

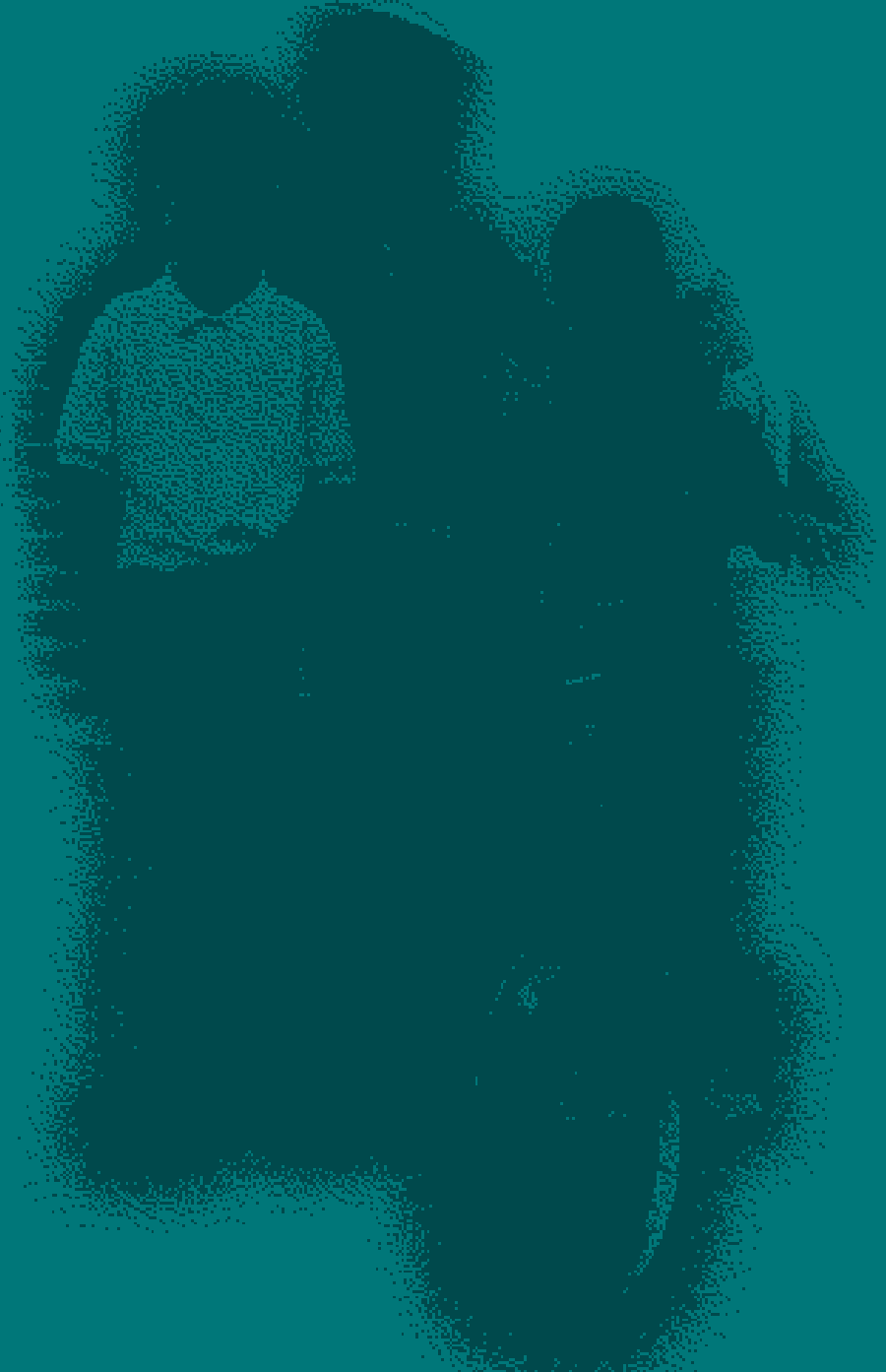
North America and the Caribbean

Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas
Barbados
Canada
Cuba
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Grenada
Haiti
Jamaica
St. Kitts and Nevis
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
St. Lucia
Trinidad and Tobago
United States of America

Recent Developments

The arrival at the United States/Mexico border of approximately 200 asylum-seekers from Iraq in September 2000 raised concerns in both countries. Most of them were Chaldean Christians from northern Iraq, who had arrived in Mexico with false documents hoping to join family members in California. After well co-ordinated efforts by the Mexican and United States governments, assisted by UNHCR, the asylum-seekers were granted access to the United States asylum process. The episode indicates that the arrival of asylum-seekers at the United States/Mexico (and United States/Canada) borders will clearly continue to be an important issue for UNHCR and governments.

The target figure for refugees to be admitted under the United States resettlement programme in 2001 will be 76,000 persons. This includes target figures for refugees from Africa and the Middle East, raised (again) to 20,000 and 10,000 persons respectively. Recent changes to that programme have enabled UNHCR to refer refugees from new regions, notably the Commonwealth of Independent States and Central Asia. The United States is also developing a protocol for emergency resettlement of refugees needing to be resettled within seven days. Up to 50 emergency resettlement requests per year could be processed under these new procedures.





In Canada, consultations and public debate on the Government's proposed new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act took place across the country after the Bill was introduced in Parliament in April. UNHCR issued its own written comments on the Bill. If it passes into law, the Bill would make some important changes in Canada's asylum procedure — notably the establishment of a Refugee Appeal Division to which rejected asylum-seekers could appeal an initial negative decision, and the incorporation into law of Canada's *non-refoulement* obligations under the UN Convention against Torture.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR is very pleased that Trinidad and Tobago has recently acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees. UNHCR's Regional Representative travelled to Trinidad and Tobago in November to attend the signing ceremony and meet with government officials.

With the end of the academic year, approximately 150 Western Saharan students have graduated from educational institutions in Cuba and are now starting to return to their country of first asylum, Algeria. UNHCR has been providing limited supplementary assistance to these students, who have benefited from a scholarship programme implemented by the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education.

Strategic Objectives

As the year 2001 marks the 50th anniversary of UNHCR and of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, UNHCR will: work closely with authorities as well as with civil society in Canada and in the United States in order to strengthen asylum and maximise resettlement opportunities; promote public awareness of and support for refugees, and enhanced public and government support for UNHCR's activities; and encourage accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol as well as to the Conventions on Statelessness, and the enactment of implementing legislation, in relevant countries in the Caribbean.

Operations

In **Canada**, the protection advocacy work of UNHCR's staff (located in Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver) will involve continued participation in the legislative reform debate, monitoring of the refugee status determination procedure, interventions on policy issues and individual cases as required, and co-operation with NGOs, lawyers and academic institutions. In 2001, the Office intends to devote attention, among other subjects, to the issues of access to the asylum procedure, detention of asylum-seekers and the treatment of unaccompanied minors.

UNHCR will continue to work closely with the Canadian government and NGOs in an effort to diminish barriers to resettlement and accelerate processing. In response to UNHCR's assessment of needs, Canadian resettlement priorities have shifted to Africa and the Middle East. Two Canadian resettlement experts have been seconded to UNHCR's offices in Cairo and Nairobi for a two year period. Their presence will strengthen UNHCR's resettlement capacity and improve links between the Office and Canadian missions overseas. UNHCR will advocate an extension of Canada's pilot project for urgent resettlement cases and participate, whenever possible, in the training of Canadian immigration officers and NGO staff, in addition to advising refugees, their family members and Canada-based agencies on resettlement.

The refugee agency will continue with a variety of public awareness activities to encourage increased public understanding of the specific plight of refugees and seek support for its activities, with a special focus on education. A UNHCR/UN Association of Canada project, supported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, will seek to make Canadian teachers better aware of the subject of refugees and make relevant educational materials available to them. UNHCR also intends to test the viability of private-sector fund raising in Canada.

In the **United States**, UNHCR will continue to monitor developments in asylum law, policy and practice, focusing on ensuring access by refugees and asylum-seekers to refugee status determination procedures, legal representation and counselling. UNHCR will continue to undertake regular visits to ports of entry and detention centres in order to make recommendations to the authorities on improving conditions. Instructions issued by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) in 2000 regarding UNHCR's access to secondary inspections (which take place at ports of entry) will enhance monitoring of procedures. The collation of asylum statistics classified by sex and age will facilitate the targeting of assistance for this group of refugees.

In order to promote compliance with international standards, UNHCR will communicate its views to the United States Government on the implications for refugee protection of relevant policy and legislative proposals. Since 2000 is an election year, UNHCR expects to see changes in the composition of Congress, and in the membership of legislative committees responsible for immigration and asylum policy, as well as key interlocutors such as the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) and the State Department. These changes could affect UNHCR's work and necessitate the development of new contacts. An important task for UNHCR in 2001 will be to provide information to the new administration and Congress on UNHCR as an organisation, its policies and programmes and the relevance of maintaining a high level of support for its activities.

As the United States increasingly relies on UNHCR for resettlement referrals, the Office will co-ordinate with the State Department, the INS and NGOs to provide appropriate recommendations and obtain financial and staffing assistance for resettlement efforts.

The promotion of refugee law in the United States will focus first on identifying areas of the country where asylum-seekers are under-served in terms of expert legal assistance. UNHCR will then promote the development of such services through contacts and joint training initiatives with organisations, attorneys and legal clinics. UNHCR will also expand the reach of its current legal training activities to new regions and NGO partners and strengthen contacts with academic institutions.

The United States Association for UNHCR (USA for UNHCR) will increase its efforts to raise funds from the private sector in 2001. Linkages with corporate and foundation donors will be strengthened and the USA for UNHCR's website will be expanded in order to reach more potential donors.

In the **Caribbean**, UNHCR's work will focus on promoting accession to key refugee instruments, developing and reinforcing legal structures and institutions for refugee protection and building the capacity of protection networks. Special attention will be paid to gender issues and to sensitising personnel responsible for the implementation of refugee policies and procedures to the needs of women and children asylum-seekers. To further these efforts, UNHCR will forge closer relations with key staff and relevant authorities of the member states of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

UNHCR hopes that efforts to promote accession to the 1951 Convention will bear fruit: positive signs have indicated the likely accession of **St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis**.

Cuba has indicated that it is seriously considering ratification of the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees. In 2001, UNHCR will continue to promote ratification as well as the establishment of a refugee status determination mechanism and durable solutions for refugees. As a limited number of asylum-seekers are expected to arrive in 2001,





UNHCR will continue to provide protection and assistance while negotiations continue on the gradual establishment of national structures in accordance with international standards.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR will further expand and enhance its protection network in two principal ways. It will continue training honorary liaison officers and re-establish a project with the *Centro de Trabajo Social Dominicano* (CTSD) for the protection of refugees in the **Dominican Republic**. CTSD will work with UNHCR to interview asylum-seekers and prepare their application documents, help Haitian refugees change their legal status and provide material assistance when appropriate.

Tension and violence in **Haiti** led to a significant increase in migratory movement in 2000. This situation is expected to continue due to economic decline and political instability and may be exacerbated by December 2000 elections. In 2001, UNHCR will, therefore, continue to closely monitor the welfare of Haitian asylum-seekers throughout the region and

update contingency plans for possible larger influxes into neighbouring countries. Given the importance of quick and effective responses, UNHCR will co-operate closely with the United States and Caribbean governments to ensure that adequate resources are available.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Canada	1,286,167
Cuba	585,300
United States of America ¹	5,104,222
Regional Projects ²	125,000
Total	7,100,689

¹ Includes administrative costs for the UNHCR Liaison Office in New York of USD 1,439,500.

² Includes local integration of refugees and capacity building in the Caribbean.