

# REFUGEES

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HOW **SECURE** DO  
**YOU** FEEL?



# TIPTOEING TO A SAFER FUTURE?

**S**ince the beginning of the new millennium, millions of uprooted people around the world and the aid officials who help them have faced continuing perils.

In Africa's Congo basin, nearly four million people have died in a war which has been misunderstood and largely ignored by the international community.

Anywhere between 100,000 and 400,000 persons have perished in the ongoing conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, despite anguished calls to halt the carnage.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States led to conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and the global war on terror.

The fallout from these

events made it increasingly difficult for genuine refugees to gain asylum and curtailed the so-called 'humanitarian space' in which organizations such as UNHCR used to function.

The worst atrocity in the history of the United Nations occurred in 2003 when a truck bomb destroyed its headquarters in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, killing 22 people and wounding 150 others.

Last year, more than 150 defenseless refugees were slaughtered in a camp in the central African state of Burundi in one of the worst single atrocities in recent years.

What can be done to at least alleviate such carnage?

There has been a growing awareness that light weapons—an estimated 640 million pistols, rifles, machine guns, etc., are in circulation—have been directly or indirectly responsible for much of the chaos.

A U.N. Firearms Protocol recently entered into force and an international conference on the issue will be held in New York in July.

The United Nations has established a new Department of Safety and Security to help protect 400,000 staff and dependents worldwide.

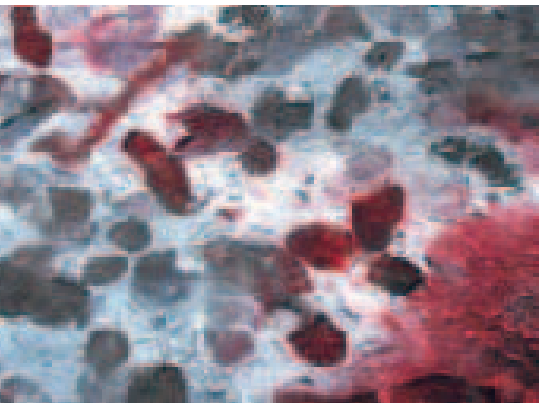
The U.N. refugee agency has also revamped its own security system, improving training and programs to better protect both its own staff and the more than 17 million civilians that it cares for.

Far more needs to be done. UNHCR is currently implementing 80 new security recommendations for its operations. Life in many refugee camps remains perilous with rape and murder everyday hazards.

Firearms experts say that despite some modest progress it could take years before major breakthroughs are made on addressing the humanitarian rather than purely security aspects of that problem.

The fragility of the refugee experience is underlined by the situation in southern Sudan. Following a January peace accord to halt decades of war, hundreds of thousands of civilians have already returned to their homes in the region. Another 550,000 refugees and four million internally displaced persons are waiting to go back.

If that is the good news, the bad news is that the area is so strewn with unmapped land mines, unexploded ordnance and small calibre weapons that many people are still unsure about where their future lies.



P. LOWE/PANOS PICTURES/ARND BRONKHORST

**Chechnya:** The bloody footprints of the innocent in the snow.



**Editor:**  
Ray Wilkinson

**French editor:**  
Mounira Skandrani

**Contributors:**  
Lise Mackie, Valery Yankey, Kerry Maze, Alun Howard, Robert Muggah and worldwide bureaux

**Editorial assistant:**  
Virginia Zekrya

**Photo department:**  
Suzy Hopper, Anne Kellner

**Design:**  
Vincent Winter Associés

**Production:**  
Françoise Jaccoud

**Distribution:**  
John O'Connor, Frédéric Tissot

**Photo engraving:**  
Aloha Scan - Geneva

**Maps:**  
UNHCR - Mapping Unit

**Historical documents:**  
UNHCR archives

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**UNHCR**  
P.O. Box 2500  
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
www.unhcr.org

# REFUGEES

N ° 139 - 2005

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In a new millennium, millions of people are facing continuing dangers.

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It is becoming increasingly clear that small arms—pistols, rifles, shotguns—are playing a major role in the fate of millions of vulnerable refugees around the world, and the aid officials trying to help them.

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The cumulative destructiveness of untold numbers of light weapons is only now being acknowledged.

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A brief look at refugee security.

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Sudan's Darfur region has been described as "hell on earth" and a "region of fear." The crisis in pictures.



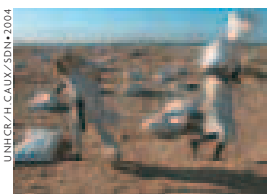
UNICEF/R. LEMOYNE/FRY

**4** For millions of refugees around the world, including women and children, and aid officials, life is often dangerous and sometimes deadly.



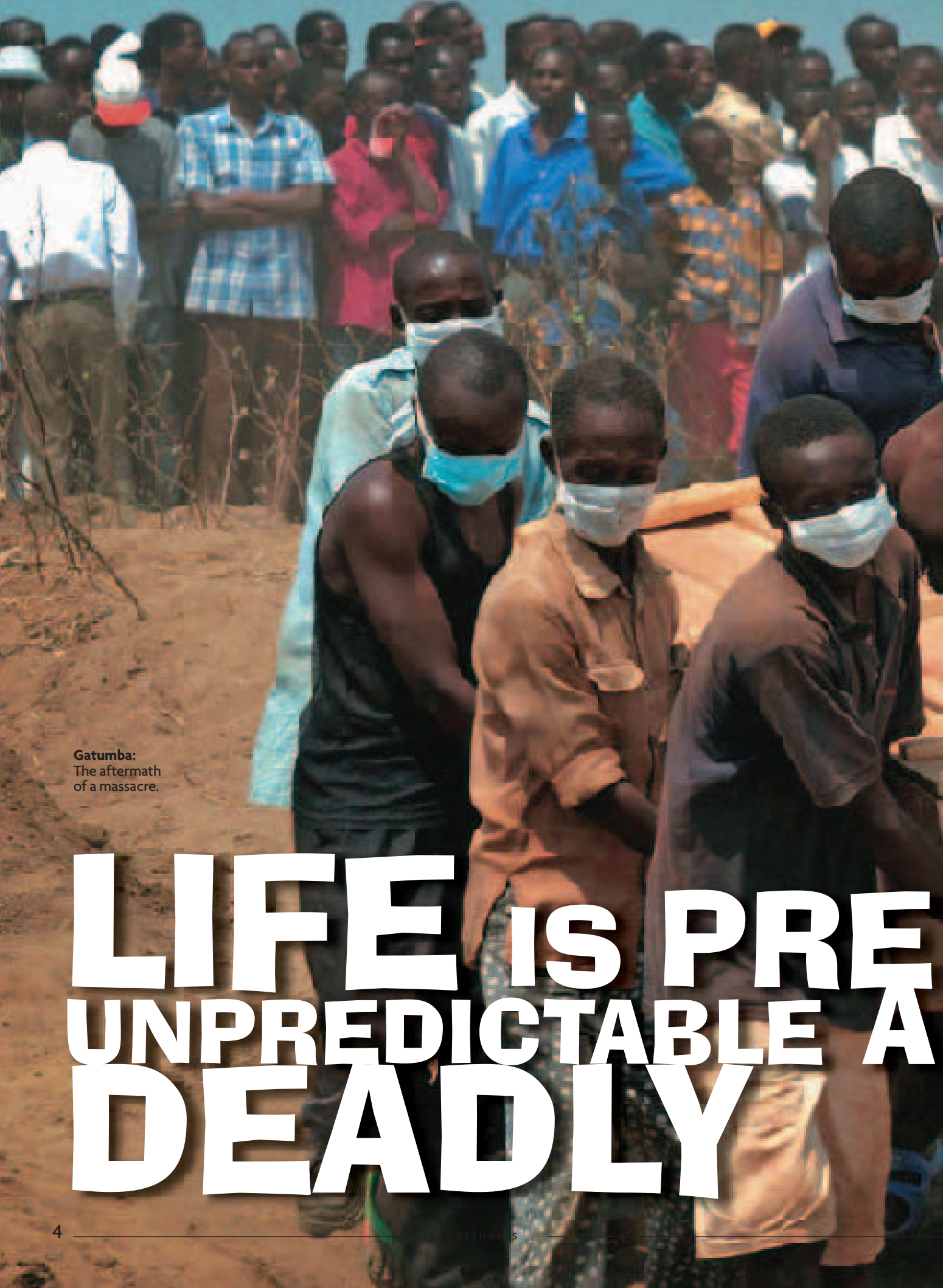
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**22** Hundreds of thousands of civilians have already returned to southern Sudan and many more are en route. But they face a difficult future.



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**Gatumba:**  
The aftermath  
of a massacre.

# LIFE IS PRE UNPREDICTABLE A DEADLY



# CARIOUS, AND SOMETIMES

FOR MILLIONS OF REFUGEES AND AID WORKERS IN VOLATILE SITUATIONS AROUND THE WORLD, SECURITY REMAINS ELUSIVE

“We cannot anymore play with security. Everyone of us must become **SECURITY CONSCIOUS.**”

**A** LONE SHOT IN THE MIDDLE OF the night signaled the start of the massacre. Drums, whistles and demented chanting followed as a line of men, women and even children dragging rifles taller than themselves, swept through the refugee camp.

They fired broadsides of small arms into flimsy tents and then ripped open the canvas and unleashed fresh fusillades into the darkness before finishing off the slaughter with grenades and machetes.

At daybreak, burnt and charred bodies, destroyed shelters, clothes, pots and pans and children's toys dis-

children. Friends said he had had a premonition of the killings and prepared himself for death with public prayer.

Mlakte Masusu was luckier. Her body had been ripped apart by a grenade during the chaos but she was found, unconscious but still alive under a tree, together with a young baby crying beside her. Her three-year-old son was found later; he had been shot in the back. “It's only God who can help us,” she said quietly in hospital afterwards.

More than 150 refugees were slaughtered on 13 August 2004 at the Gatumba camp, located in the heartland of Africa's bloodstained Great Lakes region, a few miles from the Burundi capital of Bujumbura and the border with the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The refugees had fled from the chaos in that state to apparent safety in Burundi, but in the volatile and ever-changing political and military climate of the area, Burundis from a group calling itself the National Liberation Forces and affiliated militias turned on the hapless civilians.

The attack was one of the worst single atrocities in recent years. It underscored the precarious, unpredictable and sometimes deadly nature of daily life for many of the world's uprooted populations and the humanitarian agencies which try to help them, and it turned the spotlight on the insidious and catastrophic spread of light weapons such as rifles and pistols which has done so much to fuel the ongoing misery.

“Our work is made almost impossible when (such) weapons are so freely available,” Arnauld Akodjenou,



S. DALTON/AP/COI-2001

REUTERS/CORBIS/COI-1999

figured the site. Pastor Jacques Rutekereza, of the Pentecostal church of Minevum, a human rights activist and, in a particularly tragic twist, a man who was running a reconciliation and peace project at the time, was a prominent victim, cut down along with six of his ten



the director of UNHCR's Emergency and Security Service said later as he also highlighted the capriciousness of life on the edge: "The victims of this massacre thought they were in danger from war if they stayed in their own country, and that they would at least be safe in Burundi. The international community failed these men, women and children."

#### A WHO'S WHO

LIFE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HAZARDOUS and sometimes deadly for both refugees and aid workers. In the mid-1950s, civilians in the Hungarian uprising first had to dodge Soviet tanks and then armed border guards and minefields to reach safety in the West. Unknown numbers were drowned or were raped during the mass exodus of the boat people from Indochina in the 1970s and 1980s.

UNHCR suffered its first major casualty as long ago as 1964 when a senior field officer and a colleague were

murdered in the Congo.

Still, in what today seems like an almost innocent era, there appeared to be some rules which were followed for most of the time.

The safety of aid workers relied principally on an often tacit agreement between all groups involved in a conflict that their neutrality would be respected. This allowed them to work effectively within their own 'humanitarian space.' When regular armies fought, fleeing civilians were not automatically targeted for murder or to be used as military or political pawns.

This security code generally worked throughout the latter half of the 20th century, even as the number of refugees grew from around one million at the end of the Second World War to a peak of nearly 30 million in the mid-1990s.

But just when the threat of a nuclear holocaust began to recede, as the Cold War ended and the future seemed bright, paradoxically the rules which had gov-

**Displaced civilians in Colombia mourn massacred relatives; others stage a symbolic crucifixion in front of the UNHCR office in Bogotá to protest the internal turmoil.**

erned the refugee world began to crumble.

Conventional warfare increasingly was replaced by ethnic, economic and religious civil conflicts. Light arms rather than tanks became the weapon of choice in these new struggles.

### A WATERSHED

THE 1990S PROVED A WATERSHED in many areas. Until then, UNHCR field staff had normally worked on the fringes of war, assisting refugees once they had reached safety in a second country. But in northern Iraq, the Balkans and Africa, agency personnel for the first time went to, rather than waited for, people in need of help, often at the very center of conflicts. The number of aid agencies proliferated and the risk of physical attack increased enormously.

Ragtag militias that refused to play by any 'normal' rules began to target aid officials and their valuable supplies of food and medicines. Refugee camps became convenient military staging areas in which young refugees were recruited as foot soldiers. Anyone who stood in the way could be humiliated or butchered.

Suddenly no one was safe.

But as the world became 'smaller' and 24-hour television omnipotent, the international community paid increasing attention to the carnage being inflicted in these distant crises.

Constant images of limbless people in places like Angola and Bosnia, civilians who were disfigured by mines, unexploded shells, cluster bombs and mortars as they fled or even when they returned home and started to try to plough their fields and rebuild their homes, caused a groundswell of opposition, resulting, after years of lobbying, in the 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.

A treaty covering other unexploded war materials such as bombs and mortar shells and known as Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons currently has shamefully attracted only five countries as signatories. It needs a minimum of 20 to be ratified.

Late in the decade, governments and arms experts began to focus on the impact of small caliber weapons—pistols, shotguns, rifles and machine guns. While much of the debate centered around security concerns, as more data was collected and a clearer picture emerged, it became obvious that these weapons were causing massive human suffering—not only in the number of people killed and wounded, but also by so-called 'collateral damage'—including major civilian exoduses that, in turn, resulted in widespread war-related disease and famine and the destruction of schools, hospitals, clinics and factories.

### A NEW PROBLEM

FOR THE FIRST TIME, the world also began to take notice of a group of people it had hitherto ignored, the so-called internally displaced.

In the wake of the Second World War, governments initially had fixed their attention on the plight of refugees. It was a highly sensitive issue and during the



UNHCR/M.KOBAYASHI/BW-20311

**No guns allowed  
in this refugee  
center in Sri Lanka.**

Cold War years the West openly welcomed people fleeing from the Soviet communist bloc not only as a humanitarian gesture but also as an obvious public political victory of one system over the other.

Once civilians had crossed international borders anywhere in the world, national and international laws were needed to control and regularize their presence. Thus, the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and subsequent instruments were developed.

Civilians displaced within their own countries were another matter entirely. Sovereignty was considered sacrosanct in those days. Civilians on the run were at the mercy of their own governments or opposing rebel groups, both often antagonistic towards the people caught in the middle. There was no legal or physical protection available. The Refugee Convention did not apply in these circumstances.

As with the issue of small arms, a debate was also about to begin on what to do about these internally displaced persons and an already complex global situation was about to become even more fraught as a new millennium began.

In September 2000, the U.N. refugee agency suffered its worst nightmare in 50 years of humanitarian work when three field workers in the West Timor town of Atambua were murdered by rampaging militiamen. The then Assistant High Commissioner Soren Jessen-Petersen wondered whether "UNHCR and other agencies have already crossed the threshold of acceptable risk" in trying to help refugees.

The whole issue of security was reopened for debate: how best to protect aid workers in a deteriorating environment; how to improve the security of national staff



who often worked in the most dangerous places but were sometimes left to their own devices when situations swirled out of control, as in Rwanda; how to better protect refugees open to increasing abuse; how to guard against the recruitment of child soldiers and the militarization of refugee camps; whether aid officials should work closely with the military, even friendly armies; and how to better coordinate security between agencies like UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other non-governmental agencies (NGOs).

A year after the Atambua murders, hijacked aircraft struck the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, setting the stage for conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The subsequent global war on terror would have a profound effect on the plight of refugees and aid officials in coming years.

In August 2003, the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad was destroyed by a massive truck bomb. Twenty-two persons were killed and the entire world organization was put on notice that it was now a potential target, not only aid officials working in obscure and dangerous corners of the world.

#### THE SCOREBOARD

WITH SO MANY FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES in a state of flux, what is the state of play in the fifth year of a new century?

There have been a plethora of activities on the issue of small arms since 2001, regional agreements, a U.N. Firearms Protocol entered into force in 2005 and a U.N. conference on the issue was being held in New York in July of this year. There has already been a slowly growing recognition of the inter-relation between light weapons and humanitarian crises, but as Cate Buchanan of the Geneva-based Center for Humanitarian Dialogue said: "We are still not at a point where we can clearly say 'because we did this refugees are safer or women are safer.' That may take another 5-10 years."

There are an estimated 40 million uprooted peoples around the world. Many of them live in relative safety, but for many others death is always nearby, needing the kind of help Cate Buchanan mentioned.

Some 3.8 million persons, for instance, died in six years of fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and up to 400,000 are believed to have been killed in the ongoing conflict in Darfur in the Sudan.

UNHCR is committed to strengthen both the legal and physical security of the more than 17 million people in its care by improving legal instruments and national refugee systems, strengthening policing in refugee

camp and planning safer site locations, shelter, food and water.

But because they have no international legal protection, internally displaced persons are often more vulnerable even than refugees. Signaling a new awareness of this problem, Secretary-General Kofi Annan in late 1999 urged member states to put aside their most jealously guarded powers—sovereignty and the sanctity of national borders—in the higher interest of protecting civilians caught in the crossfire of war.

"Nothing in the (U.N.) Charter precludes recognition that there are rights beyond borders," Annan said. "There is no doubt that enforcement action is a difficult step to take. It often goes against political or other interests, but there are universal principles and values which supersede such interests, and the protection of civilians is one of them."

Governments, with or without U.N. approval, became more emboldened to intervene or scold countries, as was evident in Kosovo and more recently the Sudan. But there is still a long way to go.

Noting that 320 humanitarian workers have been killed since 1997, 215 U.N. officials murdered since 1992 and a further 278 kidnapped in the last 11 years, both the U.N. and the refugee agency launched wide-ranging changes to their security systems.

The United Nations General Assembly established a new Department of Safety and Security for all of its 400,000 staff and dependants, UNHCR strengthened various security procedures, dispatched 120 experts to potential trouble spots around the world and more recently launched a two-year work plan to incorporate 80 new recommendations to 'mainstream' security issues into all of its programs.

Those were encouraging moves, but despite much discussion in other areas, there was little progress on improving national staff security and resolving the vexatious question of whether local employees should in future be evacuated in crises situations such as that in Rwanda in 1994 along with their international colleagues. During the emergency in the Great Lakes region, local employees were forced to remain in Rwanda and many were murdered or just disappeared.

There was also little progress on enhancing security agreements between agencies such as UNHCR and independent-minded non-governmental organizations or the degree to which humanitarian groups should cooperate with the military during emergencies.

REFUGEES examines some of these issues in more detail in the following pages:

The attack underscored the **DEADLY NATURE** of daily life for the world's uprooted populations, the humanitarian agencies which try to help them and the catastrophic spread of **LIGHT WEAPONS** which fuel the ongoing **MISERY**.

# PISTOLS AND GUNS

**T**HE SHEER EVERYDAY Pervasiveness of pistols, shotguns and rifles for decades left the world groping through a thick myopic mist, unable to piece together the evidence and then put a real figure on the cumulative destructiveness of such weapons.

After all, many of the estimated 640 million small arms currently in circulation are considered 'good guns'—the side arms carried by police officers on the beat; the shotgun needed for a day's hunting and the standard rifle carried by millions of regular soldiers everywhere for the protection of the realm.

'Incidents' such as a killing in an American high school, shooting in the workplace by disgruntled employees or even small-time robberies are sometimes dismissed as 'aberrations' or an unfortunate but small part of modern life (though in fact more people die directly in such 'peaceful' situations from gun violence than do in war).

Conflicts such as the recent Iraq war were dominated by spectacular television footage of Baghdad burning from the impact of smart bombs and cruise missiles and it would take a massacre of massive proportions by small arms to make similar world headlines.

But cumulatively, especially among the world's most vulnerable groups of peoples, the damage wreaked by these weapons has been enormous.

"Guns are so pervasive in most areas where humanitarian agencies operate, they could almost go unnoticed," one recent report said. "Yet the human cost is profound."

Most of the civilians killed directly in recent years in Darfur, the Great Lakes, West Africa, Colombia or Afghanistan were the direct victims of light weapons.

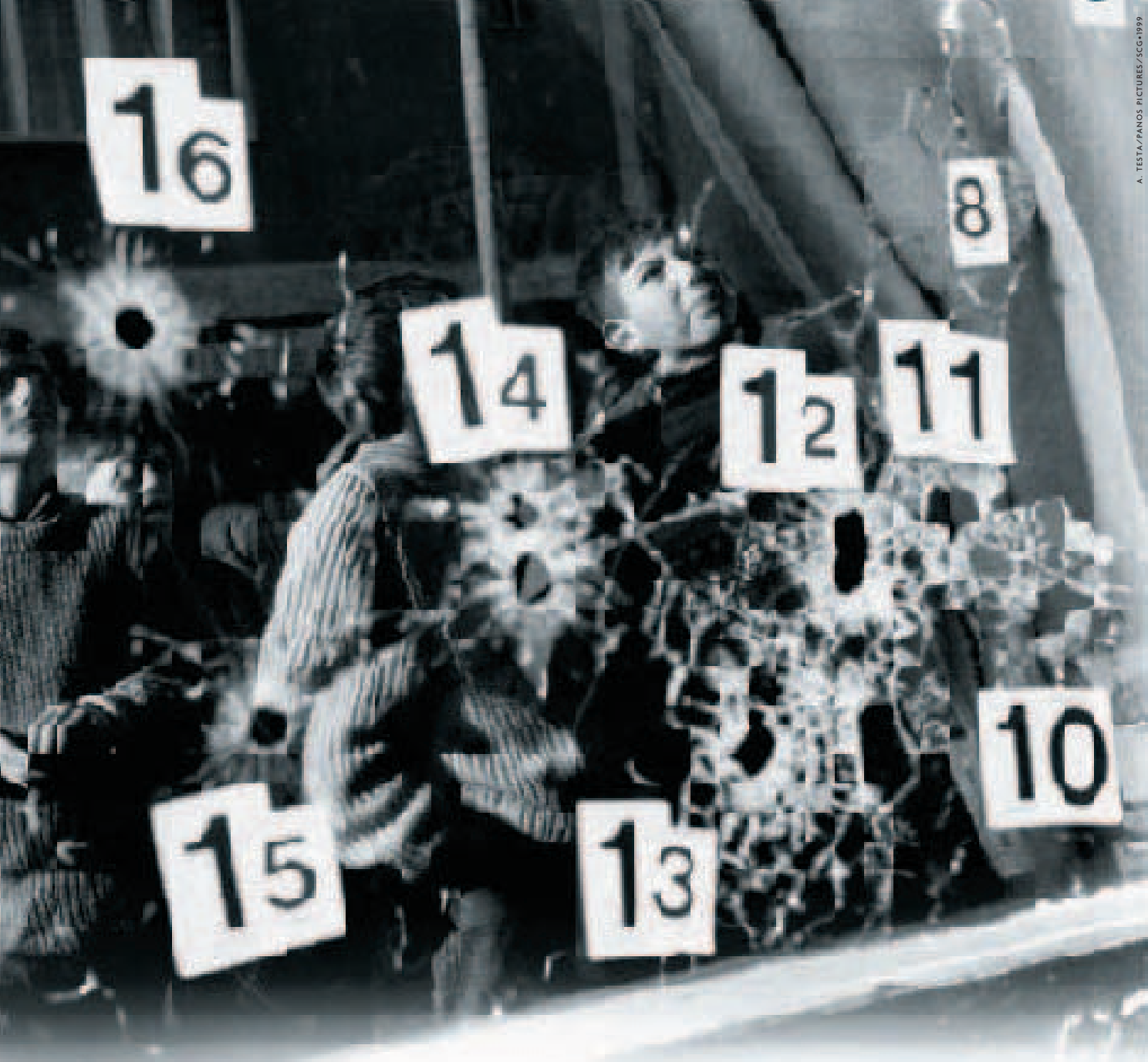
Many others died from the 'knock-on' effects armed violence sparks such as widespread disease, famine and the destruction of entire communities and their infrastructures.

An exhaustive study by the Geneva-based advocacy group Small Arms Survey said humanitarian agencies had concluded that "Armed conflict is now the driving force behind most refugee flows" each of which can number in the hundreds of thousands.

In the specific case of Colombia, it said "Spontaneous internal displacement is largely due to massacres involving handguns and assault rifles." Since 1985, more than 200,000 persons have been killed and more than two million people have been uprooted in the Western Hemisphere's worst humanitarian crisis.

During the Balkan wars of the 1990s, one report estimated 20,000 women were raped at gunpoint by Bosnian Serb soldiers as part of a deliberate plan to ethnically

Cumulatively, especially in the landscape inhabited by the world's most vulnerable groups of peoples, the **DAMAGE** wreaked by small arms has been **GROTESQUE**.



A. TESTA/PANOS PICTURES/SCG-1999

cleanse or destroy the community. It concluded “Weapons therefore assumed a symbolic role in the violent repression of women.”

Guns and rape go hand in hand in other crisis areas of the world. Children are abducted at gunpoint in regions like northern Uganda, forced to become child soldiers or, in the case of girls, sex slaves, and trained to turn their newly acquired rifles against other civilians, including their own families.

Humanitarian workers can be intimidated by gunmen and some have been murdered in cold blood. When aid officials are forced to evacuate to safer locations, programs to help huge communities of vulnerable people may be halted or abandoned.

A new study by the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Small Arms Survey quotes many aid workers as saying that at least 25 percent of the people

they had been trying to help in the last six months had become impossible to reach because of armed threats.

To complete a vicious circle, even when conflicts have apparently been resolved and refugees agree to return home, widespread intimidation and lawlessness may continue, stunting hopes for meaningful and peaceful community reconstruction.

In a submission on small arms, UNHCR concluded that curbing the production, sale or transfer of such weapons “would be the single most important contribution to greater stability, peace and security impacting the lives of so many millions of civilians.” Such moves, the refugee agency added, would “significantly mitigate the very causes in which people are forced to flee.”

**Aftermath of a small arms attack on an Albanian café in Kosovo.**

**TORTUOUS PROCESS**

THAT WILL NOT HAPPEN anytime soon.

“The international community has been slow to recognize the small arms problem,” according to Rebecca Peters, director of the International Action Network on Small Arms, a group of 600 non-governmental organizations. “During the Cold War it was overshadowed by the larger weapons which had more symbolic and economic significance, even though they were actually killing far fewer people.”

Governments and their arms experts had concentrated their attention since World War II on the spreading threat of nuclear arms, missiles and other major weapons systems.

And even when the nightmare of Armageddon receded and the nature of conflicts began to change from conventional war to long-simmering ethnic and religious struggles, often within states rather than between states, the world’s attention was initially drawn to the problem of land mines and the destruction they had wrought, not on the battlefield, but against vulnerable civilian populations including refugees.

In many ways the campaign to

eradicate antipersonnel land mines was a simple concept the world’s public could quickly grasp. Supported by such luminaries as the late Princess Diana, the slogan of ‘A Mine-Free World’ garnered mass appeal and the resultant 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty has been signed by an impressive 152 states.

At around the time this treaty was negotiated, the international community began for the first time to also focus on the proliferation of small arms.

There are obvious similarities between the older, successful land mine campaign and more recent efforts to curb light weapons, but there are also major differences.

The issue of light weapons is more complex and more politically sensitive and it will probably take much longer to achieve tangible results.

While governments, policemen and sportsmen may be willing to support the relatively straightforward idea of getting rid of mines in distant lands, when it comes to registering, controlling or eventually curtailing access to some types of weapons, that may be a little too close to home for some.

“The concept of a ‘small arms-free world’ is a lot different to the idea of ‘A Mine-Free World,’” Cate Buchanan said.

### TENTATIVE STEPS

AT THE FIRST GLOBAL CONFERENCE on the issue in 2001, a non-binding agreement established a framework for acting, including weapons collection, the destruction of surplus arms and the management of stockpiles.

Crucially it sidestepped two highly sensitive or so-called red line issues: the transfer of weapons, generally by major arms suppliers in the West, to what are bureaucratically referred to as ‘non-state armed groups’ or militias, and the regulation of civilian possession of such weapons.

A separate U.N. Firearms Protocol was formulated the same year and entered into force in 2005, criminalizing illicit trafficking, but failing to provide criteria for government-to-government arms transfers or establishing a universal marking system on individual weapons.

Some of the advances in this Protocol were recycled into current discussions on another international instrument for the marking and tracing of guns which Patricia Lewis, director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), described as an important contribution to the control of such weapons.

Meanwhile, some countries, impatient about the slow pace of progress at the global level, negotiated their own regional protocols in Latin America, southern and eastern Africa.

Some critics insisted that a fundamental change in approach was needed during future negotiations to emphasize the human toll of the unregulated small arms universe rather than viewing it, as many experts still do, as basically an arms control issue.

“Amidst all the debate about controlling the proliferation of and misuse of small arms, there is a glaring, fundamental omission, the human face,” the Geneva-based advocacy group, the Small Arms Survey said in 2002. “Policy tends to focus on supply related issues such as production and the mismanagement of stockpiles... Missing from all of this is a consideration of how people are affected daily by the presence of these weapons.”

So, after four years of often delicate and contentious negotiations results have been mixed.

Nevertheless, experts will meet in New York in July this year for the 2nd biennial meeting of states to review the progress in implementing the program of action and set the stage for a crunch meeting in 2006.

“Between now and next year could be a make or break time for the small arms issue,” Rebecca Peters said. “Hopefully we can consolidate the gains already made and start to tackle the really tricky issues like civilian possession and transfer to armed groups.

“Or governments may turn around and say ‘we’ve done the small arms issue. It’s over.’”



UNICEF/S. MANN/SDN



UNICR/LA ROSCARDI/CS/P&A-2001

**Child soldiers** walk away from their weapons in Sudan.

**Light weapons** are easily obtainable in many parts of the world.

# REFUGEE SECURITY AT A GLANCE

**T**here are currently an estimated 40 million refugees and internally displaced persons around the world, driven from their homes by regular armies, irregular militias, political, religious and other forms of persecution. Some of them, and the humanitarian agencies which try to help—UNHCR alone has a staff of more than 6,000 and cares for around 17 million people—face harassment and sometimes death during their flight, after reaching apparent safety and even when they return home.

The hazards are enormous in some parts of the world: rampaging militias such as those in Darfur, Sudan, armed with seemingly unlimited supplies of small arms and ammunition; millions of mines and unexploded ordnance scattered across Angola, Afghanistan and dozens of other countries; rapes among refugee women innocently collecting firewood for their families; the deliberate targeting and murder of aid officials and other, everyday 'mundane' security problems.

The following statistics highlight the volatile and often dangerous life of the world's uprooted peoples, ranging from the mass casualties of unrestricted war to individual victims—but also ongoing practical and legal efforts to improve security for victims and aid officials.

- In one of the most horrendous and under-reported wars of modern times, an estimated **3.8 million civilians have died** during a six-year conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo according to the International Rescue Committee—mainly from **war-induced disease, famine and small arms** warfare. The IRC concluded that vastly **improved security was necessary** to reverse this 'deadly trend' during which a population equivalent to that of Ireland has died.
- A British parliamentary report said maybe **300,000 persons had been killed** during the ongoing civil conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, the **world's worst humanitarian crisis** and a war being **fought mainly with small caliber weapons**. The U.N. said the death toll was probably around 200,000, while other reports spoke of 400,000 casualties.
- Some **1,300 people daily, or nearly a half million persons each year**, are killed with small arms and light weapons around the world, according to a report by the Small Arms Survey. A large number of these casualties are refugees or other uprooted peoples. The report said there were **nearly 640 million of these light weapons currently in circulation** globally.
- Hundreds of thousands of **boys and girls** have been recruited, **fought and died in almost every recent conflict in the world**. These child soldiers, generally armed with light weapons and machetes, have **wreaked havoc on communities**, often their own, as well as themselves and their families. Widespread recruiting continues in many regions.
- Despite a series of years-long, multi-million dollar projects to clean up old battlefields, **more than 80 countries continue to be affected by the scourge of land mines**. Hundreds of thousands of persons have been killed or maimed in the past decades and there are **15,000-20,000 new casualties each year** including refugees and IDPs.
- The 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty, currently with 152 signatories but excluding the United States, **prohibits the use, production or trade of antipersonnel mines**, requires the destruction of stockpiled mines and the clearance of mined areas within 10 years. The treaty became binding in international law in March 1999.
- Since 1997, **the number of civilian humanitarian workers killed has totalled 320**, according to the Johns Hopkins Center for Refugee and Disaster Studies.
- The United Nations reported that since 1992, **the number of U.N. staff**

**deaths totalled 215** and the number of officials taken hostage in the last 11 year period was 278

- Twenty-nine-year-old Bettina Goisard was murdered in November 2003 south of the Afghan capital of Kabul when **two men on a motorcycle drew alongside her vehicle and opened fire with a pistol**. The French field official was the latest UNHCR fatality. Three years earlier the agency had suffered its **worst single nightmare when three staff members were dragged from their office** in the West Timor town of Atambua and slashed to death.
- The United Nations darkest moment occurred on August 19, 2003 when its headquarters in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad was destroyed by a truck bomb containing 2,000 pounds of high explosive. **Twenty-two people were killed and 150 wounded**.
- In the wake of Baghdad, the U.N. General Assembly recently appropriated nearly \$54 million to establish a **new Department of Safety and Security** to help protect 400,000 staff and family members in virtually every country in the world.
- As one of the U.N.'s most field-oriented agencies, **UNHCR revamped its own security apparatus**, expanding its annual budget to around \$18 million, introducing around 120 international and national field security officers to many operations and drawing up **an ambitious set of recommendations to 'mainstream' all aspects of security**, including universal training, into its field programs.
- **Refugees are afforded legal protection** by such instruments as the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, the 1969 OAU African Refugee Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration covering Latin America.
- In the last decade emphasis has also been placed on enhanced physical security of refugees with a range of new initiatives including the **safer location and stronger security of camps**; better law and order and increased efforts to isolate armed groups; **safe access to such basics as food and water**; and the training of local police and judiciary officials, refugee leaders and aid workers.
- In contrast to refugees, **the world's estimated 25 million people** driven from their homes but remaining in their own countries—so-called internally displaced persons—**receive no international legal protection** and are subject only to the authority of their own, often hostile governments, or to irregular militias.
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force on July 1, 2002, and **makes intentional attacks** against personnel "involved in humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping missions in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations" **a war crime**. Few cases have been prosecuted at the national level.
- The 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel came into force in 1999 but **covers only personnel engaged in operations specifically authorized by the Security Council** or General Assembly, but not civilians such as UNHCR staff engaged in normal humanitarian activities. Moves to adopt a protocol to the Convention encompassing all U.N. staff have been discussed but not approved.
- The international community began to take a greater interest in small arms and their impact in the late 1990s. **A U.N. Firearms Protocol recently entered into force**. Several regional agreements covering such areas as the marking and tracing of small arms were also agreed in principle and as part of ongoing global legal discussions a conference called the U.N. Program of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons was scheduled to be held in New York in July 2005.

# CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

**L**IGHT WEAPONS have already left a trail of death among refugees and the myriad of agencies trying to help them. They were responsible both for the first UNHCR staff member murdered in the field and also its most recent victim. As such, small arms have become like symbolic but bloodied bookends for the agency, bracketing both the perils faced by humanitarian workers in the organization's early years and decades later at the start of the new millennium.

François Preziosi, the Italian head of the UNHCR field office in eastern Congo, the scene of so much subsequent carnage, was en route to resolve a problem between local officials and refugees from neighboring Rwanda in the summer of 1964 when the vehicle in which he and a colleague were driving was surrounded.

An official cable described what happened next: "The car was stopped by a mob of Congolese and Tutsi refugees. The car was surrounded on all sides. The Congolese had automatic weapons. The refugees had machetes and spears. The mob started to scream."

Preziosi's colleague yelled to the crowd, "The only reason we are here is to help you" even as both men were being murdered.

Their driver escaped and the cable continued: "While running away he (the driver) saw a Congolese aiming at him with a submachine gun. He fired 12 times," but the driver still escaped.

Forty years later, on November 16, 2003, French national Bettina Goislard was riding in a UNHCR vehicle in the town of Ghazni, 100 kilometers south of the Afghan capital of Kabul when two men on a motorcycle drew alongside and opened fire with a pistol.

She was dead on arrival at a local hospital, the first U.N. staff member to be killed in Afghanistan since the United Nations resumed operations there following the fall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001 and the fifth agency person to be killed in the field since the millennium began.

## CONFRONTING REALITY

IT WAS TWO OTHER back-to-back atrocities, however, that forced UNHCR and the humanitarian world in general to confront the reality that times had changed irrevocably and that aid workers had now become regular targets of outright hatred, revenge or political calculation.

In September 2000, a mob of local militia gunmen stormed UNHCR's office in the West Timor town of Atambua and slashed to death three staff members, Carlos Caceres, a 33-year-old American protection officer, 44-year-old Ethiopian supply officer Samson Aregahegn and Pero Simundza, 29, a telecommunications operator from Croatia. Their bodies were dragged into the street and burned.

Caceres had e-mailed a friend only a few days earlier:

Helping refugees, on this occasion in Zaire in 1996, can be difficult and often deadly work.

There are an estimated **40 MILLION** uprooted peoples around the world. Many live in relative safety, but others continue to live **PRECARIOUS LIVES** with death always nearby.



R. MAZALAN/ANZ/REUTERS

“These guys (militias) act without thinking and can kill a human as easily as I kill mosquitoes in my room.” His last words were: “I need to go now. I hear screaming outside.”

Days later and a half a world away, Mensah Kpognon, the head of the agency’s office in Macenta, in the West African state of Guinea, was killed by armed rebels during a raid on the town.

“Why are innocent, unarmed humanitarian workers being struck down in the most brutal way?” the then High Commissioner Sadako Ogata asked. “How do we balance the risks involved in caring for hundreds of thousands of refugees who desperately need our help?”

That dilemma is still being debated five years later.

In the immediate aftermath of the organization’s worst tragedy in more than 50 years of humanitarian work came a bout of soul-searching and a determination to introduce a stronger security regime for field staff.

“The risks taken by unarmed aid workers go way beyond what any military would tolerate,” then Assistant High Commissioner Soren Jessen-Petersen said. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan added: “Staff security is not a luxury. It is not an option. It is a necessity and an essential part of the cost of doing business.”

A 15-page UNHCR report entitled *Enhancing Staff Security* noted at the time, “Parties to armed conflicts increasingly expect aid organizations to care for the vic-

tims of war. At the same time, those parties have increasingly subjected humanitarian personnel to intimidation and violence. A political, legal and security void clearly aggravates risk to humanitarians.”

It recommended several major steps, encouraging UNHCR to pursue an active rather than reactive approach to security and mainstream security considerations into the planning, budgeting, implementation, review and oversight of all operations.

Progress has been made. Security training, medical services and planning were beefed up. The agency’s

Vieira de Mello, who had spent much of his career with the refugee agency.

Mark Malloch Brown, then head of the U.N. Development Program, underscored the U.N.’s dilemma. “The U.N. is a people organization,” he said. “If we lose that thread, if that gets cut, it’s more than an umbilical cord. It’s the core of the trust and legitimacy and moral authority of the blue flag.”

It was clear new steps were needed to strengthen security measures which were already flagging.

In New York, the U.N. this year revamped its entire global security apparatus. The General Assembly earmarked \$54 million to establish a new Department of Safety and Security with a staff of nearly 400 people responsible for protecting 400,000 staff and dependants worldwide.

Less urgency was displayed in other areas. The 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel sounds impressive but covers only personnel engaged in operations specifically authorized by the Security Council or the General Assembly, resulting in bizarre situations where military personnel receive protection, but civilians engaged in normal humanitarian activities do not. Despite a plethora of meetings and the urgency added

## 95 percent of the **VIOLENCE** usually takes place in only a small number of countries with **AFRICA** accounting for up to **70 PERCENT** of incidents.

small group of professional security advisers was vastly expanded to around 120 personnel dispatched to all corners of the globe.

But as Soren Jessen-Petersen lamented at the time, deteriorating conditions on the ground always seem to outstrip security advances. “We have been trying to enhance our security and have made some progress,” he said. “But the overall situation in which we work has deteriorated far more rapidly than the progress we have been able to make in protecting our staff.”

### **THE WORST EVER**

THAT SCENARIO has tended to repeat itself in the last few years. Even as the refugee agency struggled to respond to the murder of its own staff, other seismic events were about to unfold, forcing it and other international and humanitarian agencies to rethink their whole approach to helping the world’s vulnerable people.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States sparked the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, forced states to tighten their national borders with adverse affects for refugees seeking shelter and spread the specter of violent retaliation against mainly western targets to virtually every corner of the globe.

On August 19, 2003, a flatbed truck jammed with more than 2,000 pounds of high explosive demolished U.N. headquarters in Baghdad. Among the victims was mission chief Sergio





by 9/11 and Baghdad attacks, no action has been taken thus far to eradicate this anomaly.

The Statute of the International Criminal Court considers as war crimes attacks against U.N. personnel committed in situations of protracted armed conflict. But like the Safety Convention, civilians working in 'normal' humanitarian situations are not covered by that Statute either.

### **SWEEPING REVIEW**

THE U.N. REFUGEE AGENCY undertook another sweeping review of its own security policies.

It noted in one report that while 'important progress' had been made in recent years, "UNHCR has not done enough" in particular because it had "failed to integrate the issue of staff security into the organization's management practices, procedures and culture."

A list of 80 recommendations, many of them incorporating themes first outlined in the 2000 report, will be introduced during a two-year work plan launched this year.

Arnauld Akodjenou, UNHCR's security director, said the project would include an overall strengthening but also a rebalancing between the two major

strands of the agency's overall security policy.

As the U.N.'s own new global program comes into effect, he said, some of UNHCR's security staff positions might be phased out with more attention being paid to fully integrating security planning into all phases of any operation including budgeting, better training, logistics and administration, especially for senior level managers.

In the current security climate, Akodjenou said his major concerns were not perhaps the more obvious ultra high risk situations such as Darfur where conditions were well known and preventive measures could be adopted. Rather, he said, he was worried by the fact that more and more officials were working in difficult circumstances, that once secure regions such as East Africa or Indonesia were now potential terrorist targets and there was a far greater risk factor in everyone's daily life and work.

"We cannot any more play with security," he said in a recent interview. "Everyone of us must become security conscious."

But there is a basic dilemma here. Uprooted peoples are often most in need of protection and assistance at the very moment when relief workers are most exposed to danger.

However many elaborate security systems are put into place, in some parts of the world being a refugee or an official trying to help is still a high risk venture.



UNHCR/B. HEGEB/COI-2003



A. AL-RUBAYE/AFP/GETTY/IRG-2003



UNHCR/R. SOLANKI/SW-2005

**Helping civilians restart their lives in Colombia.**

**The aftermath of the attack on U.N. headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003.**

**Aid workers undergoing field training.**

# CROSSING THE RUBICON

IT WAS CONSIDERED by many to be the messiest humanitarian quagmire since the modern regime of refugee protection and assistance was established in the wake of World War II. Following the Rwanda genocide in 1994 when an estimated 800,000 persons were slaughtered, biblical hordes of survivors fled in all directions. More than 200,000 people crossed into Tanzania in one 24-hour period. Hurling in the opposite direction, one million Rwandans crashed into the tiny lakeside town of Goma in what was then Zaire and today has been renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

There were international political and military repercussions. A new government seized power in Rwanda. Africa's most enduring dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, was subsequently toppled.

On the ground there was chaos. An estimated 50,000 people died from cholera that summer in the Goma region alone. Camps were established, at the insistence of local authorities, on the most inhospitable volcanic lava beds only miles away from the Rwandan border, setting the stage for future cross-border militia raids and counterattacks.

Remnants of the infamous *Interahamwe* militias who had spearheaded the original genocide and were still armed with a vast arsenal of light weapons, took control of the camps.

Government authorities who were responsible for security either refused or were unable to control the gunmen who used the sites as rear bases, recruited young people to their cause and intimidated and sometimes murdered civilians who showed an interest in returning to Rwanda to live under its new government. The international community refused to intervene to break up the militias.

Two years later in 1996, the region was engulfed in renewed warfare. The camps were deliberately destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced back into Rwanda at the point of a gun.

Tens of thousands of people, including most of the guilty *genocidaires*, fled westwards, deeper into the rain forests of central Africa. In a desperate chase that stretched across the waist of the continent, many thousands were killed or died of disease, but 185,000 Rwandans were plucked from the forests in 1997.

Kilian Kleinschmidt, an emergency field team leader at the time recalled that the forest was "like living an Indiana Jones adventure movie, but more scary and real, more smelly, stinking and dirty. It was hell."

In a pell-mell effort to save as many lives as possible he said "Protection and assistance standards were forgotten. No time to interview individuals. There were many mistakes, but I still don't know what we should have done differently, as humanitarians or human beings. But this operation marked all of us forever."

## WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

IAIN HALL, a senior security policy advisor for UNHCR, believes the Great Lakes crisis was a watershed in refugee security and protection.

Until the early 1990s refugees had received a degree of international legal protection under the 1951 Geneva Convention and several other regional instruments once they had safely reached neighboring states.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan indicated that "the future of the U.N. is **INTEGRATED MISSIONS**" with political, military and humanitarian components planned jointly.



As the refugee agency became directly involved in emergencies, working in the very center of war rather than waiting for refugees to reach neighboring safe countries, it became increasingly clear that ‘refugee protection’ also encompassed as a ‘first resort’ physical security, shelter, food and medicine as well as legal safeguards.

The Great Lakes crisis contained virtually every security and protection issue—old and new—the agency could possibly face: an increasingly common style of bloody interethnic conflict often spread over thousands of miles; militia-controlled camps close to hostile borders; child recruitment and the widespread use of light weapons to intimidate innocent refugees; problems of cooperation with police forces and various militaries; the need for joint security among the more than 200 humanitarian agencies working in the region; protecting women and children more effectively; ensuring both the delivery and then the equitable distribution of adequate food and water supplies and ensuring that refugees could go home safely if they so desired.

It was time to take stock, reevaluate existing policies and incorporate fresh thinking to tackle the new realities.

The results were mixed.

There was widespread awareness for instance, especially after the Great Lakes crisis, about the importance of siting refugee centers away from volatile borders, helping to prevent cross-border violence, child recruitment and the militarization of camps.

Because of the political, economic and military realities beyond the control of the humanitarian community, that was not always possible even in later crises. During the Kosovo emergency in 1999, some camps were built deep inside neighboring Albania, but others virtually straddled the border, creating ongoing tensions.

As tens of thousands of Sudanese crossed into Chad during the Darfur emergency, they were relocated to safer locations deeper into the country as soon as possible. But during recent years of turmoil in several West African countries some camps there remained militarily vulnerable.

**A huge refugee camp housing hundreds of thousands of people in Tanzania in the 1990s.**



J. MARCHETTERE/ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE/GUI•2005



## UNHCR dispatched **120 SECURITY EXPERTS** to potential trouble spots and more recently launched a two-year **WORK PLAN** to ‘mainstream’ security issues into all of its programs.

Despite the best efforts of UNHCR and other agencies, the Nicla camp in Côte d’Ivoire near its border with Liberia has been an active center of recruitment by various warring factions for years.

How far humanitarian agencies should cooperate with the military in providing refugees both life-sustaining supplies and better protection, as well as providing better security for unarmed aid workers themselves, also remained a controversial issue.

Many thousands more people would have died in the Great Lakes without the heavyweight logistical support of American, European and other troops. In Kosovo, NATO forces were both military protagonists and major aid donors and many civilian aid agencies tried to keep their distance from the men in uniform.

The picture became even more confused after the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States and the subsequent war on terror, when United Nations personnel and other civilians were clearly targeted as ‘the enemy.’

The ‘humanitarian space’ that had allowed aid groups to operate with a degree of impunity during much of the 20th century had suddenly narrowed.

UNHCR’s position remained consistent: that in extreme emergencies it was necessary to cooperate

closely with various military units while still trying to maintain a neutral and non-political position in daily humanitarian activities. It was—and remains—a difficult balancing act in the current super-charged environment.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan indicated that in his opinion “The future of the U.N. is integrated missions” in places like Darfur with political, military and humanitarian components planned jointly but executed to allow as much vital ‘humanitarian space’ as operational needs allow.

### **DIFFERENT THREATS**

IT IS WELL TO REMEMBER that the world’s displaced population of around 40 million people—a polyglot mix of refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers, refugees who have returned to their homes, and people without a home at all, so-called stateless people—face various levels of security threats.

Refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, for instance, face few new security threats, though daily life may still be harsh and uncertain.

On the other hand, Arnauld Akodjenou, the UNHCR emergency director, estimated that some 15



UNHCR/E. EYSTER/KEN+1998 ZALMAL/AFG+2004

percent of the world's 10 million refugees lived in 'extreme' circumstances while perhaps 60 percent of internally displaced persons are in similar straits.

Surprisingly, perhaps, refugees who had elected to return home often also faced grave security threats in places like Angola, Afghanistan and more recently southern Sudan, often from the debris of war like abandoned land mines, unexploded ordnance and ongoing lawlessness by local militias and warlords.

The violence is concentrated. More than 100 countries at any one time normally host groups of uprooted peoples, but 95 percent of the violence usually takes place in only a small number of countries. African nations accounted for up to 70 percent of incidents since the start of the millennium, according to one UNHCR working paper.

In the last few years, the refugee agency launched a series of initiatives to improve security at all levels. In Tanzania it introduced the concept of 'security packages' to help the host government defray the cost of supporting nearly 500,000 refugees by underwriting police salaries and equipment and offering basic training in refugee law and rights.

In Guinea, members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police trained local police and gendarmes in that country's volatile camps; in Liberia UNHCR financed community watch teams made up of refugee volunteers and in Nepal the agency signed an agreement with the government to maintain a police presence in camps for Bhutanese refugees.

To try to reduce the number of women being sexually assaulted as they collected firewood outside two

major camps in Kenya, UNHCR paid local contractors to haul the wood directly into the sites. A project to enhance the awareness of sexual violence was launched. Direct refugee participation at all levels of camp management has been encouraged.

Camp layouts were improved, extra security lighting installed, protective fencing was erected and even such simple but effective devices as latches and locks on communal toilets were approved.

UNHCR also collaborates with 16 other U.N. departments and agencies on a group called Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) as well as holding regular talks with governments and NGOs. "There is no single actor who can cope with this problem on its own," says Christophe Carle, deputy director of UNIDIR.

And while the violence and tension among large groups of people, most of whom have lost everything, living closely together in squalid conditions, will never be completely eliminated, such projects do help lower the tension and improve the quality of life, at least marginally.

Five years ago then Assistant High Commissioner Soren Jessen-Petersen warned that in the aftermath of the Atambua murders UNHCR was "in danger of losing our soul, our mandate, our mission." The emerging evidence of the widespread destruction caused by small arms and the appalling toll on civilians in such places as central Africa and Darfur only underscore the continuing dangers. Equally clear, however, is that the resilience of aid workers and of refugees themselves remains strong despite the setbacks. ■

**Officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police** instruct officials in the West African state of Guinea on refugee security issues.

**Collecting firewood** near a refugee camp in Kenya can be dangerous to your health.

**Refugees returning to Afghanistan** are warned about the dangers of mines and unexploded ordnance.

## SOUTH SUDAN

# “They never knew there were

by KITTY MCKINSEY

**P**ATRICK GONDA WAS A SMILING, happy-go-lucky teenager who loved swimming and playing football. Born into a Sudanese refugee family 17 years ago, he grew up carefree in Uganda, innocent of the treacherous tools of warfare—bombs, land mines and small arms—that still blight the landscape of South Sudan.

Even before the 21-year civil war officially ended in January, Patrick “was happy to come back to his country. It was better than staying in the camps,” his father, Ben Doko, recalled under a shady tree in his large family compound in the center of a small township near Kajo Keji.

But Patrick’s life in his newly peaceful homeland ended violently on April 9, when he and a friend found a shiny 120 mm anti-aircraft artillery shell not far from their home. As they carried the unfamiliar object home, it slipped from their hands and exploded with a thunderous blast that was heard for miles around, and shredded large trees some distance from the bomb crater.

In South Sudan these days, some young people dismantle unexploded bombs to use the metal components as rings and bracelets. Others sell the bombs to local blacksmiths as scrap metal. Ben Doko doesn’t know what his son meant to do with the shell. Perhaps he was simply curious.

“His mother told the children not to touch these things,” Doko said, fighting to control his emotions during a wake for Patrick, lamenting his first-born child’s costly innocence. “They’ve been away since

they were very young. They never knew how things are here. They never knew there were bombs here, what guns were.”

Unexploded ordnance, unmapped land mines and small calibre weapons—the legacy of wars that have tormented Sudan for 27 of the last 40 years—are among the chief obstacles preventing some 550,000 refugees and four million people displaced within Sudan from returning to the south of the country, even after the January peace accord.



UNHCR/K. MCKINSEY/SDN-2005

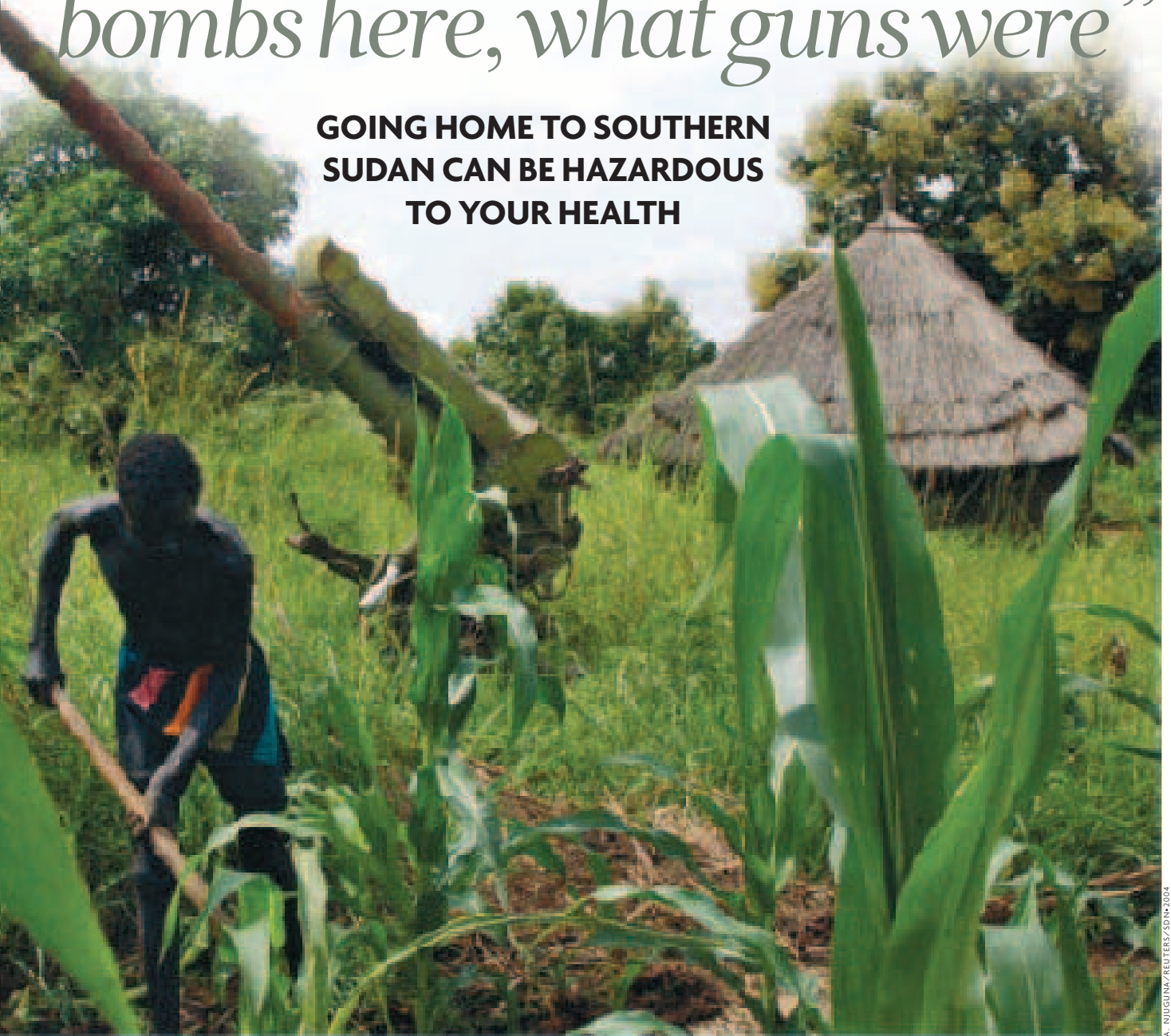
**Trying to locate** untold numbers of unexploded mines littering southern Sudan.

Land mines, unexploded bombs and small arms are not the only concerns. Refugees want to be sure that the basic infrastructure for rebuilding their lives is also in place.



# *bombs here, what guns were”*

**GOING HOME TO SOUTHERN  
SUDAN CAN BE HAZARDOUS  
TO YOUR HEALTH**



A. NIUGUNA/REUTERS/SDN-2004

Despite the dangers, several hundred thousand South Sudanese have already made their own way home without waiting for U.N. help. In Western Equatoria province alone, local authorities say 160,000 have returned since 2003. In Kajo Keji, UNHCR has registered nearly 4,000 returning every month.

## **A HAZARDOUS HOMECOMING**

“EVEN THOUGH more than half a million refugees are interested in coming home from neighbor-

ing countries, UNHCR cannot begin bringing them back on organized truck convoys until we are sure the roads are cleared of mines,” said Jean-Marie Fakhouri, director of UNHCR’s operations for Chad and Sudan.

The refugee agency is making preparations to help civilians come home voluntarily after the end of the rainy season. For now, the organization and its partners are concentrating on improving infrastructure for local communities and returnees.

“I don’t see us receiving mass movements of refugees

**A newly returned civilian works his fields next to a destroyed anti-aircraft gun.**



UNHCR/K. MCKINSEY/UGA/2003



### Some young people dismantle unexploded bombs to use the metal components as rings and bracelets. Others sell the bombs as scrap metal.

before November or December, possibly even January 2006,” says Ahmed Warsame, head of UNHCR’s office in Yei, in Western Equatoria, one of the main areas of return.

However, Warsame, who previously served in the northern Pakistani border town of Peshawar when Afghan refugees started going home on their own after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, says the South Sudanese refugees could surprise the U.N. “I remember when we were repatriating 1,000 individuals every month through Peshawar,” he recalls. “Then all of a sudden, 10,000 people were crossing every day.”

South Sudan’s refugees still seem cautious, though. After 11 years in exile, farming in Yelulu settlement in northern Uganda, 32-year-old Victoria Stima would love to take her two sons and two daughters home. But she still views the area as too dangerous.

“I heard from people that Sudan is already okay, but there are land mines,” she says outside her thatched roof round mud-brick home in Yelulu. “If I go to collect firewood I could step on a land mine and die. It’s difficult for me to go there from outside. I don’t know where the land mines are.”

Her husband, an Anglican pastor named Gordon Elunai, went back on his own for two weeks in February. He returned, scared not only of land mines, but also of the guns in the hands of nearly everyone he met in South Sudan.

“They really have to disarm the civilians,” he said, speaking perfect English. “We can’t think of going back as long as there are so many guns in the hands of civilians.” Simmering ethnic rivalries—papered over in the peace settlement—could turn deadly with so many guns floating around, he adds.

To be sure, land mines, unexploded bombs and ubiquitous small arms are not the only concerns for refugees and displaced Sudanese. They also want to be sure that

the basic infrastructure for rebuilding their lives is in place before they venture back.

#### MAJOR REBUILDING

UNHCR IS REBUILDING schools and health clinics, drilling boreholes and funding vocational training to boost whole communities, not just returning refugees.

“Here our approach is to support the community so they can receive their sisters and brothers who are in exile and minimize the pressure on health facilities, water and so forth, to make sure people can co-exist well,” says Elisha Nziko, head of UNHCR’s office in Kajo Keji.

Women, particularly those who sought refuge in Uganda and Kenya, have had opportunities for education and community leadership during their exile that they never would have had in Sudan’s traditional culture.

“The men are saying they are going to implement ‘African culture’ when we go back to Sudan,” says Domenica Idwa, 26, a teacher and girls’ advisor in a refugee school in northern Uganda. “But that culture has gone with its time.”

“We are not going to leave our human rights in Uganda,” she says firmly. “We are going to stand strong. We are not going to let ourselves down and we are going to encourage the women who stayed in South Sudan to come up.”

However, even this conversation about women’s rights and educational opportunities in refugee settlements veers back to the over-riding issue of land mines.

“Health care, water and education might be put in place in South Sudan, but the most essential thing is if there are no land mines,” Domenica says. “This causes





UNHCR/K. MCKINSEY/SBN\*2005



UNHCR/K. MCKINSEY/UGA\*2005

us fear going to cut building materials (for houses) or cultivating land. De-mining is really the most important thing.”

Mines are so prevalent that U.N. staff wanting to travel from Yei to Kajo Keji—two of the main towns in Western Equatoria—make a long detour through northern Uganda rather than risk 50 kilometers of land mines along the main road. UNHCR’s sister agency, the World Food Program, has hired the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action, FSD, to clear this main road.

Since being trained to handle mines ten years ago, Isaac Rasas has laid 25 mines and removed more than 70. First a soldier with the southern rebel force, the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), and later a de-miner for the same force (looking for mines laid by the government of Sudan as the SPLA troops advanced), he’s now working with FSD to pave the way for the return of refugees to Western Equatoria.

#### MAKING SUDAN SAFE

“I FEEL HAPPY to be making my country safe,” he says during a break in work, surveying a landscape littered with abandoned rocket launchers and rusting shells of tanks.

FSD, using local Sudanese de-miners specially trained and certified by the U.N., is clearing a swath 12.5 meters wide on either side of the road, to make space for

the construction equipment that will come later to improve the roads to handle heavy trucking.

It’s slow going. On their best day, Isaac and his team managed to clear 400 meters of roadway; on an average day, the figure is just 250 meters.

UNHCR will pay to clear the smaller roads leading off to villages, and another group will de-mine farming land.

“Before returnees started coming back, we did not have any accidents because the local people knew which areas to avoid,” says Henry Amule Suliman, a local official in charge of returnee issues in Kajo Keji. Now, he says, more must be done to make the returnees aware of the dangers.

That makes sense to Ben Doko, father of the dead teenager, Patrick. Surrounded by women sitting silently on mats on the ground mourning the loss of the promising 17-year-old, Ben pleads for outsiders to do more to make sure other families don’t have to go through his agony.

“People should go to the schools and tell them what bombs are,” he says passionately. “They should tell the newcomers because they have no way of knowing about these bombs.”

But such efforts come too late for Moses Taban. He hobbles around Kajo Keji on an ill-fitting artificial leg, a poor replacement for the limb he lost to a land mine shortly after coming back in 2002. Homeless, he sleeps at a hospital where a friend works, and ekes out a paltry living making paraffin lamps from old metal cans.

“I wish I had never come home,” 25-year-old Moses says forlornly. “If I had stayed on the other side, I would not have lost my leg.” ■

**As rebuilding begins (center), life remains difficult for hundreds of thousands of civilians waiting to return to their villages.**

Despite the dangers, several hundred thousand South Sudanese have already made their own way home without waiting for U.N. help.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has described the situation as “hell on earth.” The International Committee of the Red Cross said it was a “region of fear.”

A special U.N. Commission talked of the “killing of civilians, enforced disappearances, destruction of villages, rape and other forms of sexual violence, pillaging and forced displacement...”

The United States flatly called the ongoing atrocities genocide.

More than two years after it began to unfold, another disaster in a vast wasteland of western Sudan remains the globe’s worst and most intractable humanitarian crisis.

Around two million people out of a population of six million—one in every three people—have been forced from their homes and subjected to the widespread abuses described in the 176-page U.N. report. An estimated 210,000 of them fled into neighboring Chad to seek safety.

Anywhere between 100,000 and 400,000 have been killed, mostly by small arms, or died from disease and illnesses related to the crisis.

And there seems little end in sight. Jan Egeland, the overall head of U.N. relief operations in the region, recently described a “relentless increase in violence.” The situation in “Sudan and Darfur (the epicenter of the crisis in western Sudan) is bad and I fear is going to be even worse in the future unless the security situation improves,” he said.

And, concerning who is to blame for the disaster, Egeland could only lament: “There are bad guys and bad guys and bad guys.”

# THE TRAGEDY



E. RASMUSSEN / AFP / SDN • 2004

# OF DARFUR



Gun law in the Sudan.



F. O'REILLY/REUTERS/SDN•2004



UNHCR / H. CAUX / TCD•2004



UNHCR/H. CAUX/TCD•2004





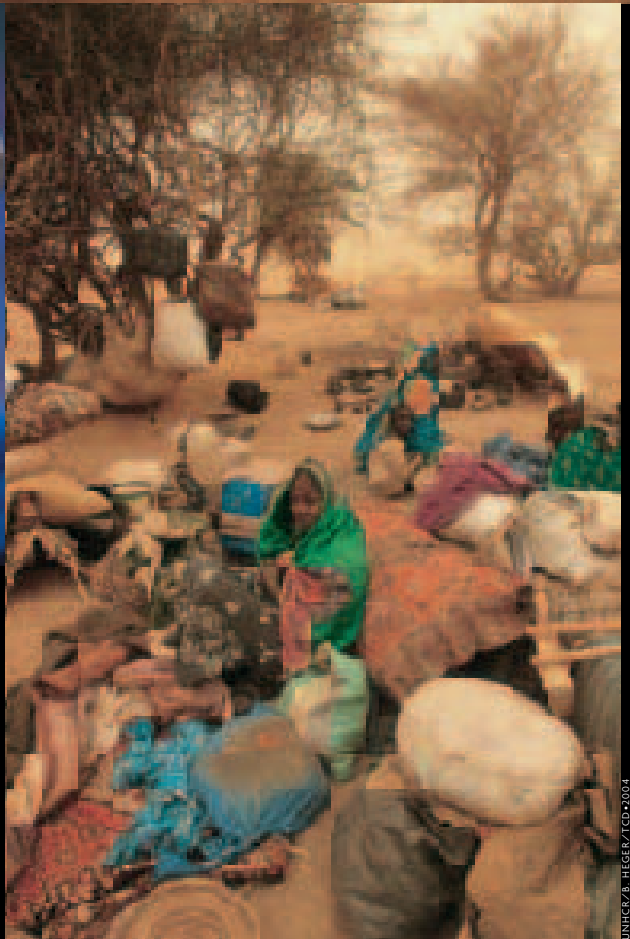
S. NELSON/GETTY IMAGES/SDN-2004



D. PEPPER/GETTY IMAGES/SDN-2004



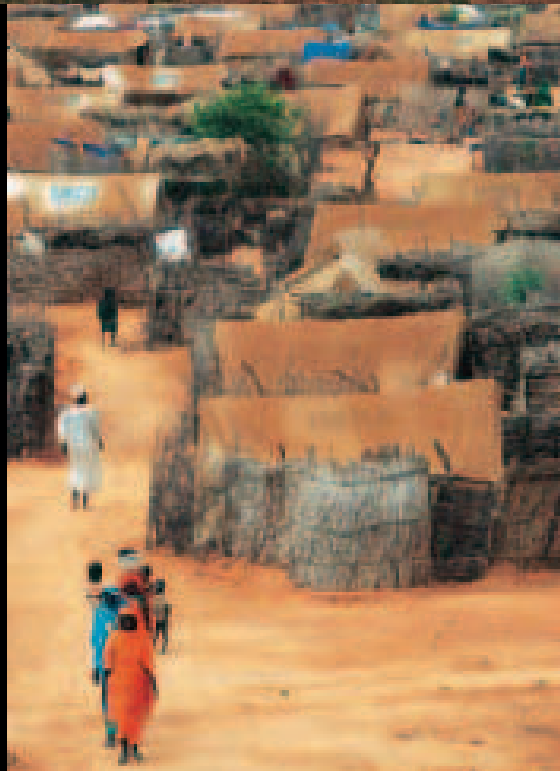
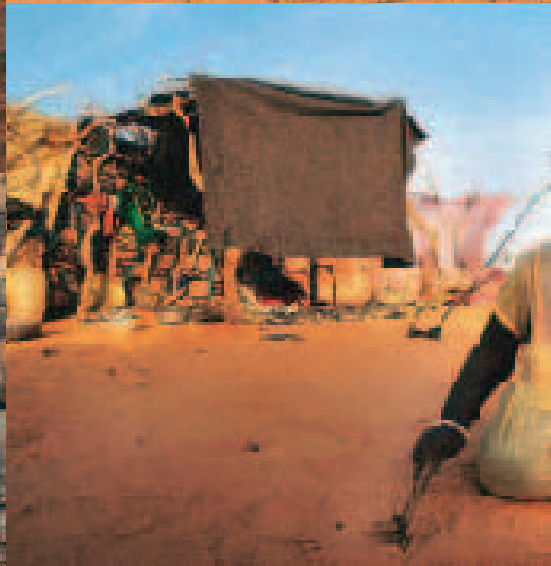
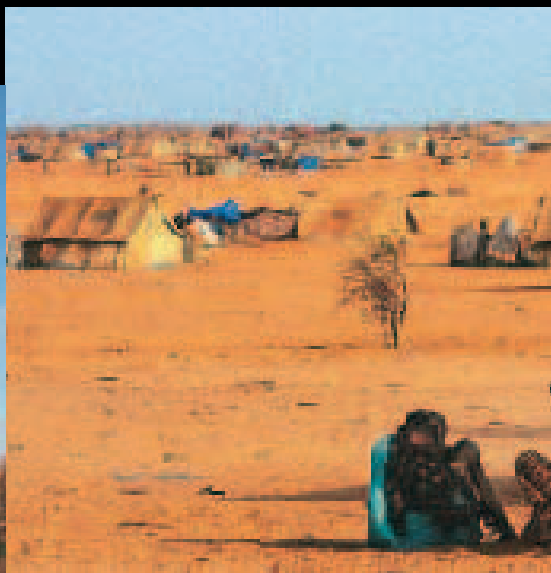
K. PRINSLOO/AP/SDN-2004



UNHCR & THE GER/TCO-2004

**DESTRUCTION,  
FLIGHT  
AND DESPAIR**

F. ZIZOLA/MAGNUM/SDN-2004



UNICEF/PH. CAUVY/SDN/2008



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# CAMP LIFE IN DARFUR AND CHAD

