



East Asia and the Pacific

Australia
Cambodia
China
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Indonesia
Japan
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Malaysia
Mongolia
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
The Philippines
Republic of Korea
Singapore
South Pacific
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Viet Nam

Recent developments

After the breakdown of negotiations between the Government of Indonesia and the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement) in mid-May 2003, armed conflict ensued in the Province of Aceh. Neighbouring Malaysia witnessed a substantial increase in the number of asylum-seekers originating from Aceh. By the end of June 2003, some 3,000 asylum-seekers from the Indonesian Province of Aceh had registered with UNHCR. In addition, another 2,700 asylum-seekers from Myanmar, primarily Rohingya and Chin, had also registered with the Office. The upsurge in asylum applications coincided with a government crack-down on illegal migrants in Malaysia. UNHCR urged Malaysian authorities at the highest level to exempt asylum-seekers and other persons carrying UNHCR documentation from arrest and deportation, but 290 persons of concern were detained in front of the UNHCR office in August 2003.

UNHCR remains concerned about the plight of North Koreans in China. At the end of 2002, China conducted a renewed campaign to round up and deport North Koreans. Following increased security measures in the diplomatic quarter of Beijing, there were no reports of asylum-seekers having gained access to an embassy in 2003 (as occurred in 2002). UNHCR continues to be denied access



to the Chinese border area. Based on available information, North Koreans who left their country illegally fall within the criteria of persons considered to be of concern to UNHCR.

In Australia, the introduction of restrictive new legislation aimed at deterring the arrival of unauthorised persons led to a dramatic fall in the number of asylum-seekers entering the country. Under the “Pacific Solution” strategy implemented by the Government, asylum-seekers *en route* to Australia are intercepted and placed in mandatory detention. In August 2003, the Government sought to extend the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) scheme to cover asylum-seekers entering Australia legally.

In Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor), the declaration of cessation of refugee status for East Timorese refugees on 31 December 2002 resulted in a trickle of returns. Of the estimated 28,000 East Timorese remaining in West Timor, Indonesia, less than 500 returned in the first nine months of 2003. East Timorese remaining in Indonesia cited continuing concerns over security, poor economic prospects, and lack of social services as reasons for not opting to return. A new strategy to pursue durable solutions for the remaining East Timorese in West Timor, Indonesia, has been agreed upon and is in the process of being implemented. This will hopefully lead to a reduction in tension on both sides of the border.

Strategic objectives

UNHCR’s main strategic objectives in the region in 2004 will be to urge governments to respect the fundamental protection principles of *non-refoulement* and asylum, and to facilitate the sub-regional dialogue on refugee issues with States and regional organisations. Although many States in the region have reinforced restrictive immigration and asylum laws, UNHCR is undeterred in its efforts to encourage governments to accede to the international conventions on refugees and statelessness, and to act on the basic principles enshrined in these instruments. The Office will also focus on the pursuit of durable solutions for refugees, mainly through sustainable reintegration in returnee areas and resettlement. In addition, as the region is characterised by a number of volatile situations that may result in refugee movements, UNHCR will strive to reinforce its emergency preparedness and response capacities in the region.

The Office has reaffirmed its commitment to support the Bali follow-up process and the Asia Pacific Consultations in 2004. UNHCR will seek to ensure that issues relating to the protection needs of asylum-seekers and refugees are incorporated in policy debates at these two fora. Within the framework of these initiatives, the Office will focus on assisting governments to develop their capacities to address asylum issues.



Papua New Guinea: West Papuan refugees are jointly assisted by the Government and UNHCR. UNHCR / A. Harper

Operations

The programme in **Thailand** is described in a separate chapter. The following paragraphs summarise UNHCR's objectives and activities in the other countries in the region.

The UNHCR Regional Office in **Australia** also covers New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. The main activities in these countries will include advising persons of concern on protection-related issues, promoting refugee law with the respective authorities, as well as processing resettlement applications. With the significant decrease in the number of asylum-seekers arriving or being detained in Australia, the Office will focus on monitoring policy and legislative developments throughout the region and engage in an active dialogue with concerned governments and other actors. To ensure high levels of public awareness of refugee rights and related issues, UNHCR will continue its public information activities and support the national committee, Australia for UNHCR, in its public relations and private sector fundraising activities.

In **Cambodia**, UNHCR will focus on strengthening asylum and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures throughout 2004. The Office will actively support Government efforts to establish a functioning national asylum system. Until such a system is in place, UNHCR will continue to be responsible for conducting RSD.

In **China**, the Office will pursue practical approaches with the Government to provide protection and facilitate durable solutions for North Koreans who are of concern to UNHCR. With durable solutions achieved for the Vietnamese refugees who sought asylum in China during the 1980s, UNHCR will seek to end assistance to this group, while continuing to advocate access to naturalisation or repatriation for those who wish to do so. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), UNHCR will conduct RSD and pursue durable solutions, principally through resettling urban refugees. The Office will continue to promote accession to the Refugee Convention in **Mongolia** and the Hong Kong SAR. In the Macau SAR, activities will focus on building the capacity of the Government to deal with asylum-related issues. Increasing awareness of and support for UNHCR's mandate will remain a central part of the programme.

UNHCR's office in **Indonesia** is also responsible for programmes in the Philippines, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. The Office's activities continue to focus on seeking durable solutions for recognised refugees as well as conducting RSD for new asylum-seekers. In Indonesia, UNHCR will work with the authorities to ensure that East Timorese electing to remain in Indonesia have access to citizenship, as it is believed that the overwhelming majority of the remaining East Timorese have stronger emotional, financial, political or family ties with Indonesia than with Timor-Leste. UNHCR's monitoring role will be crucial if statelessness is to be avoided. UNHCR will also facilitate the involvement

of other actors in the implementation of the strategy for durable solutions for the remaining caseload. At the end of 2004, UNHCR will hand over to other partners the responsibility for the programme for separated children.

In **Japan** and the **Republic of Korea**, UNHCR will focus on the provision of protection to refugees, as well as public outreach activities to broaden support and funding for UNHCR. If sufficient funding is available, the activities of the Centre for International Humanitarian Response (eCentre), which focuses on emergency preparedness and response management, will be expanded to benefit other regions in 2004.

In **Malaysia**, the Office will continue to call for unhindered access to UNHCR for all asylum-seekers, and for protection of refugees pending durable solutions, particularly those in detention or facing deportation. UNHCR will reinforce its RSD unit and its efforts to provide community services and financial assistance for food, shelter, urgent medical attention, transport, basic education and legal assistance to particularly vulnerable refugees, including women and children. UNHCR will seek to strengthen its protection network with Government authorities, including the National Human Rights Commission and the judiciary. Enhanced co-operation will also be sought with civil society. For Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, UNHCR will seek clarification of citizenship issues and access to minimum social and economic welfare services.

In **Papua New Guinea**, where UNHCR re-opened its office in 2003, the focus will be on ensuring that protection is provided to refugees from the Indonesian province of West Papua (Irian Jaya) and from beyond the region. Capacity-building activities with the authorities will focus on reception and RSD. UNHCR will provide targeted, one-time assistance to the East Awin relocation site in the Western Province, where some 300 refugees transferred from Vanimo are accommodated. Objectives for the Office include obtaining residency permits for West Papuans living in East Awin, as well as citizenship for those refugees who have been legal residents for over eight years. In the southwestern town of Daru, some 200 Indonesian refugees have indicated their desire to repatriate voluntarily. This is some 40 years after they crossed the border from neighbouring Indonesia. The Office will assist the Government to prepare and update contingency plans for potential refugee influxes and facilitate the introduction of domestic asylum legislation.

In the **Philippines**, UNHCR will continue to support the passage of legislation aimed at conferring permanent residence status on the remaining Vietnamese nationals in the country. This legislation has passed through the House of Representatives and is being debated in the Senate. In

addition, the Office will seek to assist with the revision of current immigration and naturalisation laws to incorporate proposals relating to the refugee definition and standards for the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers.

As only a limited number of persons seek asylum in **Singapore**, RSD procedures are carried out by an NGO partner. In addition, UNHCR provides basic assistance to recognised refugees and intervenes with authorities in the case of detention of persons of concern.

Since **Timor-Leste** ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol in May 2003, UNHCR is working to ensure that domestic legislation is consistent with Timor-Leste's international obligations. UNHCR in Dili and Jakarta are working together closely to ensure that East Timorese residing in Indonesia are either given access to citizenship or can return to Timor-Leste, in order to avoid statelessness. Of the 4,531 cases involving separated children that UNHCR has been associated with, 657 cases remained unresolved at the end of August 2003. These remaining cases are particularly difficult as care-givers are often uncooperative and unwilling to facilitate communication between children and their natural parents. UNHCR will continue to work in accordance with its 2002 "Strategy Paper on Separated Children in Indonesia and East Timor."

In **Viet Nam**, UNHCR will support the naturalisation of 16,000 Cambodian refugees; seek regular and unimpeded access to returnees in the Central Highlands; and continue to advocate the voluntary repatriation of a small number of refugees in China who have expressed the desire to return to Viet Nam.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Australia and New Zealand	935,908
Cambodia	694,835
China	4,370,652
Indonesia	3,563,536
Japan	2,482,578
Malaysia	1,707,741
Mongolia	168,849
Papua New Guinea	428,188
Philippines	242,031
Republic of Korea	421,281
Singapore	60,000
Thailand	6,321,446
Timor-Leste	1,281,059
Viet Nam	134,787
Regional Activities ¹	220,000
Total	23,032,891

¹ Includes general protection activities and dissemination of refugee law, transport and repatriation activities of Indochinese and scholarships for refugee students in East Asia and the Pacific.