

ERITREA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

Eritrean Refugees

- Resume the voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees residing in Sudan for the last 30 years and facilitate their reintegration.

Somali Refugees

- Pending voluntary repatriation, provide protection and assistance to some 2,300 Somali refugees residing at Harsile refugee camp near Assab.

Sudanese Refugees

- Provide protection and assistance to some 730 Sudanese refugees residing at Elit refugee camp near Tesseney and explore options for durable solutions.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Eritrean Refugees

After a long period of relative calm in the two-year old border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, full-scale fighting between the two countries erupted on 12 May. As Ethiopian forces occupied Eritrean territory, large numbers of civilians were displaced internally, while others fled to Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti. These countries, notably Sudan, were already hosting substantial numbers of Eritrean refugees, many of whom had left the country during Eritrea's thirty-year war of independence.

When the war of independence ended in May 1991, some 160,000 refugees repatriated, mostly from Sudan, either spontaneously or in organised movements in 1994 and 1995. In subsequent years, however, further repatriation was hampered by political developments. At the end of 1999, a breakthrough in negotiations between the Government of Eritrea and UNHCR created prospects for the resumption of large-scale repatriation. Meanwhile the Government of Sudan expressed its commitment to promote the voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees. On 7 April, a Tripartite Agree-

ment for voluntary repatriation was signed between the Governments of Eritrea, Sudan and UNHCR. The Government of Eritrea reformulated its reintegration programme to give returnees the freedom to return to their areas of origin and choose the type of economic activity they wished to pursue. The modalities for the start of the repatriation and reintegration operation were agreed upon at a Tripartite Commission meeting on 27 and 28 April. Following an information campaign and a registration exercise in the refugee camps in Sudan, the first repatriation movement was planned for 20 May. On 12 May, however, full-scale fighting broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea, dashing hopes for repatriation.

UNHCR was therefore obliged to shift gears rapidly from promoting repatriation and reintegration to providing emergency assistance to a new wave of Eritrean refugees in neighbouring countries and to internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside Eritrea. Over one million people were displaced within Eritrea, of which half million within Gash-Barka Zone and from Gash-Barka to other areas of the country, while some 95,000 fled to Sudan. Another 1,000 fled from the Southern Red Sea Zone to Djibouti and 1,000 to Yemen.

In Eritrea, apart from the immediate objective of saving lives and providing assistance to IDPs, UNHCR, in collaboration with other UN agencies, adopted an approach geared towards laying the foundations for the sustainable return of refugees and IDPs. This approach is based on the premise that many of the IDPs are in areas that are expected to receive the majority of returnees (Gash-Barka and Anseba Zones). Moreover, many of the IDPs were formerly refugees in Sudan, who had returned in earlier years, and it would therefore be difficult to differentiate between returnees and IDPs. UNHCR maintained its main office in Asmara, while opening a new office in the Gash-Barka Zone. An emergency team was deployed and additional staff sent to the Gash-Barka Zone. Given the proximity to

the border and the presence of landmines, UNHCR also deployed a Field Staff Safety Advisor. A number of IDPs were temporarily settled in IDP camps at the Debat and Meketi sites in the Anseba and North Red Sea Zones respectively. The vast majority of IDPs, however, sought shelter along riverbeds, in valleys and under trees. They had no access to clean drinking water or to sanitation facilities and did not bring with them even the most basic household items.

To cover initial emergency assistance, UNHCR drew USD 3,363,000 from its operational reserve and reallocated an additional USD 1,000,000 from funds available for preparatory activities for repatriation. UNHCR mounted an airlift to Asmara to transport relief supplies from stockpiles in Copenhagen, Nairobi and Tirana. These included more than 23,000 plastic tarpaulins, over 109,000 blankets, 11 heavy trucks and water tankers, six light vehicles, wood for shelter construction, as well as water and sanitation equipment. UNHCR also made substantial local purchases of wood, soap, sanitary napkins and kitchen sets from Eritrean suppliers. WFP provided basic food commodities. In addition, UNHCR provided kerosene stoves to limit environmental damage. Staff was sent out regularly to monitor the situation of the IDPs.

On 18 June, a cease-fire agreement, negotiated under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was signed in Algiers. The agreement calls for a UN peacekeeping and observer mission to be deployed to the border area. In late June, after several thousand Eritrean refugees had already begun to repatriate spontaneously to areas under the control of Eritrean forces, the Governments of Eritrea and Sudan requested UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of some 95,000 Eritrean refugees who had fled to Sudan. A Tripartite Agreement to establish the modalities of the repatriation operation was expected in July.

Somali Refugees

Plans to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the 2,300 Somali refugees at Harsile refugee

camp near Assab were put on hold, since it was felt that returnee areas were not yet able to absorb the returnees. In addition, many of those refugees who had previously indicated a willingness to return to Somalia changed their minds. The resumption of hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May saw intense military activity along the eastern front near Assab, seriously threatening the safety of Harsile camp located 55 kilometres from the Ethiopian border. Following UNHCR's request to move the refugees to Massawa, on 16 June the Department of Immigration's Office of Refugee Affairs (ORA) organised the transfer by sea of some 1,228 refugees. Some refugees opted to remain in Assab where they had some form of employment. Some 1,000 refugees fled from Harsile camp, travelling by vehicle or on foot to Djibouti, where UNHCR settled them in a newly established camp.

In Massawa, the Somali refugees were temporarily accommodated at Emkulu transit centre some ten kilometres from the city. This transit centre had previously been established as temporary accommodation for Eritrean returnees. UNHCR provided 250 tents, erected four RubHall-type shelters and made arrangements to construct additional pit-latrines to improve living conditions in the transit centre. Through ORA, UNHCR funded the provision of food aid. UNHCR reimbursed ORA for the additional costs incurred for transportation from Harsile camp to Emkulu transit centre and for the replacement of food stocks that had been lost.

Sudanese Refugees

In 1999, when the Eritrean Government announced that refugees would no longer be allowed to inhabit urban areas, 730 Sudanese refugees were settled at Elit refugee camp near Tesseney in the Gash-Barka Zone. The camp is located approximately 100 kilometres north of the Ethiopian border. With the upsurge in hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea in May, the region around Elit camp was affected by fighting and both the civilian population and the refugees fled. UNHCR urgently called on ORA to relocate the refugees to Asmara and,

on 9 and 10 June, ORA transferred 78 refugees to the Haz Haz centre. Eventually, the refugee population at Haz Haz increased to 170. As the security situation in parts of the Gash-Barka Zone improved, the remaining refugees who had fled from Elit camp returned. Between 12 and 15 June, some 635 refugees were transported back to Elit camp. UNHCR reimbursed ORA for the additional costs incurred for transportation, the replacement of food stocks that had been lost and the replacement of radio equipment that had been looted.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

In light of the rapid evolution of events in Eritrea during the year, UNHCR has slightly re-

vised its initial objectives as follows:

- Assist the repatriation from Sudan of Eritrean refugees who fled during 2000. Those unable to return to areas still occupied by Ethiopian forces will be accommodated in temporary sites if they so desire.
- Continue to pursue the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of 160,000 long-term Eritrean refugees in Sudan whose return was planned to start in May.
- Create an environment conducive to sustainable return and reintegration of long-term and new refugees, as well as IDPs, by undertaking rehabilitation activities and reinforcing infrastructure, in close co-operation with other organisations.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	1'232'483	4'841'550	3'804'300	3'804'300
SP	0	12'646'200	561'167	0
TOTAL	1'232'483	17'487'750	4'365'467	3'804'300

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

