

# The Middle East

## Major developments

Conflict in Iraq, regional resentment of the Coalition intervention, and lack of progress on the Israel-Palestine issue resulted in another turbulent year for the Middle East.

At the end of April, the United States Government released a "Road Map" for a permanent two-state solution for the Israel-Palestine issue in the Middle East. By the end of what proved to be another violent year in the region, however, little progress had been made.

For the first three months of the year, UN weapons inspections continued in Iraq, alongside international diplomatic efforts to resolve the situation. On 20 March, the Coalition bombardment of Iraq began. In May, following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist Government, United Nations international staff returned to Iraq to embark on humanitarian and reconstruction programmes. Also in May, suicide bombers struck compounds housing foreigners in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

On 19 August, a bomb attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad killed 22 persons and resulted in the

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syrian Arab Republic

United Arab Emirates

Yemen



United Nations withdrawing all international personnel from the country. By the end of the year, Iraq was being administered by the Coalition Provisional Authority. An Iraqi Governing Council had been established and ministers appointed. Security remained poor, however, particularly in the south and centre of the country.

## Challenges and concerns

The year was, inevitably, dominated by events in and around Iraq, and by Israel/Palestine. As described in the Iraq chapter of this report, UNHCR and its partners spent the first part of the year preparing for a possible outflow of Iraqi refugees to neighbouring countries.

When the Government collapsed in May, Iraqis who had sought asylum in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Syria began to approach UNHCR with requests for repatriation assistance – despite continued insecurity in Iraq. By the end of 2003, some 9,000 people had returned to Iraq with help from UNHCR. Of these, almost 5,000 came from Rafha Camp in Saudi Arabia, 4,000 from camps in the western part of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a small group (16 people) from Lebanon.

UNHCR has been urgently seeking solutions for two groups of people who left Iraq before or during the conflict. Several hundred Palestinians left Baghdad for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where some 400 were accommodated in a tented camp in the desert near the border with Iraq. A larger group of Iranian Kurds left the Al-Tash camp near the city of Ramadi, west of Baghdad, and lived in a tented camp in No Man’s Land between the borders of Iraq and Jordan.

In Lebanon, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the General Security Office (yet to be endorsed by Lebanon’s Council of Ministers). This marked a significant enhancement of the organization’s working relationship with the Lebanese authorities, providing a framework for the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers there.

Restrictions imposed on resettlement in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001 continued to slow down the process, and in 2003 the list of people waiting to be resettled grew longer.

Although only a few of the countries in the subregion had acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention by 2003, the presence of asylum-seekers and refugees was generally tolerated while their status was being determined. While the task of determining

refugee status continued to fall exclusively on UNHCR, the organization was also expected to provide humanitarian assistance for the duration of the RSD process. Successful applicants were also entitled to assistance from UNHCR while waiting to be moved. As the waiting list grew, the Office found itself providing for a growing number of people – precisely at a time when funding had become more difficult.

## Progress towards solutions

Against the backdrop of events in Iraq, UNHCR continued to promote accession by the Governments in the region to the 1951 Refugee Convention, to provide training in refugee-related issues and to carry out RSD activities for non-Iraqi refugees. At UNHCR's request, neighbouring countries introduced a temporary protection regime involving a ban on the forced return of Iraqis: with rare exceptions, the ban was maintained.

The Government of Yemen agreed to resume discussions with UNHCR about its new Refugee Law, and UNHCR started to revise the draft constitution of a national refugee body for the country.

The Tenth Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit Meeting adopted Resolution 16-10 on refugees in the Muslim world. The text reflects

amendments introduced by UNHCR, including a call to OIC member States to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and to convene a ministerial conference in coordination with UNHCR in 2004.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Sudanese peace process could offer new hope for Sudanese refugees currently living in the Middle East.

Efforts to enhance protection and assistance to refugee women and children throughout the region were strengthened by the appointment of community services officers in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen under the guidance of a senior regional community services officer based in Beirut.

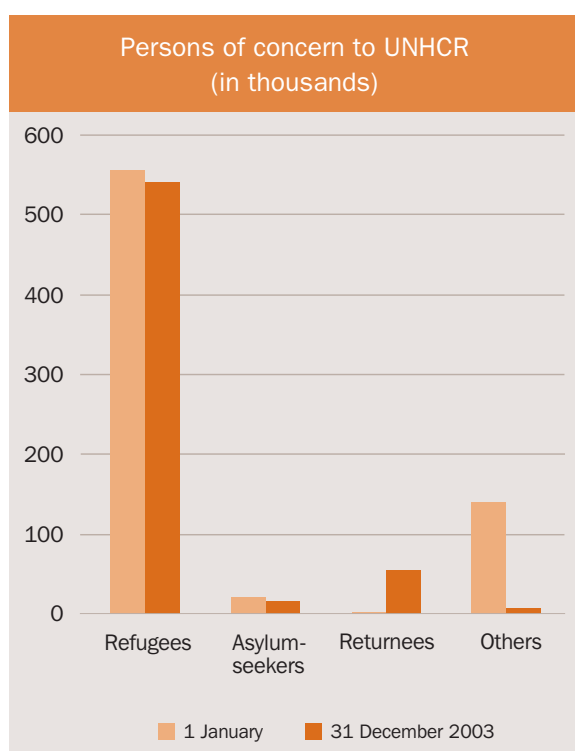
UNHCR sought to raise public awareness of its activities and concerns via the creation of a UNHCR web site in Arabic, and the continuing work of Goodwill Ambassador Adel Imam.

## Operations

At the end of 2003, **Egypt** was host to some 18,750 refugees, including some 120, mostly elderly stateless persons who sought refuge in the country during the early part of the last century. In 2003, some 3,500 refugees left Egypt for resettlement to third countries and 77 returned voluntarily to their countries of origin.

Much of the focus was on RSD, mostly of Sudanese asylum-seekers. This resulted in an increased number of recognized refugees requiring care and maintenance assistance. During 2003, UNHCR assisted an average of 8,000 refugees per month with subsistence allowances to cover some of their living costs, such as accommodation, food and other needs, as well as some medical and educational assistance. UNHCR sought to address the basic needs of some 8,000 vulnerable urban refugees, focusing particularly on the needs of children. It continued to work with partners to foster more sustainable approaches to refugee self-reliance, including vocational training, incorporating job placements in such areas as car mechanics, carpentry and electronics.

UNHCR also conducted several workshops on refugee protection for officials from the key government ministries.



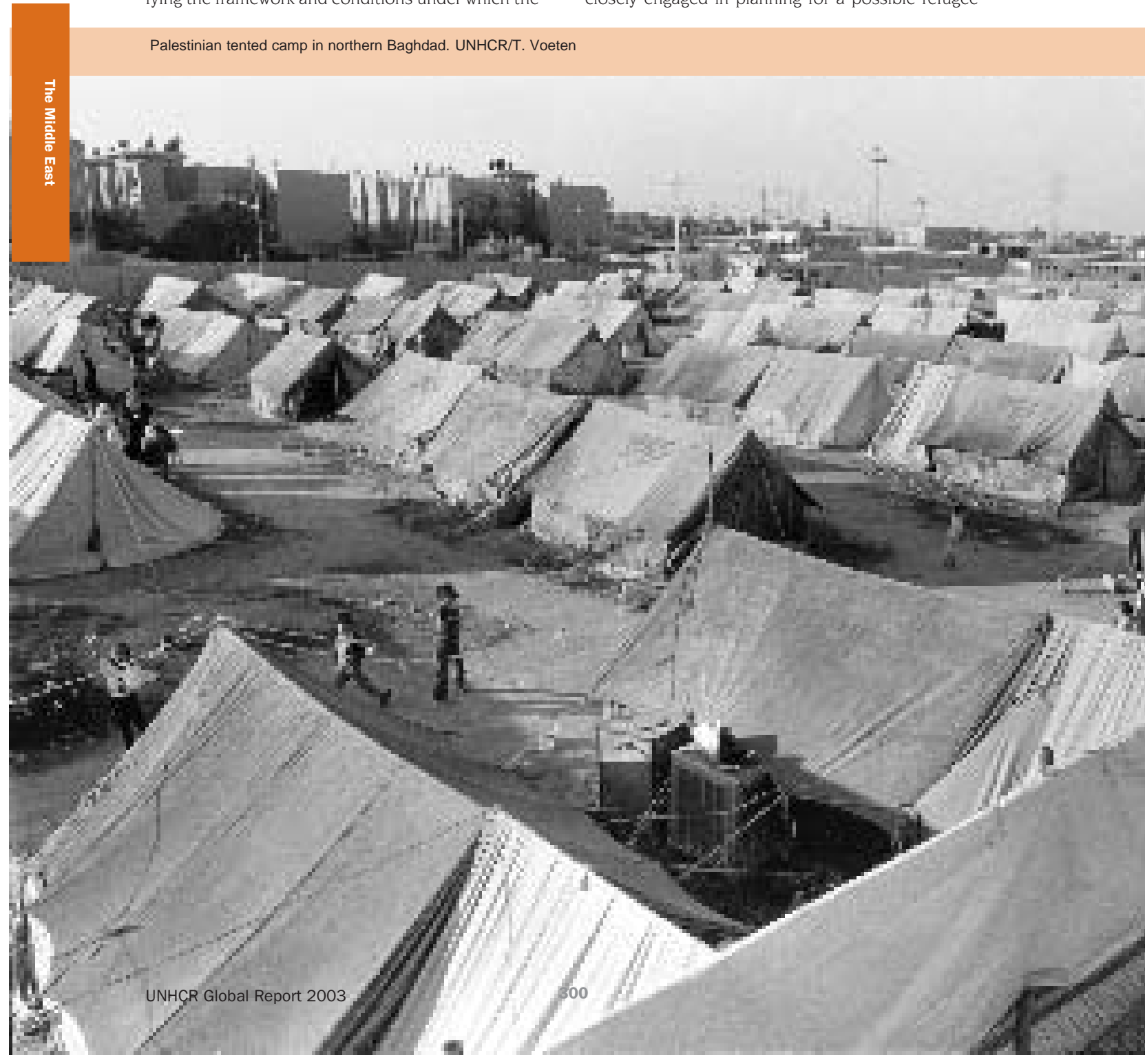
UNHCR's office in **Jordan** contributed extensively to the emergency preparations prior to the conflict in Iraq, responding to the needs of hundreds of people, mostly Palestinian and Iranian Kurds, who left the country just before and during the conflict. Some 400 Palestinians were allowed to enter Jordan, on the ground that they were married to Jordanian nationals, while others were accommodated in the Ruwayshed camp near the border. The Iranian Kurds, meanwhile, were obliged to remain in a camp in No Man's land, between the borders of Iraq and Jordan. UNHCR and NGOs provided basic humanitarian assistance, but conditions in the desert camps remained harsh. UNHCR and the Government signed a Letter of Understanding (LOU) specifying the framework and conditions under which the

Government would provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees in Jordan, with support from UNHCR. The main focus of the LOU is the Ruwayshed camp. At the same time, UNHCR continued to carry out RSD for non-Iraqi asylum-seekers, and provided care and maintenance for 1,000 other refugees.

Following the attacks on the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August, UNHCR's Amman office provided space for relocated international staff, to enable them to support operations in central and northern Iraq from Jordan.

In **Kuwait**, UNHCR was, in the early part of the year, closely engaged in planning for a possible refugee

Palestinian tented camp in northern Baghdad. UNHCR/T. Voeten



exodus from Iraq, and has continued to provide logistical support to the Iraq operation. The Kuwait office was instrumental in setting up the new UNHCR office in Basra in summer 2003, and then, when international staff were relocated from offices inside Iraq, provided accommodation and office space to the Basra team. The Kuwait office also monitored the return of Iraqis repatriating via Kuwait from Saudi Arabia. The Government of Kuwait donated USD two million towards UNHCR's work in Iraq in 2003.

Meanwhile, activities on behalf of the 1,500 Iraqi, Palestinian, Somali and Afghan refugees included legal counselling for the 1,600 stateless people living in the kingdom. The focus in Kuwait was on strengthening the existing

structure for international protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, and raising the level of tolerance and awareness of local authorities in dealing with these groups. Two Iraqi refugees were resettled from Kuwait during the year.

In **Lebanon**, RSD procedures for non-Iraqi (mostly Somali and Sudanese) refugees continued. The MOU signed with the General Security Office in September covered registered refugees' right to temporary residence, their freedom of movement, and identity cards for them. During the year, some 490 people were resettled from Lebanon. A number of Iraqis repatriated between May and December, the majority on convoys organized by the Iraqi Embassy in

Beirut and the General Security Office. Some 70 individuals were known to UNHCR. Meanwhile, 16 Iraqi Kurds who had been stranded between the Israeli and Lebanese borders since August 2001 returned to northern Iraq with assistance from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

By the end of 2003, almost all of the 5,000 Iraqi refugees remaining in the Rafha Camp in **Saudi Arabia** had returned to Iraq under a voluntary repatriation programme jointly organized by the Governments of **the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Kuwait, UNHCR and the authorities in Iraq.**

Inter-ministerial committee discussions regarding accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention did not achieve much progress in 2003, but it is hoped that they will resume discussions in 2004. In an effort to promote the concepts of asylum, humanitarian assistance, and other refugee-related issues in the region, UNHCR and the Naif Academy of Security Sciences concluded a cooperation agreement in March 2003. A similar agreement is being set up with the Gulf Cooperation Council. NGOs from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States provided financial and other support to UNHCR's operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A number of "third country nationals" moved to the **Syrian Arab Republic** from Iraq early in the conflict. They were accommodated in the El Hol refugee camp until IOM facilitated their transportation back to their home countries.

The majority of the 2,600 mostly urban refugees in Syria are Iraqi (1,500), the rest being Somali, Sudanese and Iranian. It is estimated, however, that a further 70,000 Iraqis are living in the country. During the summer months, some 5,700 Iraqis approached UNHCR requesting repatriation assistance, but following the withdrawal of international staff, plans for organized returns were put on hold.

Throughout the year, UNHCR provided legal and social counselling for refugees and gave clothing and school equipment to needy refugee children (who received free education from the State). By the end of 2003, the Damascus office had 140 resettlement cases pending – more than half were Iraqis, the remainder mostly Somali and Sudanese. Plans were under way to establish a legal clinic in 2004.



The development of national asylum legislation in **Yemen** will be a major step forward. Looking ahead, the next challenge will be to increase national capacity to implement the refugee legislation as soon as it is passed. To that end, a number of training workshops were carried out in 2003. Meanwhile, UNHCR and the Government carried out a registration exercise in 11 governorates, providing refugees with legal documentation. Refugees continued to arrive in Yemen throughout the year, mostly from Somalia. New arrivals were provided with basic food, shelter and emergency health-care assistance. The majority, however, simply transited in Yemen, moving on to more affluent States in the region and further afield.

## Funding

The funding situation was tight in 2003. Assistance programmes in Egypt were reduced, and beneficiary selection processes became increasingly stringent.

Voluntary contributions - Restricted / Earmarked (USD)					
Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Donor	Annual programme budget		Supplementary programme budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
<b>Egypt</b>					
	United States of America	218,000	218,000	0	0
<b>Iraq</b>					
	Germany	0	0	1,084,599	1,084,599
	Pioneer Gulf, Dubai (UAE)	0	0	5,000	5,000
<b>Jordan</b>					
	Australia	0	0	909,091	909,091
	Luxembourg	296,912	296,912	0	0
	Switzerland	0	0	759,259	759,259
	United States of America	104,000	104,000	0	0
<b>Middle East</b>					
	<i>Association Française de Soutien à l'UNHCR (FRA)</i>	0	0	4,020	4,020
	Australia for UNHCR (AUL)	0	0	903	903
	Austria	0	0	114,025	114,025
	Canada	0	0	4,620,345	4,620,345
	Chile	0	0	10,000	10,000
	Czech Republic	0	0	68,185	68,185

Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Donor	Annual programme budget		Supplementary programme budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
	Denmark	0	0	578,035	578,035
	<i>Deutsche Stiftung</i> (GFR)	0	0	215,285	215,285
	France	0	0	1,177,856	1,177,856
	Germany	0	0	3,229,279	3,229,279
	Greece	0	0	300,000	300,000
	Gulf Execution Committee (JPN)	0	0	21,187	21,187
	Japan	0	0	2,860,345	2,860,345
	Japan Association for UNHCR (JPN)	1,797	1,797	34,256	34,256
	JTUC-RENGO (JPN)	0	0	27,027	27,027
	Kuwait	0	0	2,006,308	2,006,308
	Liechtenstein	0	0	37,037	37,037
	Netherlands	0	0	2,000,000	2,000,000
	New Zealand	0	0	275,050	275,050
	Norway	0	0	14,583	14,583
	Pavarotti and Friends (ITA)	0	0	2,336,932	2,336,932
	Private donors Andorra	0	0	2,010	2,010
	Private donors Austria	0	0	3,837	3,837
	Private donors Canada	0	0	34	34
	Private donors China	0	0	60	60
	Private donors Greece	0	0	3,534	3,534
	Private donors Hungary	0	0	443	443
	Private donors Italy	0	0	2,159	2,159
	Private donors Japan	0	0	83,333	83,333
	Private donors Korea	0	0	1,190	1,190
	Private donors United States of America	0	0	350	350
	Republic of Korea	0	0	1,460,629	1,460,629
	Spain	0	0	3,263,102	3,660,323
	<i>Stichting Vluchteling</i> (NET)	0	0	115,207	115,207
	Sweden	3,420,753	3,420,753	0	0
	Switzerland	0	0	220,588	220,588
	Turkey	0	0	100,000	100,000
	UK for UNHCR (GBR)	0	0	11,356	11,356
	UN OCHA	0	0	1,887,028	1,887,028
	United Kingdom	0	0	2,777,778	2,777,778
	United States of America	3,800,000	3,800,000	28,100,000	28,100,000

Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Donor	Annual programme budget		Supplementary programme budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
	UNOPS	0	0	15,693,440	15,693,440
	USA for UNHCR (USA)	0	0	83,460	83,460
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>					
	Saudi Arabia	177,971	148,337	0	0
<b>Syria</b>					
	Switzerland	0	0	370,370	370,370
	United States of America	160,000	160,000	0	0
<b>Yemen</b>					
	Italy	114,025	114,025	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,293,458</b>	<b>8,263,824</b>	<b>76,868,515</b>	<b>77,265,736</b>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the donor profiles.

### Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total
Egypt	3,527,960	0	3,527,960	3,381,321	0	3,381,321
Iraq	3,426,660	37,737,663	41,164,323	2,625,916	20,797,854	23,423,770
Israel	79,000	0	79,000	78,257	0	78,257
Jordan	1,527,920	5,060,461	6,588,381	1,489,160	4,720,643	6,209,803
Lebanon	2,973,050	617,890	3,590,940	2,572,466	152,912	2,725,378
Saudi Arabia	1,651,387	1,271,238	2,922,625	1,533,183	865,407	2,398,590
Syrian Arab Republic	1,651,646	981,796	2,633,442	1,339,501	536,366	1,875,867
Yemen	3,989,668	0	3,989,668	3,667,291	0	3,667,291
Regional projects <sup>1</sup>	0	29,668,720	29,668,720	0	18,597,465	18,597,465
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,827,291</b>	<b>75,337,768</b>	<b>94,165,059</b>	<b>16,687,095</b>	<b>45,670,647</b>	<b>62,357,742</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes contingency plans for the situation in Iraq and neighbouring countries, reintegration and repatriation of Iraqi refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, as well as in-kind contributions for the situation in Iraq.

Note: The Supplementary programme budgets do not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.