

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Support the Government in the implementation of a national refugee legislation and the establishment of a National Eligibility Commission.
- Assist the Government with refugee registration and the issuance of legal documents to all refugees in the country.
- Promote local settlement activities and facilitate voluntary repatriation, when feasible, for Angolan refugees from Cabinda.
- Provide humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR).
- Provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
- Promote local settlement assistance to urban refugees. Ensure asylum-seekers with free and fair access to refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.
- Undertake reception and reintegration of Congolese returnees, mainly from Gabon and DRC.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

The first half of 2002 was marked by a series of elections: constitutional, presidential and legislative. The elections can be seen as positive developments towards the revival of political life in the Republic of the Congo (RoC) and the development of full democracy following the signature of the peace agreements in December 1999. However, the renewed conflict between government forces and the “Ninja” rebels that flared up in the Pool Region in April, and is ongoing, has tempered such optimism. The conflict has perturbed and delayed the election process in the region, and caused the internal displacement of tens of thousands of people. Some 2,230 Congolese are known to have

fled across the borders into DRC. The heightened insecurity resulted in the implementation of precautionary UN security measures and increased prudence. Although the peace process in neighbouring DRC has not progressed as foreseen in order to allow repatriation, the military and political situation in Angola has developed positively during the first half of the year and is now expected to provide increased repatriation possibilities.

A tri-partite meeting on the repatriation of Rwandan refugees took place in March between the Governments of Rwanda, RoC and UNHCR. National refugee legislation was adopted in December 2001, but pending the establishment of the National Eligibility Commission (NEC), UNHCR continues to carry out RSD. Upon UNHCR’s recommendation, refugees are receiving identity cards and other documents such as birth certificates from the authorities. While waiting for the NEC to become operational, the *Commission Nationale d’assistance aux Réfugiés* (CNAR) has started preparing files for UNHCR’s evaluation and eventual submission to the NEC. However, the Government’s limited resources and capacity are limiting progress on registration, status determination, documentation and assistance. For the refugees from DRC, the lack of appropriate identification documents constitutes a serious problem affecting their freedom of movement and their ability to become self-sufficient. Security personnel often prevent refugees from transporting their products to local markets.

Some of the **Angolan refugees** residing in Pointe Noire have indicated their intention to return to Angola following the recent Angolan cease-fire agreement. This refugee group originates from the area of Cabinda where conflict still continues.

As of 30 June 2002, 3,430 of the 17,750 Angolan refugees were still receiving humanitarian assistance from UNHCR. The

aim is for refugees in the two allocated sites in Pointe Noire to attain self-sufficiency. During the reporting period, an evaluation of the living standards in the sites indicated that refugees would continue to need assistance for one to two more years, if they do not opt for repatriation. Following the evaluation, efforts are under way to energise the fragile integration process by focusing on agriculture, gardening and breeding. The progress achieved so far includes the establishment of a tree nursery for 3,200 fruit trees where environmental concerns were taken into consideration. Animal husbandry facilities (sheep, hens and pigs) were also installed at the refugee sites. In addition, two bakeries were set up, and a school and health centre were rehabilitated in one of the sites. 65 Angolan refugee students received tuition grants in the first half of 2002.

The deterioration of the vehicles used by UNHCR and its partners continued to be a major impediment to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Poor road conditions also hampered access to refugee sites during the rainy season.

The evolution of the political situation in DRC is not encouraging for the voluntary repatriation of **DRC refugees**, as was previously anticipated. Some 85,000 DRC refugees live among the local Congolese on the banks of the Oubangui River in Loukolela, Betou and Impfondo. Spontaneous settlements and the local integration of the refugees will be considered because of the close cultural and ethnic links that exist between the refugees and the local population.

Peaceful cohabitation between the local population and DRC refugees is imperative for local integration. A committee composed of UNHCR, the police, the administration and security authorities visited the sites in Impfondo. During these visits the authorities informed and sensitised refugees and the local population on useful methods and procedures for addressing the problems relating to the use of arable land. As of 30 June, 21 of the 50 sites had been visited. The local population and the refugees are now jointly discussing

the conditions for land cultivation, rather than simply discussing the access to land. Agreements between native landowners and refugees have been established, and the committee is helping refugees and nationals to draft and formalise their contracts and agreements. There is a possibility that this approach will also be implemented in Betou and Loukolela.

DRC refugees can make an adequate living from fishing in the dry season and agricultural activities during the rest of the year. UNHCR and its partners are also providing agricultural tools and fishing equipment to help refugees support themselves. Access to sufficient food in northern Congo has been a challenge since 1999, as insecurity in the area did not allow for the widespread distribution of food. Recent improvements in the security situation allowed for the undertaking of a joint UNHCR and WFP food assessment mission in May 2002. As a result, WFP extended its food distribution until the end of the year.

UNHCR provides the materials to support various income-generating activities such as the manufacturing of soap, palm oil, furniture and the processing of manioc to several co-operatives, mostly to those consisting of women. There are currently 49 refugee women co-operatives in Impfondo and 23 mixed co-operatives in Betou. In order to pursue the debate on gender issues and the role of refugee women, several activities were organised on International Women's Day and on World Refugee Day. Refugee women participated in sporting events and in animated conferences/debates, some of them receiving a prize for their efforts.

With education assistance being one of the main pillars of the programme, 44 primary schools were constructed or maintained in Impfondo, Loukolela and Betou for 13,230 refugee and 75 local Pygmy children. Regular controls were established to ensure the conformity of the refugee curriculum with the one that is used in the DRC. The DRC Government has agreed to run the national exams for primary education at the end of the school year for 720 refugees in three refugee

sites. Meanwhile, the validation of exams for secondary level students is underway. Furthermore, school kits and equipment have been provided to refugees in collaboration with UNICEF.

UNHCR will be able to access its refugee operations more quickly, as well as ensure better security for its staff, if needed, after the manual clearing of a landing strip 1600m long and 50m wide. Upon completion, this will become the new runway in Betou.

The registration of refugees is scheduled to take place in the second half of the year, but official legal documents have not yet been issued. The absence of these documents subjects the refugees to the risk of harassment within the country and is a major protection concern. UNHCR makes efforts to intervene on behalf of the refugees, when possible.

The topography of the refugee hosting area (dense forests, floods, swamps) and the climatic conditions of the region continue to impede the delivery of assistance. The infrastructure is poor and operational movements are limited to boat transportation. In addition, the current boat and vehicle fleets are old, and logistical support for the programme is inefficient. Security is another major constraint, frequently interrupting the movement of staff to refugee sites.

By the end of June 2002, Brazzaville hosted 3,430 urban refugees originating mainly from DRC, CAR, Rwanda, Burundi and Chad, as well as other countries. UNHCR's interventions addressed their needs for accommodation, domestic goods, health care and education. A micro-credit grants committee selected 30 beneficiaries among the refugees to work on projects, such as animal husbandry, sewing and carpentry. Training sessions were organised prior to the

disbursement of funds for their projects. pre-determined criteria for up to six months. During this time the refugees are expected to become sufficiently integrated and economically independent. The Office provided 245 refugee students with education assistance in the form of school fees, school materials, and uniforms. As a result of negotiations between UNHCR and the Congolese authorities, the Government agreed to lower the school fees for refugee students to the same amount paid by nationals.

Since the beginning of the year, UNHCR in co-ordination with international and national agencies helped reunite four unaccompanied minors with their families. The Office provided special counselling and mediation to reunited families. UNHCR transferred a group of 70 refugees from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire for their security. The Office promoted resettlement primarily for refugees in urgent need of protection. 20 refugees were admitted for resettlement to the USA and Canada.

A decade of war has led to a difficult political and economic situation in the RoC, affecting the integration of refugees in the country. Refugees did not find jobs easily and those who were involved in income-generating activities often faced difficulties in finding markets due to the general financial and economic stagnation.

The heightened tensions in the political and military environment in the RoC made many Congolese refugees less inclined to return to RoC. Hence, fewer **Congolese returnees** than expected repatriated from DRC from January to June 2002. To address this issue, UNHCR organised a mission with the Congolese authorities to Gabon, where there are a large number of Congolese refugees, to discuss recent developments in RoC with relevant counterparts and refugees.

Progress as measured against indicators

Impact/Performance Indicators	Actual Progress
Primary school refugee pupils receive educational assistance from UNHCR.	12,660 refugee children residing in RoC and some local children, attended primary education; over 800 participated in the nationwide final exam on primary education. UNHCR constructed or maintained 44 primary schools, of which two were constructed during the first half of the year and are already operational.
All asylum-seekers have access to refugee status determination procedures that are non-discriminatory and in accordance with international standards.	Refugee status determination is carried out by UNHCR. The Government adheres to UNHCR's recommendations. The structures (office space, hiring of staff and operational procedures) for the National Eligibility Commission (NEC) have been put into place but are not yet operational.
Improvement of refugees' corporal hygiene, with specific attention to women and children	25 tons of soap and hygienic sets have been distributed with particular attention to the needs of refugee women and children.
Assistance to vulnerable refugees is provided as a priority.	2,080 vulnerable refugees, including 100 unaccompanied minors were assisted; four were reunited with their families.
Access to arable land is granted.	A sensitisation campaign among the local population is under way in Impfondo; formal contracts regularising the use of land were finalised between refugees and national landowners.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

For the remainder of this year, UNHCR will pay particular attention to the following priorities:

- Co-operate closely with government

officials and local authorities to ensure the freedom of movement of refugees.

- Support NEC to become operational in order to provide all refugees with appropriate identification documents.
- Carry out the registration of refugees in close collaboration with the Government.

Financial Data (USD)

Annual Programme Budget			
Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available	Obligation Level
6,926,406	8,207,209	3,982,540	3,982,540