

1st Meeting

**OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS
(OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 1995)**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Overview has been prepared to facilitate discussion during the 30-31 January 1996 meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee. It provides information on key protection issues and on programme-related developments that have occurred since the October 1995 meeting of the Executive Committee. It is intended to limit oral presentations by the Secretariat and thus allow more time for discussion between the Office and Governments, and among delegations.

II. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

2. UNHCR has been entrusted by the international community with the function of providing international protection to persons in need by, *inter alia*, supervising the application of international instruments relating to the protection of refugees. Under Art. 35 of the 1951 Convention, Art. II of the 1967 Protocol as well as Art. VIII of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, States party to these instruments have assumed an obligation to cooperate with UNHCR in the exercise of its functions, in particular by facilitating UNHCR's duty of supervising the application of the provisions of these international refugee instruments. In carrying out this mandate at a national level, UNHCR seeks to ensure a better understanding and a more uniform interpretation of recognized international principles governing the treatment of refugees. The development of appropriate registration, reception, determination and integration structures and procedures is therefore not only in the national interest of the countries concerned, but also in the interest of the international community, as it helps stabilize population movements and provide a meaningful life for those who are deprived of effective protection. In creating this mandate for UNHCR, the international community recognized that a multilateral response to the refugee problem would ensure a coordinated approach in a spirit of international cooperation.

3. The mandate for international protection gives UNHCR its distinctive character within the United Nations system. International protection involves also promoting, safeguarding and developing principles of refugee protection and strengthening international commitments, namely to treat refugees in accordance with international rules and standards. The ultimate objective of protection is to find a durable solution, be it in the form of voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement. In addition, preventive action is necessary to address the economic, social and political aspects of the refugee problem. The protection mandate is therefore intrinsically linked with the active search for durable solutions. This is necessarily embedded in an international legal framework which ensures predictability and foreseeability as well as a concerted approach within a framework of increased state responsibility, international cooperation, international solidarity and burden-sharing.

4. In recent years, UNHCR has significantly increased its involvement in voluntary repatriation operations. It is recognized that the purpose of international protection is not that a refugee remains a refugee forever. Rather, it is to ensure the individual's renewed membership of a community and the restoration of national protection. Voluntary repatriation is usually viewed as the most desirable durable solution by the refugees themselves as well as by the international

community. UNHCR's humanitarian action in pursuit of a lasting solution to refugee problems is therefore vigorously oriented towards enabling a refugee to exercise the right to return home in safety and with dignity. In consequence, the continued commitment of Governments which have generously protected refugees from former Yugoslavia to an organized repatriation process is essential, in view of the risks of destabilization of uncoordinated return movements. Under the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNHCR is currently developing a repatriation plan which will allow for the "early, peaceful, orderly and phased return" of refugees.

5. UNHCR welcomes the recent commitments made by the concerned Governments to strengthen existing measures designed to speed up the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees currently living in Zaire. In 1996, UNHCR will place special emphasis on voluntary repatriation to Rwanda. A successful repatriation will, however, depend on the willingness of the Governments involved to fulfil previous commitments made, *inter alia*, in the Bujumbura Plan of Action of 17 February 1995, the Declaration of the Cairo Summit on 29 November 1995, and the Joint Communiqué of the Tripartite Commission on 20 December 1995.

6. In many instances, voluntary repatriation may not materialize for a variety of reasons, including because a refugee may have been through a particularly severe experience. Efforts must then be made to ensure self-sufficiency and successful integration. UNHCR recognizes a broad set of principles and values, integral to the notion of granting permanent asylum.

7. The challenge to provide international protection, including the search for durable solutions, can only be met through the combined efforts of all actors involved, in close coordination and cooperation with each other.

III. AFRICA

West Africa

Malian refugees

8. With northern Mali experiencing relative stability, some 30,000 Malians have already returned spontaneously since March 1995. Following a UNHCR regional meeting held in Mali from 28 August to 2 September 1995, a pilot project was set up for voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees in October. Some 7,200 of 110,000 registered Malian refugees, mainly from Algeria, but also from Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, have been repatriated under the pilot project.

Togolese refugees

9. Since the promulgation of a general amnesty in Togo in December 1994, some 175,000 out of 300,000 Togolese refugees have returned spontaneously to Togo, mainly from Benin. Another 15,000 have repatriated under a pilot project established in January 1995 to facilitate voluntary repatriation of Togolese refugees in Benin.

10. The signing of bilateral agreements between UNHCR and the Governments of Togo (12 August 1995), Benin (24 November 1995) and Ghana (14 December 1995), has further encouraged Togolese refugees both in Benin and Ghana to return home. In October 1995, 22 families (84 individuals) were repatriated as the first UNHCR assisted repatriation group from Ghana. The total number of Togolese refugees currently in Benin and Ghana has decreased to some 95,000.

11. The Third UNHCR Consultative Meeting on Voluntary Repatriation of Togolese Refugees, intended to accelerate repatriation operations, was held in Lomé, Togo from 4 to 5

December 1994, and launched a Plan of Action and a funding appeal.

Sierra Leonean refugees

12. While security problems in Liberia have thus far limited regular UNHCR access to the 120,000 mostly Sierra Leonean refugees in the country to those residing in Monrovia and adjacent Montserrado county, recent political developments have opened the way for UNHCR to provide assistance in Boroma and Cape Mount, where some 35,000 Sierra Leoneans reside.

Liberian refugees

13. While the signing of a peace agreement on 19 August, followed by a cease-fire and the inauguration of a new Government, renewed hope that the 750,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries (Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria) would be able to repatriate, delays in the implementation of certain aspects of the accord have stymied progress in this respect. The delay in the deployment of peace-keeping troops, for example, has prevented UNHCR from gaining access to major returnee areas. A UNHCR regional meeting adopted a Plan of Operation for the Liberia voluntary repatriation which is to be implemented as soon as the peace-keeping troops are deployed nationwide and have begun disarming combatants.

Horn and Eastern Africa

Uganda

14. A major refugee registration exercise by the Government in October and November, completed in cooperation with UNHCR and other major partners in the refugee programme, showed a reduction in the number of refugees in the camps/settlements from 350,000 to 228,000.

15. The Branch Office updated its contingency plan to account for any major new influx of Sudanese refugees to Uganda arising from renewed fighting in southern Sudan; thus far, only a few arrivals have been noted.

Kenya

16. Sudanese continued to arrive in Lokichokio transit centre at an average rate of 1,000 persons per month. The composition of these new asylum-seekers has changed noticeably, with women and children forming the majority. This low intensity influx from Sudan has boosted the population in Kakuma camp from 28,000 in December 1994 to over 44,000 in December 1995.

17. During the reporting period 9,569 persons opted for the repatriation package and cash grant from the Dadaab camps and returned to Somalia, bringing to over 30,000 the total number of Somali repatriants since the beginning of 1995.

18. Attributing a rise in violent crime to persons without regular status in the country, the Kenyan Government on 25 November launched a drag-net operation that resulted in the detention of several hundred foreigners in Nairobi. All persons of concern to UNHCR targeted by the operation have since been released.

19. The Reception Centre at Thika, closed as a refugee facility in April 1995, has been reactivated by the Kenyan Government as a holding area where all the detainees are to be screened. The Branch Office has been requested by the Kenyan Government to be part of the screening team. Persons of concern to UNHCR who are in Nairobi legitimately will be allowed to remain in the city. These would include resettlement cases, students and health cases. Those

asylum-seekers and refugees who ought to be in designated camps will be returned to their camps by UNHCR.

Somalia

20. During the reporting period local efforts towards a durable peace and stability inside Somalia continued. One such effort was the seven-week Darod Reconciliation Conference. It is anticipated that inter-clan reconciliation, which should result from the conference, will not only open and secure new repatriation routes from Kenya to Somalia but will also enhance the momentum of actual repatriation movements.

21. An attack by strongman General Aideed on Baidoa in September shattered the Baye region's long-lasting peace, triggered an outflow from the town, and forced UNICEF and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to withdraw staff and suspend activities.

22. Although no repatriation movements to North-West Somalia were recorded during the reporting period, the security situation was stable and UNHCR international staff returned from Boroma to Hargeisa. Quick impact projects (QIPs) remained the main UNHCR activity in Hargeisa. The authorities in North-West Somalia wrote to UNHCR giving approval for the return and reintegration of Somali refugees from countries of asylum. Contacts continued to be made between North-West Somali clan elders/politicians and refugee clan elders.

Sudan

23. While a pilot programme saw the return of 25,000 Eritreans in line with bilateral agreements entered into by Sudan and Eritrea with UNHCR, the Government of Sudan indicated a wish for direct discussion with the Eritrean authorities before the repatriation of some 100,000 Eritrean refugees in Sudan can commence. The first phase was to have begun in the last quarter of 1995.

24. During October, Sudanese security officials entered UNHCR's Field Office in Gedaref and arrested an Ethiopian. Subsequently, there were further arrests of Ethiopians and Eritreans. Among those deported were recognized refugees.

Ethiopia

25. The planned repatriation of up to 60,000 Ethiopian refugees from Sudan was suspended earlier in the year due to the onset of the rainy season in June. Some 3,000 Ethiopian refugees were repatriated and assisted with reintegration at the time. Following a successful tripartite committee meeting held in Khartoum, Sudan, in November between Ethiopia, Sudan, and UNHCR, it was agreed that the repatriation operation should resume in December. By the end of December some 4,000 Ethiopians had been successfully repatriated. No organized repatriation movement was undertaken for Somali refugees to North-West Somalia from either Djibouti or Ethiopia. Plans for this caseload will be initiated in early 1996.

26. The second phase of the repatriation/reintegration of 15,000 Ethiopian refugees from Djibouti was completed in November. A total of 31,617 Ethiopians have repatriated from Djibouti since November 1994.

Central Africa

Central African Republic

27. The planned repatriation for more than 1,000 Sudanese refugees from the Central African Republic came to a virtual standstill due to continuing problems in southern Sudan. However, a total of 448 of these people will proceed directly to Khartoum in the near future.

Zaire

28. Over 4,000 persons, mainly Ugandans with some Sudanese, crossed into Upper-Zaire during December. Those of Ugandan origin are thought to belong to a group calling itself "freedom fighters" who reside in the triangular area between Zaire, Uganda and Sudan.

Southern Africa

Mozambique

29. UNHCR is continuing in 1995-1996 the implementation of up to 750 QIPs before the end of its operations in June 1996, when all field locations outside Maputo will be closed. These projects are in addition to the well over 500 projects already finalized under the 1993-1994 reintegration programme.

30. At the same time, systematic linkages are being built with development agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, the European Union and various bilateral and non-governmental actors. These linkages are aimed at promoting sustainability of the UNHCR inputs in major areas of return, and are always developed in close cooperation and coordination with relevant government bodies, such as Provincial Planning Commissions and line ministries. A cooperative framework has been launched with UNDP which includes a district mapping exercise, which will establish a database for all major returnee areas in Mozambique.

Angola

31. UNHCR is in the process of updating its contribution to the DHA consolidated appeal. At the same time, UNHCR's own operational appeal which, together with an updated status report, will be launched in late January 1996, is being revised.

Great Lakes Region

32. Following the lifting of the arms embargo on Rwanda by the Security Council, the Zairian authorities began expelling Rwandan and Burundian refugees from their territory, forcing back to Rwanda some 16,000 Rwandan refugees between 19 and 24 August 1995.

33. At the request of the Secretary General, the High Commissioner visited the Great Lakes region for consultations with the Governments of the countries of asylum and the countries of origin. Following her visit, Tripartite Commission meetings were organized between Rwanda, Zaire and UNHCR, between Rwanda, Burundi, and UNHCR and between Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR to discuss the modalities to promote voluntary repatriation. These Tripartite Commissions also set up technical meetings to work on the practical modalities of repatriation.

34. The initial outcome of the initiatives were encouraging and the numbers of returnees, especially to Rwanda, started to pick up as voluntary repatriation was seen by the refugees to be the only option in the wake of the August expulsions from Zaire. However, the momentum reached in September and early October was not sustained. The pressure against repatriation in

the asylum countries and the mixed security perceptions of conditions in the country of origin contributed to the stalling of repatriation movements. The broader political issues remained unresolved.

35. In view of that situation, several initiatives were undertaken including the Secretary-General's convening of a regional conference and the Cairo Summit. Another Tripartite Commission at ministerial level between Rwanda, Zaire and UNHCR was convened on 20 December in Geneva.

Cairo Summit on the Great Lakes Region (28-29 November)

36. The Great Lakes Summit, convened by four Heads of State (of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zaire) and a high level Tanzanian representative, took place against the background of a compromise agenda which focused on the repatriation of refugees, on security of the region and on justice. President Mobutu of Zaire reiterated his position against the expulsions of refugees and put his signature on the separation of intimidators, prohibition of cross-border military activities and cooperation with the International Tribunal.

37. Although UNHCR was not present at Cairo, the Summit Declaration is balanced and positive regarding UNHCR's role and responsibility, and refers to the Office's role in implementing it. It confirms the principles and approaches of the Nairobi Summit, the Bujumbura Plan of Action and the Tripartite Agreements on repatriation. The Declaration has a moral and political value which can help to push forward the process on repatriation.

Tripartite Commission Meeting between Rwanda, Zaire and UNHCR

38. In accordance with the conclusions of the first Tripartite Commission meeting (Geneva, 25 September), the three parties met on 20 December to evaluate progress made in the repatriation process of Rwandan refugees from Zaire.

39. During the meeting, the parties reaffirmed the commitments made during the previous Tripartite meeting and agreed on the need to take measures to give a new momentum to the return of refugees to their country of origin. With due respect to the voluntary character of repatriation, the parties agreed to the removal and repatriation of refugees in groups and to the progressive closure of the refugee camps in north and south Kivu. In the framework of promotion of repatriation, UNHCR will ensure the coordination of the practical arrangements related to the closure of the camps and the repatriation of refugees, and will continue to put at the disposal of the Rwandan and Zairian parties the necessary assistance.

40. Rwanda confirmed its willingness to continue to create conditions of security, to accept the return of its citizens, to reinforce transit centres, to receive refugees, to pursue, in cooperation with UNHCR, the information campaign in the refugee camps and in the communes of return, and to facilitate cross-border visits. Zaire confirmed its willingness to remove, up to the end of the operations, those who intimidate the refugees in the camps from repatriating.

Rwanda

UNHCR programme in Rwanda

41. UNHCR, in close coordination with the Government of Rwanda, provided individual assistance to those who repatriated under its auspices. In addition, community rehabilitation projects have been implemented to benefit the whole community in areas of return.

42. UNHCR has also established a network of facilities serving each official border entry point into Rwanda which ensures the reception of returnees arriving from all neighbouring countries. It has also established a centre in Kigali, to accommodate returnees in transit. Collectively, this system ensures that whenever and wherever assisted returnees enter Rwanda, UNHCR will receive them and ensure a safe, dignified passage home.

Some NGOs requested to leave Rwanda

43. On 6 December, the Rwandan Minister of Rehabilitation announced that 38 NGOs operating in Rwanda should terminate their work, and 17 others had to negotiate their presence in Rwanda in 1996. The reasons given were non-registration, inefficiency and lack of coordination with the authorities. A total of 102 NGOs can continue their work. Of the 38 terminated NGOs, UNHCR has implementing arrangements with the following: Austrian Relief Programme, Médecins sans Frontières - France (MSF-France), Médecins du Monde and INTERSOS. Among the 17 NGOs required to negotiate their presence, UNHCR has implementing arrangements with Food for the Hungry, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, a British Direct Aid. They were allowed to remain.

Extension of UNAMIR

44. The Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) for a final period until 8 March 1996. The troops will be reduced to 1,200 soldiers, 200 observers and military support staff. UNAMIR's new mandate will be to:

- exercise its good offices to assist in achieving the voluntary and safe repatriation of Rwandan refugees within the frame of reference of the recommendations of the Bujumbura Conference and the Cairo Summit of the Heads of State of the Great Lakes Region,
- assist the Government of Rwanda in facilitating the voluntary and safe return of refugees and (...) promote a climate of confidence and trust through the performance of monitoring tasks;
- assist UNHCR and other international agencies in the provision of logistical support for the repatriation of refugees.

Burundi

Security situation

45. Violence and sabotage afflicted Bujumbura and its environs. Low intensity insurgency spread from the western provinces of Cibitoke to the provinces of Bubanza and Kayanza, causing internal and external displacement. In Cibitoke all humanitarian activities have been suspended. As a result of violence in early December, at least 6,000 persons were displaced from their homes in different parts of Bujumbura or in the hills. Travel by road between Bujumbura and the refugee camps in the north east stopped for security reasons, but UNHCR maintained a presence, albeit reduced, in the camps.

Situation in refugee camps

46. Since the beginning of 1995, some 70,000 refugees have repatriated to Rwanda. The figure includes some 30,000 refugees who returned under UNHCR auspices and some 40,000 who spontaneously repatriated. UNHCR has closed the refugee camp of Majuri and transferred the 15,500 refugees to Magara camp for security reasons. After a temporary decline in repatriation movements to Rwanda in October and November, the deteriorating security situation

has compelled more refugees to opt for repatriation. On 21 December, 1,500 refugees returned to Rwanda and about 3,000 more had registered for repatriation.

47. At present some 81,000 Burundi refugees live in camps in Zaire and some 83,000 in the United Republic of Tanzania. Because of the prevailing security situation in the areas of return of most refugees, namely Cibitoke, Bubanza and Muyinga, UNHCR is not promoting repatriation for the time being. It is important to note that humanitarian agencies have extremely limited access to the conflict zones in north-west Burundi and face difficulties in providing affected populations with regular assistance.

Tripartite Commission meeting on repatriation

48. A Tripartite Commission meeting between Rwanda, Burundi and UNHCR (Kigali, 15 to 17 November) agreed to create two consultative committees, one on security (to deal with intimidators) and another one on mass information. The Commission recommended that Burundi, in cooperation with the other parties, continue to work on the separation of the intimidators from the rest of the innocent refugee population. The Rwandan delegation attributed the decline in the repatriation movement in October and November essentially to the presence of intimidators in the refugee camps. The Commission agreed to hold a fourth meeting in Bujumbura in January.

United Republic of Tanzania

General situation

49. The new Tanzanian President has taken the initiative to meet with the Presidents of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda to review bilateral relations, the refugee problem in the region and the repatriation of refugees.

50. While the United Republic of Tanzania continues to have a generous asylum policy, it has been eroding of late, and there has been increasing pressure for the refugees to return home. During the Tripartite Commission meetings, efforts were made to reach agreements on ways and means to facilitate repatriation. The arrest and removal of intimidators from the refugee camps is being addressed and modalities of arrest and internment have been prepared by the authorities.

UNHCR Programme

51. The assistance programme is implemented largely through international NGOs. The water sector continues to pose difficulties. There is not enough ground water in the Kagera region to meet the water needs of the local and refugee populations. The borehole drilling programme has not been successful and it is now planned to pipe river water in the Ngara area and the lake water in the Karagwe area. The construction of the pipe will be a major operation which will last over a year. The programme also continues to support environmental projects and activities.

52. While the anticipated repatriation figure of 50,000 was not achieved in the United Republic of Tanzania, there was a marked increase in the number of refugees volunteering to repatriate, from 1,617 (of whom 631 were from the old caseload) from January to June, to 3,260 from July to November. This positive trend was aided by the mass information campaign and cross-border visits of refugees and Government officials between the United Republic of Tanzania and Rwanda. A verification exercise conducted in mid-1995 and December 1995 revealed a decrease in the assisted population to some 570,000.

Zaire

Repatriation of refugees

53. In Zaire, the refugee population at the beginning of 1995 was estimated to be 1,410,100, of whom 100,000 were Burundi refugees. Throughout the year, spontaneous and organized repatriation movements (estimated at 150,000) reduced this figure significantly, and it is estimated that at the start of 1996 some 1,100,000 refugees remain in the Zairian camps, of whom some 81,000 are Burundian.

54. Following the forced repatriation of 16,000 Rwandan refugees in August, the Zairian Government announced that all refugees should return to Rwanda by 31 December 1995. Although President Mobutu later relaxed this deadline, the Government continued to insist that repatriation be accelerated.

55. UNHCR has registered some 26,640 Rwandan refugees returning from Zaire between 1 September and 14 December 1995. This included 9,755 old caseload refugees and 13,024 from the new caseload. This brought the cumulative total since 1 January 1995 to 82,737. The majority of the returnees during the period under review were assisted with convoys organized by UNHCR and benefited from transport and repatriation packages inside Rwanda.

56. After having reached a peak of some 1,500 returnees in a single day during the third week of October, the movement of voluntary returns dropped to an average of less than 200 a day. In order to assess this situation, review the commitments of each of the parties and give renewed impetus to this joint repatriation effort, particularly for refugees currently in Zaire, the High Commissioner convened another Tripartite Commission meeting in Geneva on 20 December (see paras 38-40 above).

IV. THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

Priorities for 1996

57. **Latin America:** In the field of protection and promotion of refugee law, emphasis will continue to be given to encourage the nine countries in the region that have not yet done so to accede to the 1951 Convention. Emphasis will also be placed on the harmonization of domestic legislation on the criteria and procedures related to the application of refugee related principles. Promotional activities concerning the legalization of local integration related aspects will also be pursued where appropriate. As regards assistance measures, the Office will continue to provide asylum-seekers and refugees with initial basic care and maintenance assistance, and training towards accelerating self-reliance. A comprehensive public awareness campaign will also be launched.

58. **North America:** UNHCR will continue to intensify its provision of timely briefings to key United States officials on overall activities with the goal of maintaining, if not increasing, funding levels, and to consolidate policies and approaches on refugee matters.

Mexico

59. The reporting period was characterized by continued repatriation to Guatemala despite the killing of ten returnees, and the public announcement by the Mexican authorities of their agreement to allow the legalization of the local integration of Guatemalan refugees not wishing to repatriate.

60. Repatriation figures have been steadily increasing in recent years. During October 1995 968 individuals returned to Guatemala; an additional 1,600 are scheduled to repatriate before the end of the year. Some 10,440 refugees are expected to have repatriated to Guatemala in 1995.

61. The Mexican authorities' declaration on local integration permits UNHCR to pursue a second durable solution for the refugees in Mexico. Provisions have been made for the voluntary repatriation of some 12,000 individuals, and a plan of action is being prepared to consolidate a programme for those refugees who opt not to repatriate. In addition, activities will be carried out to increase refugee self-reliance.

Guatemala

62. The peace process moved ahead during 1995, with an agreement on indigenous rights being added to earlier agreements on a timetable for peace negotiations, human rights and resettlement of uprooted populations. This, together with the elections held in November 1995, is expected to further boost the repatriation process in 1996.

63. By the end of November, 10,000 refugees had repatriated from Mexico to Guatemala, which compares to some 6,000 returns for the whole of 1994. This brings the total of returnees to 21,000 since collective returns were initiated in 1993. With the individual returns between 1984 (when repatriations were started) and 1992 included, the global total number of returns comes to 30,500.

64. The repatriation process will continue during December, but the total number of returnees is expected to stop short of the revised total of 12,000 for 1995. Furthermore, the repatriation is expected to peak during 1996 at 12,000 returns and thereafter decrease, with some 8,000 refugees expected to repatriate during 1997.

65. To facilitate the integration of returnees into their communities, UNHCR is implementing QIPs that aim at assisting not only the returnees but also the communities receiving them. Activities are multi-sectoral and include the upgrading of roads and bridges in and between villages to facilitate access to markets, improvements to schools and clinics, and credit schemes for purchasing materials to start small-scale businesses, and provision of seeds or farm animals for horticultural, agricultural and forestry activities. Certain activities such as training schemes are oriented specifically towards women, to enhance their participation in decision-making processes at the family and community levels.

Other countries in Central America

66. In the other countries of Central America, UNHCR is focusing on ensuring the sustainability of already achieved durable solutions and preventing future refugee flows in the region. This is achieved through supporting the legalization of local integration; through a prevention strategy, by which Governments' adherence to human rights principles is supported; by the strengthening of national human rights mechanisms through which regional development is being supported; and by participating in the articulation of national development projects together with UNDP.

67. Since 1993, 11,000 refugees in the Central America region have had their status regularized as migrants. The vast majority of these persons are in Costa Rica where, through an Executive Decree, they were given the possibility to opt for a change of their migratory status. The Governments of Nicaragua, Panama and Honduras have granted permanent residence permits for some 350 refugees, and Guatemala has also initiated a local integration process for Central American refugees.

68. In contrast, the legalization of the residence of some 8,800 refugees in Belize continues

to be ignored by the Government, although in practice, a very small number of refugees obtain permanent residence permits on a case-by-case basis. The local integration of this caseload is supported by the implementation of QIPs, giving the refugees in Belize the same support in integrating as the returnees in Guatemala.

South America and the Caribbean

69. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela responded positively to UNHCR's call for resettlement places for refugees from former Yugoslavia, although no actual resettlement movement has taken place to date. In Colombia, UNHCR's implementing agencies have received a number of protests from asylum-seekers dissatisfied with the policy applied at the regional level, whereby persons coming from outside the continent do not qualify in principle for UNHCR's assistance pending consideration of their claims.

70. The percentage of extra-continental asylum seekers arriving in southern Latin America and the Caribbean through irregular movements from another first country of asylum has risen from 13 per cent to 77 per cent. Of these, 62 per cent were from Africa, some 18 per cent each from the Middle East and from Europe, and 2 per cent from Asia. A total of 64 per cent were registered in Brazil (as at October).

North America

71. UNHCR has been asked for its comments on the preliminary draft agreement between Canada and the United States for cooperation in the Examination of Refugee Status Claims from Nationals of Third Countries. UNHCR has also offered its comments on the proposed United States Immigration in the National Interest Act and has urged a number of changes to ameliorate strict provisions therein. Attempts have also been made to remove the cap on refugee admissions in the United States, which now stands at 75,000 per year for 1997 and 50,000 per year thereafter.

V. ASIA AND OCEANIA

China

72. An agreement signed between UNHCR and the Government on 1 December regularized the status of the UNHCR office in the country, which went from being an Office of the Chargé de Mission to a Branch Office.

Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA)

73. At the end of November, some 36,940 Vietnamese (mostly screened-out cases, but also some refugees), 6,375 *prima facie* Lao refugees and 165 screened-out Lao remained in ASEAN countries of first asylum and in Hong Kong. Returns, either voluntary or orderly, have been negligible in recent months, reflecting the impasse brought about by draft legislation in the United States that renewed expectations of resettlement to the United States amongst Lao refugees and screened-out Vietnamese who might meet specific migration criteria. Negotiations are underway between the United States and Governments in the region to resolve this impasse.

74. While fully supportive of efforts to regain the repatriation momentum and find durable solutions for the remaining refugees, UNHCR, in accordance with the decisions of the CPA Steering Committee, will in the first half of 1996 disengage from providing care and maintenance assistance to non-refugees in countries of first asylum.

International Seminar on the Indo-Chinese Exodus and the International Response (Tokyo, 27-28 October)

75. In collaboration with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations University, UNHCR organized a seminar to exchange views on the background to the Indo-Chinese exodus, the international response to it, and lessons learnt and their applicability to current or future situations of mass exodus. In addition to participation from the three sponsoring bodies, 26 experts drawn from governmental, non-governmental academic and media milieu participated. While discussion tended to centre mainly on the factors leading to the exodus, one of the lessons drawn from the experience was that status determination must be carried out at the earliest possible moment whenever a solution other than voluntary repatriation, especially resettlement, is considered in situations of mass exodus.

Myanmar repatriation

76. Of the 250,000 Muslim residents of Rakhine State, Myanmar, who fled as refugees to Bangladesh in late 1991 and early 1992, 195,000 have repatriated. UNHCR began its voluntary repatriation programme for the refugees in April 1994. While movements to Myanmar this year slowed during the April to October monsoon season, they began picking up later in the year. It is hoped that those volunteering to return from amongst the remaining 52,000 refugees will do so before the end of the current dry season. UNHCR Bangladesh is holding frequent promotion sessions in the camps to this effect.

77. The 15 international and 40 local UNHCR staff in Myanmar have unrestricted access to all the returnees, including those in the Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Sittwe prisons. The reintegration programme has been gaining momentum with over 150 implementors in 700 sites in 82 village tracts. The focus is on health, water and sanitation, education and rural infrastructure. Three international NGOs - Action Internationale contre la Faim (AICF), Bridge Asia-Japan and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) - in cooperation with the Myanmar Red Cross and working as UNHCR implementing partners, have been working on a water project, skills training and the provision of special assistance to vulnerable people. WFP has made considerable progress in its food-for-work programme, providing numerous employment opportunities in the implementation of mainly small-scale access road construction/repair and pond digging projects.

Papua New Guinea

78. The Free Papua Movement, in a sign of renewed vigour, ransacked the Indonesian consulate in Vanimo on 27 October.

79. Some 3,600 of the 9,600 Irian Jayan refugees in Papua New Guinea receive UNHCR assistance. In view of the refugees degree of self-sufficiency, and the conditions on the Indonesian side of the border, UNHCR plans to close its Liaison Office and terminate its activities in Papua New Guinea in June 1996.

Sri Lanka

80. Several hundred thousand people were displaced by the latest government advance into the Jaffna Peninsula, which began on 17 October and led to the recapture of Jaffna town. Some 250,000 displaced persons are reported in the north of the main island, with vast numbers arriving in the Vanni region. The Government of Sri Lanka has been providing food, and medical and other relief supplies to the newly displaced population.

81. Within the framework of a joint United Nations agency contingency response, UNHCR

has adopted a strategy of emergency preparedness (stockpiling of shelter and relief supplies) and emergency prevention (support to the Government and other agencies in the passage of specific relief items). To this end, UNHCR has purchased and stockpiled relief items, including five prefabricated warehouses. CARE distributes UNHCR relief items in close collaboration with the Government. UNHCR will assist the Government in the transportation of all non-food items and shelter materials from government-controlled areas in the Vanni region to the conflict areas.

VI. EUROPE

82. Throughout 1995, UNHCR's Bureau for Europe has placed great importance on strengthening the Office's relations with regional organizations, in particular the European Union and the Commission, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its institutions, and the Council of Europe. Increased cooperation has taken place through consultations on legislation as well as in participation in a variety of fora of direct or indirect relevance to the Office.

Western Europe

83. Although the final asylum-seeker statistics for 1995 are not available, it is apparent that, compared with the yearly figures from the early 1990s, Western Europe will witness another year of a relatively low number of asylum applications (in the order of 300,000). This would appear partly to be the result of the implementation of regulations aimed at addressing increased immigration pressures. Many people are lodging asylum applications as a substitute for following the regular migration application procedure, which recently ceased to be an option in several countries. Visa requirements, accelerated procedures, "safe third country" and "safe country of origin" are measures which appear to have attained their intended result. The number of cases accepted under the Convention has decreased while at the same time larger numbers of people have been admitted to stay in humanitarian categories; this both reflects a tendency in European States to apply the Convention in a less liberal manner and provides an indication that a high number of asylum applications are unfounded. The dilemma being faced by Western Europe is how to discourage and limit the misuse of the asylum "door" while ensuring that those genuinely in need of protection are granted it and not returned to situations of danger.

84. Refugee and migration issues remain high on the political agenda in Western Europe. An intensive dialogue has taken place between UNHCR and the European Union (EU) on the "harmonization" of Article 1 A of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The final position reached by the EU on Article 1 A includes a number of positive elements in line with UNHCR's interpretation. However, on the important issue of persecution by non-state agents, the EU does not reflect the views of the Office.

85. The signing in December of the Dayton Peace Agreement for former Yugoslavia has put the question of the temporary protection regime in Europe in the spotlight, with the likely voluntary repatriation of hundreds of thousands of refugees from former Yugoslavia. The Office is engaged in intensive dialogues with Governments, NGOs and intergovernmental institutions on this subject, aimed at agreeing an organized, coordinated and concerted return programme for the benefit of all concerned.

Northern Europe and the Baltic countries

86. In the Nordic countries, as in the rest of Western Europe, the number of asylum-seekers declined in 1995. Migration and refugee issues are part of the daily political agenda. One issue of particular concern is the high rate of unemployment in the refugee population. Considerable efforts, particularly through adult education and vocational training, are needed to improve this situation. A newly published Swedish governmental report proposes a comprehensive approach which coordinates immigration and refugee policies with cooperation and foreign policies so as to

improve the preventive aspects of Swedish refugee policy. The same report also suggests a more liberal interpretation of the 1951 Convention and an interpretation of the concept of non-state agent of persecution in line with the views of UNHCR.

87. In the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) the Office continues, in cooperation with the Nordic countries, its role of coordination and implementation of assistance to create an infrastructure for the reception of asylum-seekers/refugees and the processing of their claims. The goal is to reach a point where these States could adhere to the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol properly equipped to carry out the obligations which come with the signing of these instruments.

CIS countries and Turkey

88. In the last quarter of 1995, the preparatory work gained momentum for the regional conference to address the problem of refugees, displaced persons and other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring States. A second round of sub-regional meetings (following the first round in mid-1995) was initiated on 22 and 23 November in Tbilisi for the Transcaucasian region. Another subregional meeting was held in Minsk on 18 and 19 December to review solutions for Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. A third meeting is envisaged for Central Asia.

89. In Eastern Europe, UNHCR continues promoting appropriate refugee legislation and the creation of adequate infrastructures for the reception and integration of asylum-seekers and refugees. The Office is also concerned with the provision of technical assistance relating to the drafting of citizenship laws, paying particular attention to potential and/or existing problems of statelessness. Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova are the only non-signatories to the 1951 Convention in this region. However, Ukraine has adopted a refugee law and the authorities are complying with international standards, in particular in relation to refugee status determination procedures. In the Russian Federation, UNHCR has expressed its concerns on the restrictive application of Convention criteria contained in the draft refugee law to the Russian parliament. At the same time, the Office is assisting the authorities in the implementation of a fair refugee status-determination procedure through institution-building and training activities. In Azerbaijan, UNHCR is still involved in discussions over some of the provisions contained in the refugee law passed in 1992, as well as in provisions for the draft citizenship law. In Armenia, UNHCR has been actively involved in the drafting process, and welcomes the recent promulgation of the refugee law and citizenship law and asylum provisions contained in the new Constitution.

90. In Turkey, the Office is actively engaged in proposing amendments to the new procedures relating to refugee status determination and in discussing a more flexible application. UNHCR is also working in close cooperation with the Turkish authorities to prevent *refoulement* of asylum-seekers and refugees recognized under UNHCR's mandate.

91. From an operational point of view, in Georgia (Abkhazia) and Armenia/Azerbaijan, the conflict resolution process has made no significant progress. The implementation of UNHCR Special Programmes in these countries, funded through the inter-agency appeal for the region (except Armenia), suffered from delayed financial support from the international community. However, UNHCR and its implementing partners have made considerable efforts to achieve most of the targets set for 1995, particularly in the priority sectors of shelter and income-generation. Consultations are taking place between UNHCR and DHA to adapt the inter-agency appeal procedure to avoid such funding problems in 1996. In Armenia, the UNHCR programme, funded from under General Programmes, will have achieved its initial objectives by creating conditions conducive to the local integration of refugees, who, under a new citizenship law adopted in 1995, should be able to apply for citizenship. In 1996, UNHCR will maintain the emphasis in the three Transcaucasian countries on key sectors, such as shelter and income-generation activities, with the

objective of promoting self-reliance among the refugee and displaced population until political negotiations pave the way for more durable solutions.

92. The United Nations emergency operation implemented for the displaced population from Chechnya, Russian Federation, has been progressively phasing out since the return movement observed after implementation of the cease-fire signed in July 1995. In December, the number of internally displaced persons in the autonomous republics neighbouring Chechnya had decreased by more than 70 per cent, and approximately 60,000 internally displaced persons were believed to remain in Daghestan and Ingushetia, Russian Federation, during the winter. However, due to resumed fighting in south-eastern Chechnya, some 14,000 persons returned to Daghestan during the second half of December, thereby increasing the total internally displaced population to some 74,000. UNHCR should be able to cope with this new influx if it remains limited in scope and time, and its presence in Daghestan has been temporarily extended up to the end of March 1996. UNHCR will maintain its presence in Ingushetia and North Ossetia as an assistance programme is underway since October 1995, and will be pursued in 1996, for 38,000 Georgian refugees (from South Ossetia) hosted by North Ossetia, Russian Federation, and 40,000 Ingush displaced from North Ossetia, now living in Ingushetia.

Central and Eastern Europe

93. UNHCR's activities in Central and Eastern Europe continued to focus on protection, refugee law promotion, institution-building, training and limited assistance programmes for asylum-seekers and refugees where national structures do not exist and where national assistance is not adequate. Efforts centre on establishing fair and effective eligibility procedures to which asylum-seekers can have access. While the numbers of recognized refugees remain limited in Central Europe, most countries provide temporary protection to significant numbers of persons fleeing conflict areas in former Yugoslavia. Some refugees from former Yugoslavia expect to return, others view integration as a more realistic option.

94. UNHCR endeavours to assist the Governments in Central Europe in creating conditions conducive to integration. These countries are also affected by transit migration movements, which often blur the distinction between migrants and genuine asylum-seekers. Border controls have been intensified to stem irregular movements of people. Readmission agreements have been signed both between countries of the European Union and of Central Europe, and among Central European countries. UNHCR has also stepped up border missions to sensitize officials to the rights of refugees.

95. While all Central European States have become signatories to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, Slovakia and the Czech Republic are essentially the only countries that have so far adopted refugee legislation. UNHCR is providing technical assistance on the Czech citizenship and nationality laws in collaboration with the Council of Europe and other international organizations, in relation to *de jure* and *de facto* statelessness. UNHCR is further involved in discussion to amend the Polish draft aliens law, which has reached the final parliamentary stage, and the authorities have extended considerable cooperation in adjusting its provisions to UNHCR's recommendations. Enacting refugee legislation in Central European countries assumes additional importance in affording asylum-seekers access to eligibility procedures.

96. UNHCR continues to strengthen its cooperation with NGOs, not only through regular country-wide, joint training of NGO staff working in the field of refugees, but also through continuous contacts providing relevant information and legal advice, notably in cooperation with European Consultation on Refugees and Exile.

Former Yugoslavia

97. The political and military situation in the former Yugoslavia has improved dramatically in the past months and, at the time of writing, the region was steadily travelling on the road to

peace. This brief overview highlights the situation as at 15 December and reviews developments since October.

98. A cease-fire agreement brokered by the United States came into effect among the warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 12 October and has been generally holding.

99. This new situation has produced positive results for the Federation, where an agreement was reached between the Croat and Bosnian Government sides for the return of displaced persons to contested areas in Central Bosnia, as well as to Sector East in Croatia. A basic agreement was signed between Croatia and Serb authorities from Sector East on 12 November establishing a twelve-month transitional period and the conditions of security for the reintegration of the region under Croatian authority.

100. The Presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (for the Bosnian Serbs) signed on 21 November the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina which had been negotiated in Dayton, Ohio (USA), after intense negotiation. A Peace Implementation Conference was held in London on 8 and 9 December. UNHCR will continue to act as the lead agency in the humanitarian field and, in accordance with Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreement, will develop and implement in close consultation with the parties a repatriation plan that will allow the orderly return of refugees and displaced persons.

101. These developments have had a positive impact on the overall humanitarian situation, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina where UNHCR is currently reaching those in need more effectively than at any time during the war. Access to Sarajevo has improved dramatically following the reopening of the Blue Routes and the airlift. UNHCR and the High Level Working Group agreed that the air-bridge will carry whatever stock has been built up at Ancona by 10 December (up to 5,000 metric tons), before the operation is discontinued early next year.

102. Protection of minorities throughout the region remains one of UNHCR's major objectives. UNHCR issued a strong statement on the involuntary relocation of displaced persons to the newly gained areas.

103. Particular efforts have been made in the Kuplensko Camp, where a permanent UNHCR presence has provided overall assistance to some 20,000 former inhabitants of the Bosnian Bihac enclave loyal to Bosnian separatist leader Fikret Abdic. On 30 October UNHCR started a bus service from the camp to Velika Kladusa, Bihac, in order to enable those wishing to return home to do so. By 15 December over 4,200 refugees had returned to Velika Kladusa from the camp, in most cases back to their houses, using the bus service or their own means of transport.

104. A revised United Nations Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeal for the former Yugoslavia, to meet emergency humanitarian needs during the winter (January to April 1996), was issued on 20 November, to assist 3.3 million beneficiaries. UNHCR requirements amount to \$ 70.9 million.

VII. SOUTH WEST ASIA, NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Afghanistan

Operations

105. During 1996-1997, UNHCR will continue to intensify activities in the safe areas of Afghanistan so as to create conditions conducive to repatriation. The Office of the Chief of Mission in Afghanistan will facilitate repatriation through the provision of direct assistance at the time of return and by responding to essential needs in an attempt to promote successful reintegration.

106. Assistance with return from neighbouring countries will comprise a package of cash

(UNHCR), food (WFP) and transportation (IOM). The provision of individual assistance to returnees will shift to locations inside Afghanistan to ensure greater linkage between assistance and physical return. Transportation will be provided from the countries of asylum and within the country of origin by IOM. Additional routes from Pakistan to the neighbouring provinces in Afghanistan will be established to facilitate return to nearby peaceful destinations. Return from the Islamic Republic of Iran will be augmented with arrangements for returnees to transit through Turkmenistan (owing to poor road conditions in north-west Afghanistan) for final destinations in northern Afghanistan.

107. In order to improve conditions in Afghanistan, UNHCR, in collaboration with other United Nations Agencies, will implement projects, mainly QIPs, which repair basic infrastructure, revitalize economic activity, encourage regional stability and support the continued return of refugees and displaced persons to their areas of origin. In rural areas experiencing high repatriation, shelter, water, crop production and irrigation will be among the highest priorities. In urban areas, activities will focus on sanitation, community services, education and income generation.

108. During the period 1998-2000, UNHCR rehabilitation activities in Afghanistan will decrease as the development-oriented United Nations agencies and bilateral programmes enter a transitional phase from relief to development. UNHCR presence will primarily focus on the residual caseload in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in pursuit of a durable solution through promotion of repatriation or local settlement. Reintegration activities will target assistance primarily on protection-related issues through capacity building with local authorities.

Programme Delivery

109. It is anticipated that by mid-1998, security conditions will permit the Office of the Chief of Mission in Kabul to resume full operations in Afghanistan and conclude its presence in Pakistan for other than logistical support. Sub-offices will remain fully staffed and operational through late 1998, at which point consideration of continued presence will be determined by remaining caseload and progress on local settlement in the neighbouring countries of asylum.

Algeria

110. With improved security conditions in Mali, some 7,000 Malian refugees have repatriated spontaneously, while another 700 returned in three organized pilot repatriations in October, November and December. A fourth organized movement is scheduled for January. In September, 6,000 Malian and Niger refugees moved into three centres erected by the Algerian authorities to accommodate them.

111. Since March 1994, staff security concerns have dictated a situation wherein expatriate staff of all United Nations Agencies live and work at a hotel while national staff, out of their own choice, continue to work at the United Nations building downtown. The Branch Office has had consequently to limit the reception of urban asylum-seekers.

112. A joint food assessment UNHCR-WFP mission for Western Saharan refugees in Tindouf is scheduled to take place as of mid-December 1995.

113. The Security Council was at the time of writing still discussing a draft resolution supporting the Secretary-General's report of 24 November 1995 recommending the continuation of the identification process which has come to a virtual halt due to persistent disagreement between the Moroccan Government and the Frente Polisario. UNHCR is prepared to resume the preparatory works in the MINURSO operation area at any given time, including the signing of an agreement with AICF for the implementation of an evaluation of water requirements for returning refugees, a survey of existing sources and a prospective drilling programme around potential

repatriation sites in the eastern part of the territory, where water resources are scarce. Both sides have cooperated with the efforts of UNHCR, and have pledged their support in ensuring the smooth repatriation of refugees after the start of the transitional period.

Central Asian Republics

114. UNHCR continued to pursue its preventive strategy in Central Asia by obtaining a greater understanding of potential and actual regional population movements, assisting in the institution and capacity building of operational partners, and promoting the establishment and administration of legislation which could effectively deal with regional population movements. In addition, UNHCR maintains its ongoing operations to provide protection and find durable solutions for refugees. Principal UNHCR activities during the reporting period included:

- (a) The initiation in November of the first United Nations construction projects in Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan. The projects, which will assist in the resettlement of Afghan and Tajik refugees, include the construction of a school, water pipelines and the provision of building materials.
- (b) The successful voluntary repatriation of some 100 Tajik refugees from Afghanistan through Turkmenistan. The refugees were flown from Turkmenistan to Tajikistan as they were not permitted to transit through Uzbekistan.
- (c) The provision of technical assistance to the Governments in the region to promote their accession and effective implementation of international instruments relating to refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

Egypt

115. By mid-October, 1,036 Palestinians expelled from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya were left stranded at the border with Egypt. To complement the tented area established by the Libyan authorities, which contained minimal facilities, UNHCR Egypt organized an emergency relief operation, furnishing one month's supply of food, water, blankets, clothing, soap and cooking utensils. MSF-Belgium brought in medical provisions.

116. While the permission granted by the Libyan leader at end-October allowing the group to remain for up to six months until the Palestinian authorities came up with a solution provided a respite, 106 Palestinians - mainly families with Egyptian documents, or those with no means of livelihood or accommodation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya - remained at the border at the time of writing.

Islamic Republic of Iran

117. UNHCR continued to assist Afghan and Iraqi refugees in camps, and also supported the Government in procuring international relief supplies, essential drugs and vehicles. UNHCR Tehran introduced a new programme to expand its capacity to meet needs of vulnerable Afghan refugees by opening medical and community services facilities in ten cities with large refugee populations. As for the Iraqi refugees, the last group of Shiite Arabs were accommodated in two new camps in the south, while the repatriation of the Iraqi Kurds did not see much progress.

118. The Government is now candid about its limited capacity to deal with the 2 million refugees in the country, and has been demanding more support from the international community. It closed its borders with Iraq and Afghanistan to asylum-seekers. UNHCR during the last quarter of 1995 has responded positively to the Government's repeated request for having a regional approach to the refugee problem by initiating a study.

Iraq

119. In Northern Iraq ongoing fratricidal fighting between the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK) and the repeated incursions of Turkish military forces into Northern Iraq, compounded by the most recent clashes between the KDP and the Kurdish Workers Party of Turkey (PKK), have contributed to a dramatic deterioration of the general security situation in the area. By November all refugees had moved to Atroush B camp, which now regroups 15,000 persons, and where there is improved security monitoring by the local authorities.

120. The Office has continued its mediation between the Governments of Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran with a view to creating the conditions necessary for the voluntary repatriation of refugee populations still living on the respective territories of the two countries. A Memorandum of Understanding signed by both Governments plans the voluntary repatriation by each country of 7,000 refugees. On the Iraqi side, UNHCR has registered some 7,000 Iranian refugees in southern Iraq willing to repatriate voluntarily, and has handed over these lists to the Iraqi authorities.

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

121. For many years, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has hosted large numbers of foreigners, who have been attracted by the Government's open-door policy. However, with United Nations sanctions and the concomitant increase in social problems, poverty and unemployment taking their toll on the fate of the estimated 2 million foreigners currently in the country, the Government has reversed its open-door policy and instead decided to expel all foreigners 'illegally resident in the country. Among those affected are almost certainly persons who would qualify for refugee status, but who had not applied because of the liberal entry policies in effect. Many such cases have been approaching UNHCR directly in recent months. The Libyan Government, however, associating UNHCR with the United Nations sanctions, has requested UNHCR to refrain from registering asylum-seekers and granting asylum status.

Mauritania

122. To date 7,000 refugees from Mali have registered with UNHCR for voluntary repatriation, 4,000 persons have already spontaneously repatriated and another 621 have returned in free UNHCR-organized movements. A UNHCR Emergency Team staff-member has been sent on a six-week mission to the countries hosting refugees from Mali in order to prepare a plan of operations for their repatriation.

123. In mid-December, a joint UNHCR-Mauritanian Red Crescent team went to the areas of origin of Mauritians who still reside in Senegal and who may wish to repatriate in 1996.

Pakistan

124. During 1995, parallel to the repatriation operation, the rationalization process to change the Afghan refugee programme from a cost-ineffective general camp assistance to targeted assistance to the vulnerable groups continued throughout the year. Many of the services provided in the camps (e.g. water supply, health, primary education) are planned to be continued by the refugees themselves through camp committees. In order to achieve this objective, suitable agencies and provincial government departments are participating in the handover process. General food distribution to the camps by WFP was discontinued at the end of September 1995, and only targeted beneficiaries receive edible oil. As a result, the highly inflated number of ration cards are no longer valid, and there has been a significant reduction in the care and maintenance budget. The Government is seriously concerned at the phasing out of international assistance despite the presence of more than one million Afghan refugees. The Government has officially stated that there will be no local settlement of the Afghan refugees. It has voiced its concern over the refugee population movement from the camps to the urban centres seeking income and job opportunities.

Saudi Arabia

125. Saudi Arabia continued to assist 13,423 Iraqi refugees in Rafha camp. During October, 702 persons left Rafha for resettlement, mostly to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Norway, Sweden and Australia. Another 236 refugees repatriated voluntarily to Iraq on 2 October.

Tajikistan

126. Following the completion of the objectives of its operation in Tajikistan, and pursuant to its commitment to ensure the transition to longer-term rehabilitation and development, UNHCR has continued to harmonize its activities with the UNDP Plan of Action. This includes modalities for partnership with NGOs in the implementation of these activities, and promotion of the role of NGOs in the definition of programme parameters or as independent agents in for specific sectors of assistance.

127. The OSCE has successfully taken over the monitoring of the rights of returnees and internally displace persons and liaises with UNHCR when needed. UNHCR still handles the repatriation of refugees from Afghanistan. Small numbers continue to return from both Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz.

Yemen

128. Some 420 Somalis were deported from Aden to Bosasso in August following the adoption by the Yemeni Government of a stricter policy towards illegal aliens. A joint UNHCR-Government registration committee was established with the objective of identifying the current caseload of refugees residing in the country. UNHCR's support to the exercise will include provision of technical, financial and human resource assistance. At present, UNHCR is assisting actively some 13,500 registered Somali refugees, mainly in southern Yemen.

129. UNHCR Yemen has facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 166 Somali refugees to Berbera, North-West Somalia, on 1 November. A pilot repatriation project for 1,500 Somali refugees is under consideration.

130. In close cooperation with the Government, UNHCR has been involved preparing the construction of a camp for some 10,000 Somali refugees at Shuqra, some 100 kilometres east of Aden.