



North Africa

Recent Developments

One of the salient features of the region has been the search for lasting and effective solutions for the plight of the refugees from Western Sahara. Many of the refugees, some of whom have been in exile for over three decades, are currently housed in four settlements in Tindouf. Finding durable solution for this protracted refugee situation is, however, inextricably linked to the political resolution of the conflict over the Western Sahara territory. Over the years, UNHCR has been constrained in finding enough resources to continue to provide protection and humanitarian assistance for the group, which the Government estimates to be 165,000 persons.

Several inter-agency initiatives were undertaken in 2002 to address the ongoing food shortages and other problems affecting the Saharan refugees and their families. Efforts to revive donor interest included two donor briefings attended by the Special Repre-

Algeria
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Mauritania
Morocco
Tunisia
Western Sahara Territory



representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Western Sahara, and representatives of WFP and UNHCR. The current financial difficulties facing the Office may however, force the organisation to review its priorities in consultation with the political bodies of the United Nations. UNHCR, in co-ordination with the SRSG, will make further efforts to follow the recommendations in the UN Security Council resolutions relevant to the situation. Furthermore, UNHCR will strive to conduct a registration of the Saharan camp population to better direct its protection and assistance activities.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's objectives in North Africa are to support government efforts in promoting international protection and establishing comprehensive asylum systems. In the meantime, UNHCR continues to fill gaps through RSD and the provision of limited

material assistance to vulnerable refugees. In 2003, UNHCR will pursue its efforts to encourage concerned governments to adopt domestic refugee-related legislation. At the same time, it must be noted that for most of the refugees, voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin is generally, hindered by the lack of conditions conducive to return as well as the lack of integration prospects. Similarly, resettlement opportunities have become more constrained for these groups of refugees. The open door policy in the host countries, however, has allowed many refugees and asylum-seekers to continue to enjoy the tradition of hospitality.

UNHCR, in close co-ordination with the Office of the SRSG for Western Sahara, will endeavour to enhance its protection work in the Tindouf refugee camps, including the implementation of confidence-building measures in conformity with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. In this

respect, UNHCR intends to submit a revised confidence-building project to the parties concerned. In the absence of positive developments leading to the voluntary repatriation of refugees, UNHCR would be forced to re-assess its activities and priorities accordingly.

The Office will also explore the potential for raising funds from government and non-governmental organisations in the region.

Operations

In **Algeria**, UNHCR will provide protection and basic humanitarian assistance, seek durable solutions, and promote international refugee law through capacity-building and training activities for

government officials and national NGOs. The Office hopes to facilitate the establishment of an effective asylum framework, by working closely with government authorities.

Discussions are ongoing to secure a Memorandum of Understanding that will define the co-operative framework between UNHCR and the Government of the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**. In the meantime, the Office will undertake activities geared towards increasing awareness of its mandate. UNHCR will also try to encourage more Libyan NGOs to contribute to refugee programmes worldwide. In close co-ordination with relevant authorities, UNHCR will finalise the relocation of some 1,200 Somali refugees to better accommodation, which should herald not only better general living conditions but also a better chance of promoting their self-reliance.



In **Mauritania**, UNHCR will provide international protection and direct material assistance to the most vulnerable urban refugees. The Office also hopes to prepare for the voluntary return of urban refugees from Sierra Leone. Technical assistance will be provided to the authorities to establish national refugee legislation.

In **Morocco**, pending the update of national refugee legislation and the establishment of an eligibility procedure, UNHCR will carry out RSD and assist refugees to obtain legal status when possible.

In **Tunisia**, UNHCR will advocate the preparation of refugee-related legislation and the subsequent establishment of RSD mechanisms. UNHCR's direct assistance to refugees in Tunisia targets the most vulnerable, including refugee women and refugee children. The Office will provide healthcare, accommodation, education and social counselling to refugees in the country, as well as assist in the resettlement of those refugees in need of such a solution and accepted by receiving countries.

In the **Western Sahara Territory**, as a result of severe financial constraints, UNHCR may have to review its presence, until such time as the parties to the conflict agree to a political settlement of the problem and conditions are conducive for the implementation of voluntary repatriation. In the meantime, the Office will continue to explore ways of introducing confidence-building measures for the Saharan refugees. UNHCR will continue to closely co-ordinate its endeavours with the SRSG.

Mauritania: Touareg refugees from Mali.
UNHCR / A. Kazinierakis

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Algeria	4,680,287
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1,037,744
Mauritania	332,120
Morocco	251,741
Tunisia	192,719
Western Sahara Territory	290,106
Total	6,784,717

