances on a temporary basis. No training activities were implemented in the first half of the year.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR assisted an urban group of some 1,175 refugees who are primarily of Iraqi origin. During the first six months of the year, UNHCR registered a total of 3,723 new asylum-seekers, the vast majority of whom are Iraqis. By the end of June, UNHCR had assisted some 500 refugees to resettle to third countries. The Office continued efforts to disseminate awareness of refugee issues and specifically targeted border officials, as well as local NGOs, to enable the latter to provide legal counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees. In July, the Ministry of the Interior issued a directive to the Public Security Department giving UNHCR access to asylum-seekers in detention and exempting refugees from application of the Residency and Foreigners Affairs Law No. 24 of 1973. Financial constraints obliged UNHCR to reduce some of the material assistance provided to refugees. The distribution of clothing allowances was suspended, as were vocational and English-language training, training for implementing partner staff, and distribution of winter heaters.

Kuwait has a registered population of some 3,500 refugees, consisting mainly of Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians and Somalis, as well as a small number of other nationalities. In addi-

tion, some 800 Bedouins, or stateless persons, were registered with UNHCR. A total of 307 refugees received subsistence allowances. Eighty-seven refugees were resettled to third countries during the first half of the year. As part of its continuing Accession Campaign, UNHCR plans to intensify its efforts to encourage the Kuwaiti authorities to accede to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

In **Lebanon**, UNHCR assisted some 3,500 urban refugees, primarily of Iraqi and Sudanese origin. There are also currently some 5,000 asylum-seekers. Some 483 refugees departed for third-country resettlement during the first half of 2000 and the Office will pursue efforts to accelerate resettlement processing. Two important issues facing UNHCR are the detention of asylum-seekers and refugees owing to their illegal entry, and the growing backlog of decisions on asylum applications. UNHCR has been able to secure the release of refugees charged with illegal entry into Lebanon, on the understanding that the Office would promote their resettlement to third countries. During the first six months of the year, 1,611 asylum-seekers lodged applications with UNHCR, the majority of Iraqi and Sudanese origin. Efforts will continue to reduce the growing backlog of asylum applications. UNHCR pursued refugee law promotion activities through a workshop for government officials held in April, as well as a lecture on refugee status at Lebanese University. In co-operation with the Middle East Council of Churches, on 30 June-1 July UNHCR sponsored an exhibit of handicrafts made by refugees.

By the end of June, **Saudi Arabia** hosted some 5,600 refugees, including some 5,400 Iraqis and some 160 Afghans who live in Rafha Camp. While UNHCR provided international protection, the Government of Saudi Arabia provided all infrastructure assistance. Some 92 persons were processed for resettlement during the first six months of the year. A seminar on refugee issues was held in January for Government officials. UNHCR's office in Riyadh acted as the co-ordination centre for UNHCR's operations in the five countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council and is also re-

sponsible for assessing claims for refugee status submitted by individual asylum-seekers in **Bahrain, Oman and Qatar**. The Office carried out missions to Bahrain (February), Qatar (April) and the United Arab Emirates (May) to review overall protection issues in the region and conduct refugee status determination for asylum-seekers. UNHCR received the green light from the authorities of Qatar to conduct a three-day workshop on refugee law that will likely take place in the second half of the year. New NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) focal points were appointed in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In its public information activities, UNHCR was able to capitalise on the deep interest shown by local governments and NGOs regarding the recent Kosovo, Chechnya and Horn of Africa emergencies. In this regard, UNHCR signed a framework agreement in March with the Qatar Charitable Society that is aimed at building support for refugees in general and those in the region in particular.

The **Syrian Arab Republic** hosted just under 5,000 refugees who are registered with UNHCR and originate from Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, and other countries. Approximately 4,000 urban refugees live in Damascus, whereas 850 are registered in El-Hol camp in Hasake Governorate. Since El-Hol is an open refugee camp, many residents only return to receive assistance but pursue income-generating activities in other locations. In addition, there are some 1,500 asylum-seekers of various nationalities that are awaiting status determination but are not receiving assistance from UNHCR. During the first half of the year, some 390 refugees, mainly from El-Hol camp, were resettled from the Syrian Arab Republic to third countries. It is expected that the refugee population in El-Hol will continue to diminish through resettlement. Assistance to refugees in El-Hol camp included food, medical care, primary education, as well as vocational training. Based on an individual assessment of need, by the end of June a monthly average of 3,000 urban refugees of other nationalities were receiving monthly subsistence allowances and other types of assistance, including education and health care, as well as assistance targeting women and children. Refugee

women received sanitary kits and training on health issues such as breast-feeding, family planning and HIV/AIDS awareness. A total of 211 refugees (53.5 per cent females) received elementary and secondary education in urban centres. Four refugees received scholarships under the Albert Einstein Academic Scholarship Programme for Refugees (DAFI programme) to attend university. Owing to financial constraints, a needs-assessment mechanism was set up in February whereby a joint committee comprising UNHCR and a national partner meets with all newly recognised refugees applying for material assistance. The committee reviews the needs of the concerned refugees based on their situation and, when required, a home visit is undertaken.

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** hosts some 500 recognised refugees originating mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Uganda. The refugee population includes a number of Palestinians. Seventeen refugees were resettled from the UAE during the first part of the year. Mainly national NGOs cared for registered refugees in need of assistance. The Office organised two workshops for NGOs on People Oriented Planning. One was held in Abu Dhabi for a local NGO and the second in Ajman for an international

NGO. Two seminars on refugee women and co-operation with UNHCR were held respectively in Al Ain and Sharjah. To promote awareness of refugee law and UNHCR's work, the Office continued to strengthen contacts with authorities at the federal level as well as in the emirates of Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman. UNHCR also continued to pursue private sector fundraising activities in the UAE. Some 15 small-scale private-sector fund raising events were organised during the first half of the year.

Outlook for July – December

UNHCR's objectives for 2000 in the Middle East will continue to focus on providing international protection and basic assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in camps and urban areas, with special emphasis on meeting the needs of refugee women and children. UNHCR will also promote lasting solutions, including voluntary repatriation or resettlement. The Office will also continue to promote awareness of refugee law and basic humanitarian principles, while promoting accession to the 1951 Convention. It will improve public information and fundraising activities. Finally, UNHCR will maintain and regularly update its contingency planning in the event of a regional emergency that could result in large-scale population displacement.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget		Revised Budget		Total Funds Available*		Total Funds Obligated	
	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP	AB and TF	SP
Countries								
Egypt	3'977'010	0	4'012'568	0	1'700'100	0	1'700'100	0
Iraq	3'292'701	0	3'214'143	0	2'735'587	0	1'314'200	0
Israel	0	0	10'000	0	4'500	0	4'500	0
Jordan	1'665'487	0	1'670'487	0	749'300	0	749'300	0
Kuwait	891'015	0	765'881	0	350'700	0	350'700	0
Lebanon	2'667'045	0	2'670'047	0	1'198'800	0	1'198'800	0
Saudi Arabia	1'373'137	0	1'481'583	0	668'995	0	659'300	0
Syrian Arab Republic	2'258'251	0	2'221'823	0	1'077'300	0	1'077'300	0
United Arab Emirates	174'000	0	231'300	0	91'893	0	84'000	0
Yemen	3'090'192	0	3'677'373	400'000	1'993'700	0	1'993'700	0
Regional Projects **	264'200	0	664'200	0	80'000	0	80'000	0
Sub-total	19'653'038	0	20'619'405	400'000	10'650'875	0	9'211'900	0
Bureau at Headquarters	687'600	0	686'753	0	311'021	0	311'021	0
TOTAL	20'340'638	0	21'306'158	400'000	10'961'896	0	9'522'921	0

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

**Covers scholarships for refugee students, enhancement of the evaluation function in CASWANAME and regional consultations on population displacement in CASWANAME.