

Foreword

by the High Commissioner for Refugees

The 2001 Global Report provides a detailed description of UNHCR programmes and activities funded through last year's Global Appeal. This was my first year as High Commissioner, and in many ways it was a year of transition for the organisation.

2001 was an important milestone, as it marked the 50th Anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Using the opportunity to reflect on how to revitalise the international framework for refugee protection, a process of Global Consultations on International Protection was launched at the end of 2000 and continued through-



The High Commissioner visiting Afghan refugees in Pakistan. *De Telegraaf / L. Hiemstra*

out 2001. This proved to be a unique consultative process, bringing together representatives of States from all regions of the world, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, academics and refugees themselves. It will end in 2002, and will generate an Agenda for Protection for the years to come. I hope that this will contribute greatly to the effective protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless people and other people of concern to my Office.

In December 2001, as part of the Global Consultations process, a meeting of States Parties to the Convention and Protocol took place in Geneva. This was the first such gathering of States Parties in five decades. Attended by 162 States, including 76 represented at Ministerial level,

the gathering adopted a landmark Declaration of States Parties which breaks new ground in a number of areas. Its importance should not be under-estimated. A few years ago, the Convention was under attack. A number of States were arguing that it was out of date. This is no longer the case. Now, no one is questioning the Convention's continuing relevance and validity.

Although conflict and persecution caused new population movements in some countries – particularly in Africa, the Caucasus and parts of South America – there were no new refugee emergencies on the scale of some of the previous years. UNHCR's emergency response capacity was nevertheless tested on several occasions in the course of the year – first in West Africa, then in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and finally in the countries bordering Afghanistan.

Following the events of September 11, UNHCR made contingency plans for a major outflow of refugees from Afghanistan. In spite of the insistence of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other neighbouring countries on keeping their borders with Afghanistan officially closed, UNHCR played an active role in encouraging them to provide temporary protection for the most vulnerable and in assisting them to meet their needs.

For many years, Afghans constituted the world's largest refugee population. With the fall of the Taliban regime and the establishment of an Afghan Interim Administration, new opportunities arose to address this massive problem of human displacement. At the end of 2001, UNHCR published its plan to assist with the voluntary return and reintegration of up to 1.25 million returnees in 2002, including both returning refugees and internally displaced persons. To fund this, UNHCR requested USD 271 million for the period from November 2001 to the end of December 2002.

The search for durable solutions for refugees and other people of concern to my Office – and particularly for those in protracted situations – remains a top priority. Globally, the number of refugees and internally displaced who returned in 2001 amounted to some 700,000, which is relatively low. However, there were several encouraging developments in the course of the year, which hold prospects for more and larger returns in the foreseeable future.

In West Africa, some 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees repatriated from neighbouring countries. In Eritrea, after many years in exile, some 36,000 refugees returned to their homes from Sudan. Another successful repatriation was the return of over 50,000 refugees from Ethiopia to North-west and North-east Somalia. Our challenge, now, is to ensure that these returns are sustainable. It is in this context that we are encouraging development actors to invest in areas of return, so that returnees can rebuild their lives and engage in productive activities.

There were also a number of positive developments elsewhere. For example, in Southern Serbia, UNHCR played a role in preventing new violence by promoting measures such as the creation of a multi-ethnic police force. In The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, of the 170,000 people who were displaced by fighting during the year, UNHCR assisted more than 80 percent to return to their homes. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, some 100,000 refugees and internally displaced returned home to areas controlled by opposing ethnic factions during 2001, which is more than any other year since the peace agreements were signed. Finally, in the case of East Timor, another 18,000 refugees repatriated during 2001, bringing the total number of returns to some 194,000.

UNHCR's operations in 2001 continued to be constrained by funding problems. Although a budget of USD 898.5 million was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2000, donors soon made it clear that this was not fundable. One of my first priorities as High Commissioner was therefore to undertake an internal review of the organisation – which became known as the "Actions 1, 2 and 3" process – to define its optimum profile and size, and to analyse its funding base. This process resulted in a substantial reduction in the 2001 budget as well as in the number of staff posts, and the closure of some field offices.

I hope that this Global Report will serve not only as a review of UNHCR's activities over the last year, but also as an indicator of possible future needs and potential trouble spots. If we are to improve conditions for many of the 19.8 million people of concern to my Office, we must continue to heighten the world's sense of responsibility towards these people.



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