

GEORGIA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Support the process of conflict resolution sponsored by the OSCE in Georgia/Ossetia and facilitate the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons from North and South Ossetia to their places of origin.
- Support the process of conflict resolution sponsored by the UN in Georgia/Abkhazia and seek durable solutions for some 270,000 IDPs from Abkhazia; in the interim, and without prejudice to their eventual return, promote the *de facto* integration of IDPs in their present places of residence; protect and monitor those who return spontaneously to their homes, as well as local residents.
- Seek improvements to the Refugee Law and asylum procedures and help governmental and NGO structures build up sufficient resources and expertise to respond to involuntary displacement.
- Advise the Government on a legal framework for the repatriation of the formerly deported Meskhetians.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Refugees/Asylum-seekers

Since October 1999, over 6,500 Chechen refugees from the Russian Federation have sought refuge in Georgia. This is the first time that Georgia has received refugees. The influx occurred just months after Georgia had acceded to the 1951 Convention. UNHCR is supporting the Government to meet its international obligations.

Host families shelter 80 per cent of the refugees in the Pankisi Valley in northeast Georgia and 20 per cent live in communal centers. A UNHCR mobile team has been deployed to the region to identify and monitor refugee pro-

tection and assistance needs. UNHCR supports the Government in the co-ordination of assistance (through regular inter-agency meetings in the field) and in meeting their needs for shelter, food, education, health and sanitation, in partnership with national and international governmental and non-governmental organisations. The immediate assistance needs of the refugees have now been met.

For the second half of the year, following recent assessments, particular attention will be paid to meeting the specific needs of refugee women and children. Community and information centres will be established to provide psychosocial and skills-building services, particularly targeting women. Kindergartens are being established. Recreational activities for adolescents will be supported which will be open both to the host and the refugee community. UNHCR will also support forestry activities to compensate for timber used for firewood during winter months. Alternative accommodation will be provided on a case-by-case basis. Winterisation kits, including blankets, winter clothes and mattresses, will also be supplied.

Following Georgia's accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in May 1999, the main focus of protection activities has been the further development of national refugee and asylum legislation and practice. UNHCR has worked with its main partners in this area, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) as well as the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, to identify remaining gaps in national legislation and suggest amendments to meet international standards. While suggested amendments are being discussed at various levels, submission to Parliament and subsequent debate may take place only in the second half of 2000. In support of the debate, UNHCR and an NGO prepared a special issue of its bulletin *Refuge* for wide distribution amongst parliamentarians and others concerned. In view of the complexity of the issue, UNHCR has suggested to the Govern-

ment that it take time to draw lessons from the experience gained with the Chechen refugees before embarking on drafting new legislation or amendments.

Pressing protection concerns include the volatile security situation within the Pankisi Valley, as well as the need to verify the identity of a number of undocumented cases. UNHCR disseminated information to help the refugees understand the mandate and role of UNHCR, their legal status as refugees, and also to raise awareness among local and international agencies about the protection needs of the Chechen refugees. UNHCR is working closely with the MRA, the local administration and law enforcement agencies to meet their protection need.

Initial funding constraints were overcome by temporarily borrowing resources from on-going projects, which temporarily slowed down the implementation of those projects.

Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Osset Conflict)

During the first six months of the year, the overall situation in the Georgian-Osset conflict zone was relatively quiet. This was attributed in part to UNHCR's protection monitoring presence, which is seen by many as actively promoting the peace process. However, the political conflict resolution process has been slow. The Joint Control Commission (JCC), through which UNHCR supports the OSCE-led conflict resolution process, has not convened, in the last six months, although the OSCE met four times with each of the sides. Security incidents of a criminal nature continue to present risks to UNHCR staff and operations in the area.

The return of refugees and IDPs to their places of origin has been slow, reflecting the apparent lack of political will by both the Georgian and Osset sides to move the conflict resolution process forward and eliminate obstacles to the return process.

During the first six months of 2000, UNHCR facilitated the return of 66 families (330 persons) to their original homes, provided shelter

assistance, and rehabilitated community facilities. UNHCR's implementing partners assist in the rehabilitation of the returnees' homes.

UNHCR continued to support the reintegration of 1,172 families (5,860 persons) who have returned to South Ossetia and Georgia proper since 1997, by promoting self-reliance through income-generation, food-security and community services projects. Self-reliance programmes have been important in creating conditions for return, giving returning refugees and IDPs the social and economic opportunities needed to sustain return. One implementing partner completed a computerised database on vulnerable cases in the regions of return which is used by both humanitarian and development agencies.

The UNHCR Mobile Team finalised a village-profile database on the shelter and security conditions in areas of return in order to respond efficiently to requests to return both in villages and vis-à-vis the local administrations. A second list of village profiles is being prepared for affected parts of Georgia proper, which will be finalised by the end of the year.

The question of property restitution for returning refugees and displaced remained high on UNHCR's agenda. An independent expert, co-financed by UNHCR, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, commented on draft legislation presented by the Government. As in previous years, UNHCR and its partners provided legal and social counselling to affected individuals and families.

For the second half of the year, UNHCR will continue working on managing a transition away from humanitarian assistance towards poverty-alleviation programmes for the returnee, displaced and war-affected population. UNHCR can only act as a catalyst in this regard, by building the capacity of local NGOs to be more active in this area and by advocating for donors and development NGOs to take on vulnerable caseloads in the region.

Returnees and IDPs (Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict)

Pursuant to relevant UN Security Council reso-

lutions, UNHCR continued to support the UN-sponsored Georgia-Abkhaz conflict settlement process with the objective of seeking durable solutions for some 270,000 IDPs from Abkhazia. Although the Working Group on IDPs could not be convened, work on IDP issues continued. In the absence of a political agreement on the status of Abkhazia, as well as conditions for the secure and dignified return of IDPs to their places of origin, UNHCR continued to support governmental counterparts to enable IDPs to realise their full political, economic and social rights under Georgian law, in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

A major breakthrough in this process was the issuance in January of a Presidential Decree establishing a State Commission on the "New Approach to IDPs". Through this mechanism, the Government, the World Bank, UNDP, UNHCR and the international donor community aim to manage a transition from humanitarian assistance to a more sustainable development approach. This is in line also with the Brookings Process. By moving away from the previous approach, which categorised IDPs as vulnerable and in need of humanitarian assistance, IDPs will be given the opportunity to participate alongside other citizens in the social, economic and political development of the nation, rather than being excluded from this process. The Government, national and international agencies have embarked on a detailed assessment of the "New Approach to IDPs" to lay a basis for programme design, improved targeting of needs and appropriate public policy reform.

To initiate the "New Approach" in operational terms, a self-reliance pilot fund (SRPF) is being negotiated, based on innovative collaboration between the Post Conflict Fund of the World Bank, UNDP, UNHCR, USAID and other donors, with secretariat support from UNOCHA, and representatives from the Government and IDP community. The goal of the SRPF is to provide small grants that could attract larger funding to increase the self-sustainability of IDPs.

In tandem with these developments, UNHCR continued to work with implementing partners in Western Georgia and Tbilisi to increase levels of self-reliance amongst vulnerable IDPs. A successful micro-finance programme is run by a local NGO set up by UNHCR and an international NGO in 1997, that targets economically active, self-employed citizens of Georgia, where over 70 per cent of the beneficiaries are poor IDP women. In Western Georgia, UNHCR supported food security through livestock and crop-production schemes, as well as micro-finance and community services programmes that promote greater self-reliance.

For IDP children, UNHCR supports the children's magazine *White Crane* through UNV, that enables children from the conflict zones and across ethnic groups to share experiences via a popular letters page. Children contributing to the magazine are selected to participate in summer camps, also supported by UNHCR.

In the absence of international staff during the first six months of the year owing to security, staffing and funding constraints, the situation of spontaneous returnees as well as local residents in the Gali district was monitored on very few occasions.

Durable Solutions for Formerly Deported Meskhetians

UNHCR has continued to promote Georgia's accession to the international instruments related to stateless persons and statelessness. UNHCR financed the verification of an earlier unofficial translation of the relevant Conventions and shared documentation on statelessness in Russian with government agencies. A workshop - organised in conjunction with the Council of Europe - will be held with the participation of government officials and NGO partners, to discuss European standards in respect of citizenship issues and their applicability in Georgia. The planned extensive training activities for government officials could only partially be implemented owing to staff vacancies.

UNHCR is collaborating with the OSCE and

its institutions, the Council of Europe and other partners to assist the government to meet its national and international commitments regarding appropriate solutions to the plight of formerly deported Meskhetians who wish to repatriate to Georgia. In this respect, one of UNHCR's implementing partners has presented a discussion paper containing proposed principles for future legislation. Another local NGO completed a survey of the Meskhetians currently residing in Georgia and analysed their legal and socio-economic situation and needs.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

UNHCR's objectives and priorities remain the same for the second half of the year with the

following adjustments, reflecting the developments and constraints outlined above.

The third initial objective is replaced by:

- Seek improvements to refugee law and asylum procedures and support governmental and NGO structures to build up sufficient resources and expertise to respond to the influx of refugees from Chechnya, Russian Federation. In this regard support the Government in providing protection and assistance to the Chechen refugees.

The fourth initial objective is replaced by:

- Advise the Government on issues related to citizenship, with a view to encouraging eventual accession to the Statelessness Conventions and attaining durable solutions for formerly deported Meskhetians.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*/**	Total Funds Obligated**
AB and TF	8,946,202	8,543,736	3,296,088	3,233,000
SP	0	2,257,824	770,794	770,794
TOTAL	8,946,202	10,801,560	4,066,882	4,003,794

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

**Includes programmes in Northern Caucasus.

