

REFUGEE CHILDREN: ESCAPE FROM PERSECUTION AND WAR



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Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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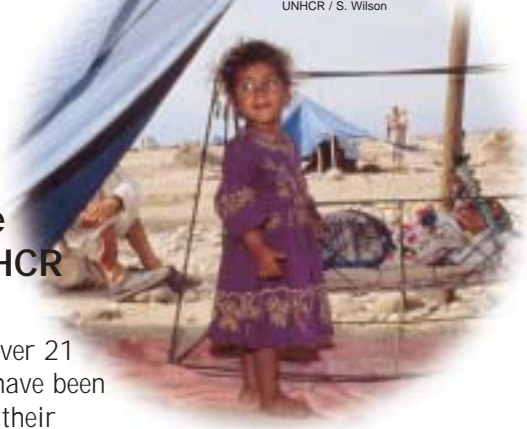


UNHCR / S. Wilson

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WHO ARE REFUGEE CHILDREN?

Every day, somewhere in the world, children become refugees. They flee their countries because their lives are in danger. If they stay, they risk being treated badly because of their race, religion, nationality or their parents' political beliefs. Perhaps they flee because their country is being torn apart by war. But young children usually don't understand the reasons... they are scared and they run. They take with them only a few things which they can carry. Often there is no room for their most precious possessions and often there is no time to gather them. Sometimes refugee children escape with only their dreams and hopes.





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1. Refugee children no longer have a home, nor a country. Sometimes, they have lost their families. They are children whose childhood has been torn away.

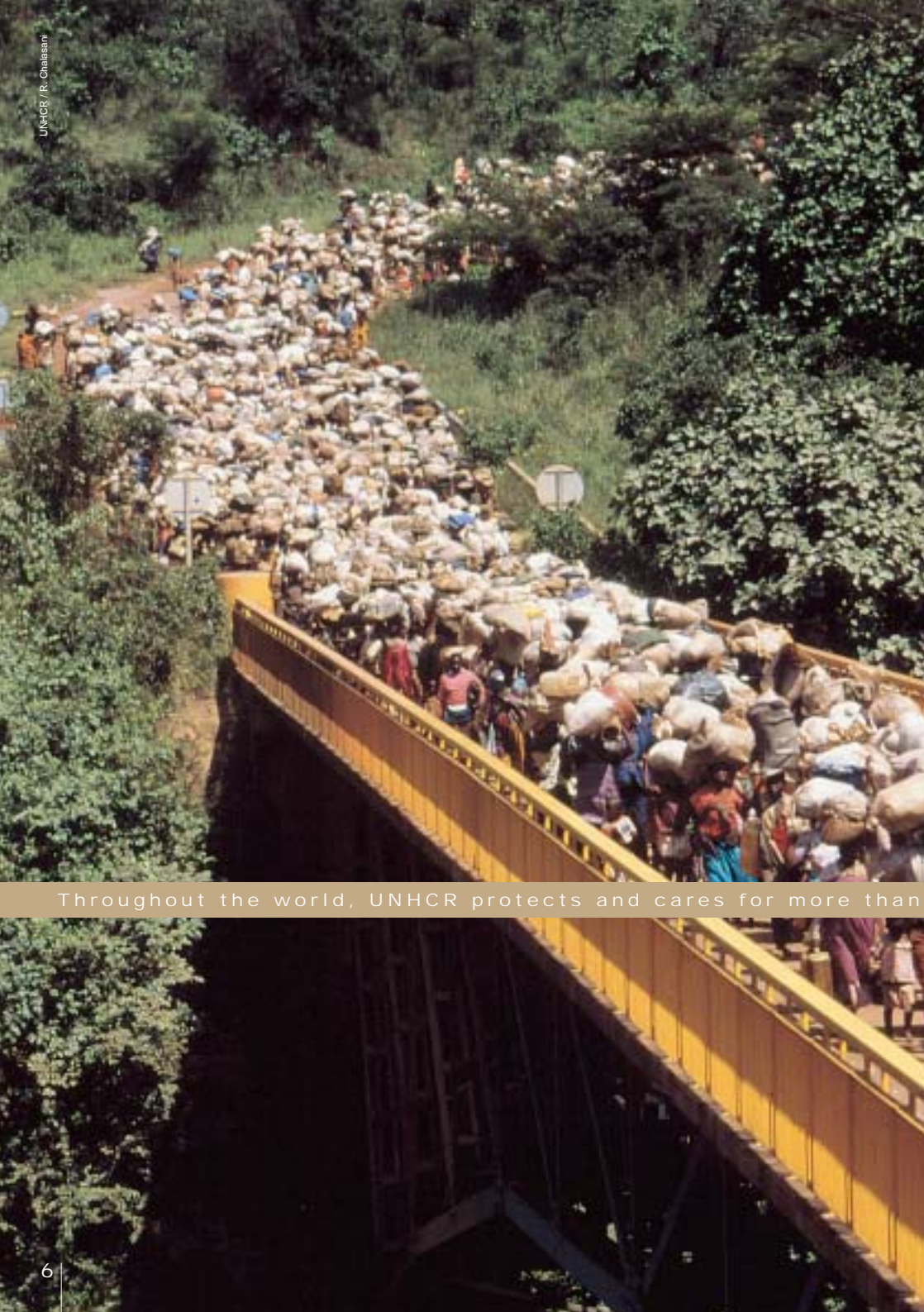
2. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) protects refugee children and cares for them.

Together with other organisations, UNHCR does all it can to give refugee children safety, food, water, shelter, health care, education and a reason to hope for the future.

2



UNHCR / L. Taylor



Throughout the world, UNHCR protects and cares for more than

UNHCR's main job is to protect refugees. The governments of many of the world's countries have agreed to grant **asylum** to refugees. To grant asylum means to offer protection in a safe country to people who are in danger in their own country.



THE PEOPLE UNHCR PROTECTS



UNHCR / B. Press



UNHCR / S. Wilson



UNHCR / K. Gooli

21 million people. Over half of those 21 million are *children*.

Asylum-seekers are people who have left their own country and have asked the government of their new country and UNHCR to consider them as refugees.

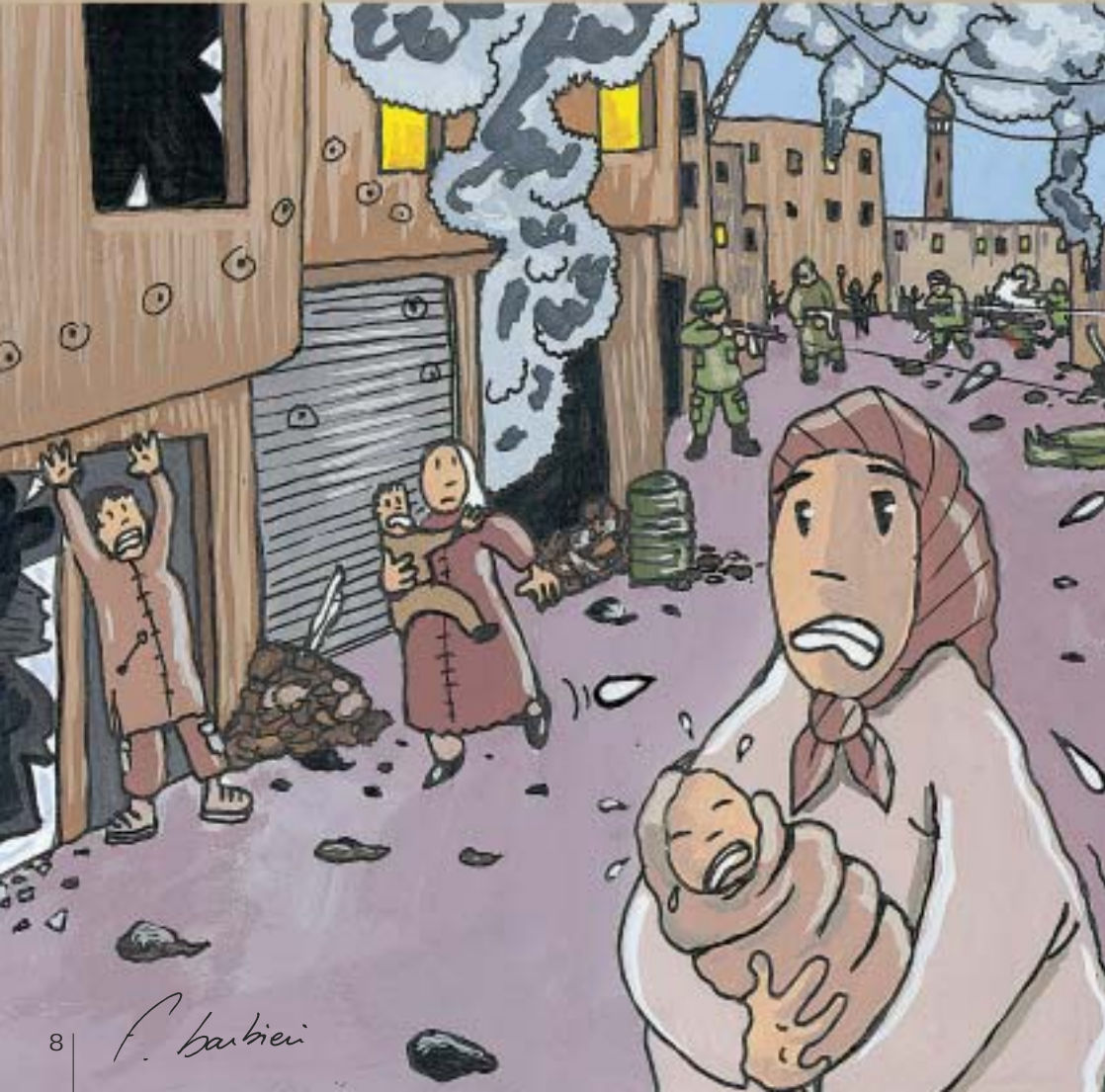
There are other people who have been forced to flee their homes for exactly the same reasons as refugees. They leave because they fear their lives are in danger. These people have not crossed any international borders and are still in their own countries. They are called **internally displaced people (IDPs)** and sometimes, UNHCR is asked to protect and assist them too. There are more IDPs in the world than there are refugees.

Refugees who have decided that it is safe to return to their home countries are called **returnees**.

UNHCR checks whether it is indeed safe enough for these people to go home and also assists them to rebuild their homes and their communities. One way of helping is by repairing important structures such as wells, schools, clinics and roads.

AMIN'S

AFGHANISTAN IS A DIVIDED COUNTRY. HOSTILE DESERTS AND TALL MOUNTAIN RANGES SEPARATE THE AREAS WHERE PEOPLE LIVE. THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES ARE DIVIDED INTO MANY ETHNIC GROUPS AND CLANS. IN 1979, THE FORCES OF THE SOVIET UNION INVADED AFGHANISTAN. MANY RESISTANCE FACTIONS, CALLED



ESCAPE



MUJAHEDIN, FOUGHT AGAINST THE SOVIET TROOPS DURING THE 1980s. WHEN THE SOVIET ARMY PULLED OUT OF AFGHANISTAN IN 1989, RESISTANCE FIGHTERS WHO HAD FOUGHT THEIR SOVIET INVADERS FOR TEN YEARS, BEGAN TO FIGHT AGAINST EACH OTHER TO GAIN CONTROL OF THEIR COUNTRY.




EUROPE

AFGHANISTAN
Kabul

ASIA

AFRICA



10 YEAR OLD AMIN LIVED WITH HIS PARENTS, BROTHER ABDUR AND SISTER ALIFA, IN THE CAPITAL CITY, KABUL. AT FIRST, THERE WAS CALM.

Hey, Amin! Pass the ball over here!




BUT EVENTUALLY KABUL BECAME A WAR ZONE. THE CITY WAS SHELLED NEARLY EVERY DAY - FIRST BY ONE AFGHAN MILITARY GROUP, THEN BY ANOTHER . MANY CIVILIANS WERE KILLED DURING THESE ATTACKS.

THE CIVIL WAR BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT FACTIONS OF THE MUJAHEDIN CAUSED MORE AFGHANS TO FLEE THEIR HOMES AND COUNTRY. AMIN AND HIS FAMILY WERE ALSO FORCED TO FLEE.

They are killing civilians. We must leave Kabul.

Pack quickly children. We must leave at once.






MEANWHILE, PEOPLE SUSPECTED OF HELPING THE ENEMY WERE BEING KIDNAPPED, TORTURED AND EXECUTED. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE FLED THE CITY.


Why are they shooting at us?

They are shooting at everyone!



MANY AFGHANS TRIED TO FIND SHELTER AND SAFETY ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY, WHILE OTHERS JOINED THE MILLIONS OF REFUGEES WHO EARLIER HAD FOUND THEIR WAY TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES SUCH AS IRAN AND PAKISTAN.

THE REFUGEES SUFFERED TERRIBLY ON THE LONG JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN; THEY WERE HUNGRY, COLD AND AFRAID.



When will we reach Pakistan?

Will we be safe?

THE REFUGEES HAD TO PASS THROUGH MANY ARMED ROADBLOCKS WHICH WERE SET UP BY THE VARIOUS FIGHTING GROUPS. OFTEN, THE SOLDIERS STOPPED THE TRAVELLERS AND DEMANDED PAYMENT BEFORE LETTING THEM PASS. OTHER TIMES, THE SOLDIERS WOULD CHECK PEOPLE'S BELONGINGS, LOOKING FOR WEAPONS. ANYONE SUSPECTED OF CARRYING WEAPONS WAS SEVERELY BEATEN.



What have you got in that bag?

You have to pay to use this road.



Abdur!

My son!
My son!

THE RIVAL MUJAHEDIN GROUPS HAD PLANTED MANY LAND-MINES IN THEIR WAR AGAINST EACH OTHER. THE VICTIMS WERE OFTEN NOT SOLDIERS, BUT CIVILIANS. AMIN'S BROTHER WAS KILLED BY A LAND-MINE AND HIS FATHER WAS ALSO INJURED.



I can't walk any further.

You can make it, Grandma.

It's getting colder. I'm worried about the children.

THE REFUGEES HAD TO WALK 300 KILOMETERS TO SAFETY. CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS WAS A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

ONCE THEY REACHED THE BORDER, UNHCR STAFF WERE ABLE TO HELP THEM.

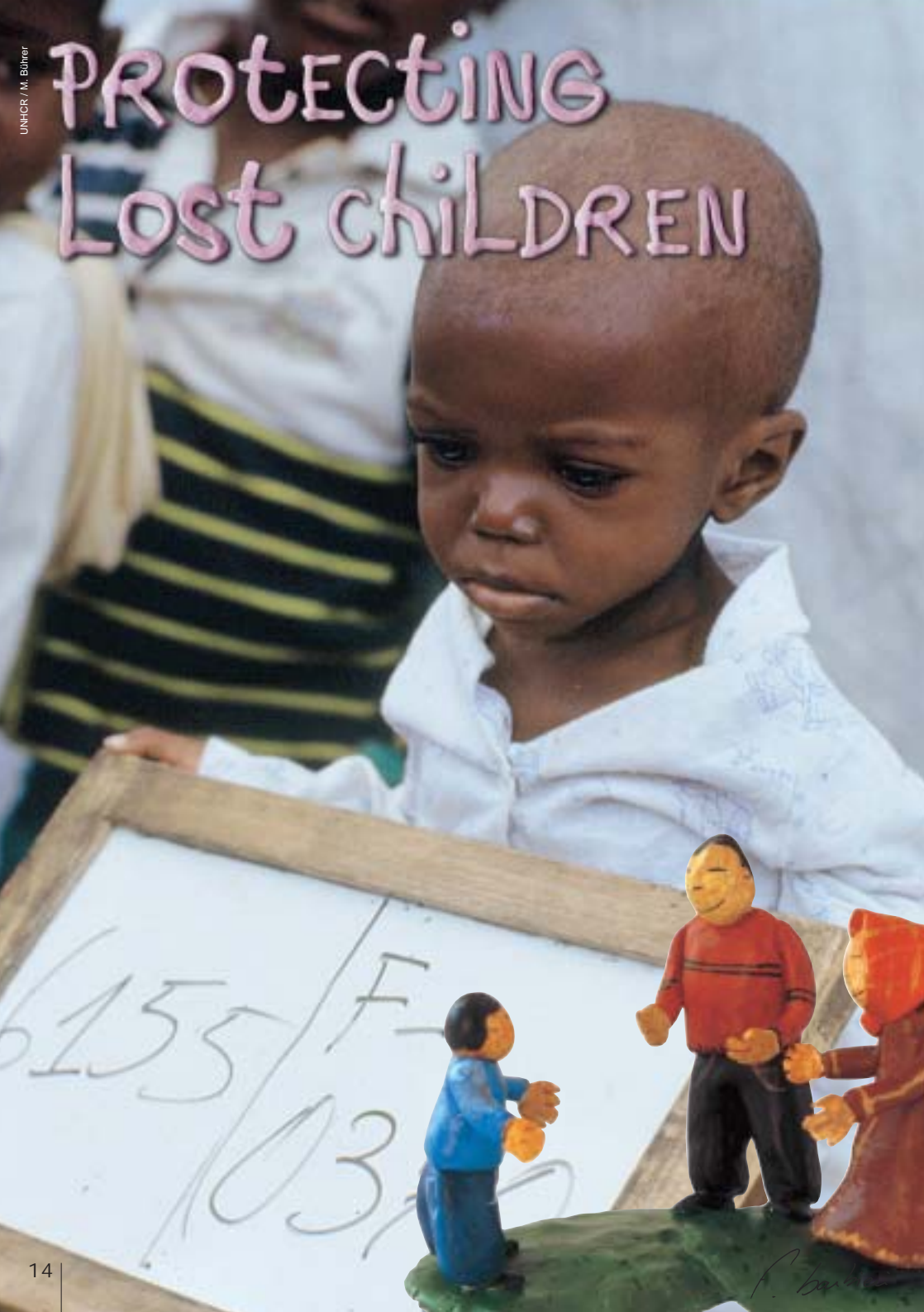


THEIR FIRST NEED WAS FOR MEDICAL CARE.

AMIN, HIS FAMILY AND OTHER AFGHAN REFUGEES WERE ESCORTED TO A REFUGEE CAMP IN PAKISTAN. THERE, THEY WERE SAFE. THEY HAD SHELTER, FOOD AND WATER. BUT AMIN AND HIS FAMILY GRIEVED FOR ABDUR. THEY LONGED FOR THE DAY WHEN THEY COULD RETURN TO THEIR HOME IN AFGHANISTAN.



PROTECTING Lost CHILDREN



When people are persecuted, when war breaks out, children often suffer the most. In the chaos and confusion of escape, children can accidentally be separated from their parents. Sometimes they are kidnapped by soldiers and made to fight or to work as servants.

Recently in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, many children were separated from their parents. Photos were taken of these children and shown around the refugee camps. Many parents recognised their lost children and through this method of tracing, the children were reunited with their families.

When quick family reunion is not possible, arrangements are made for the children to be cared for in their communities. Foster families receive some assistance to support an extra child.

Some refugee children may sit in total silence all day or rock back and forth endlessly or cry without obvious reason or throw uncontrollable tantrums. Their memories are full of terrifying nightmares.

When possible, these desperate children are given medical and psychological treatment. Slowly, with loving care and regular routines of lessons and play, many children begin to recover something like a normal life.



UNHCR / C. Beinhaume



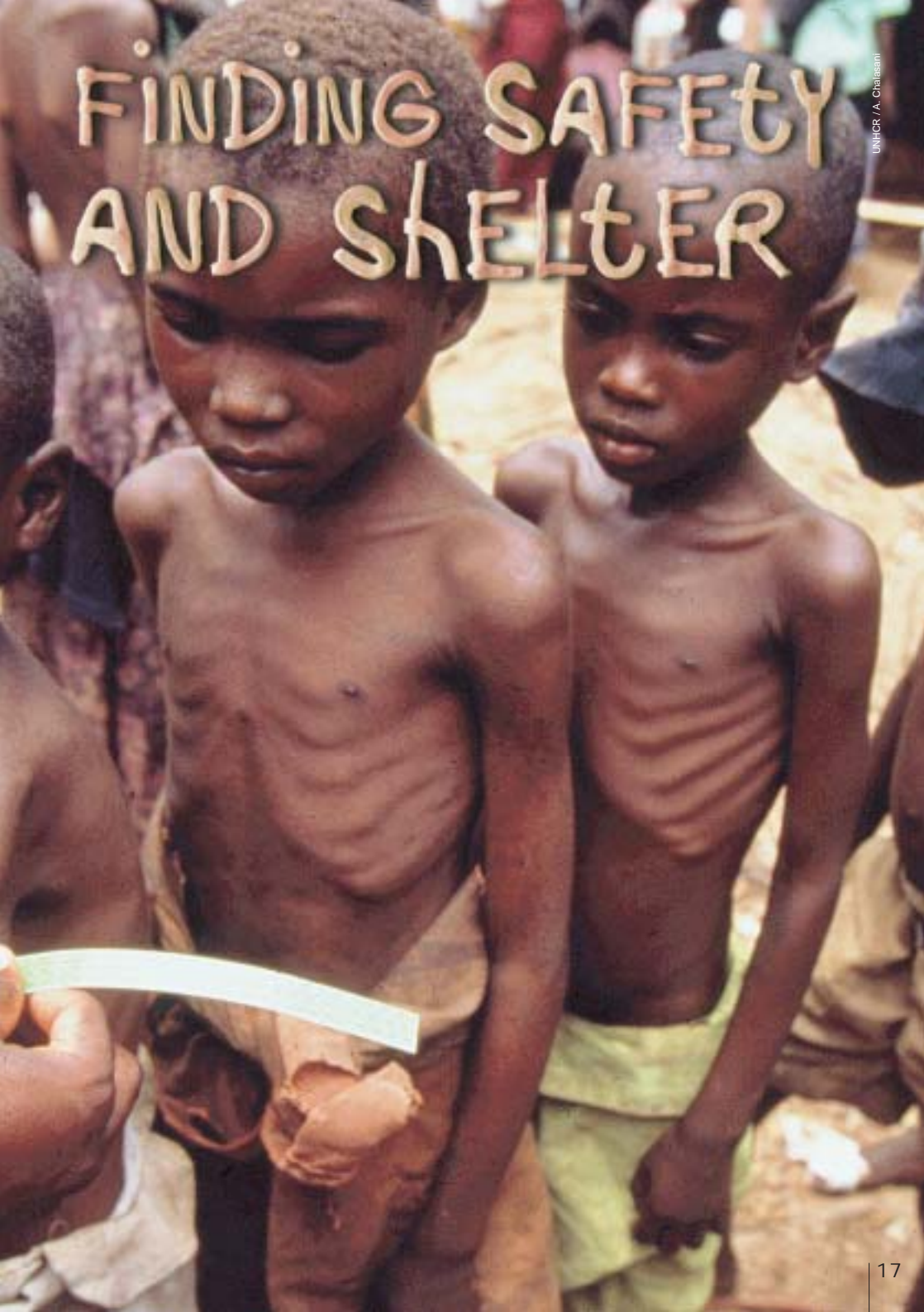
UNHCR / A. Cesulfo

In 1997, UNHCR rescued hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees who were lost in the rain forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children who had lost their parents were flown back to Rwanda.

On the way to safety, thousands of refugee children suffer from hunger. Many fall sick with no hope of finding medical care. Even though they are children, they may have been tortured, physically abused or imprisoned. They have been through terrible experiences, which nobody, least of all children, should ever have to endure.

The refugee camp becomes their temporary home while they wait for the day when they and their families can go back to their country safely. They need shelter, food, clean water, basic medical care and education. **All children** have the right to these basic things and UNHCR and its partners do their best to make sure that they receive them.





FINDING SAFETY AND SHELTER

A PLACE to STAY

When refugees flee to a country of asylum, they hope that their stay will only be a short one. Often, however, the persecution or conflict that drove them away continues for months, sometimes years. Their temporary homes become more permanent. Simple shelters made from sticks and plastic sheeting are replaced by tents and small huts. Sometimes refugee camps become so large, with so many people, that they become temporary cities.



UNHCR / B. Press

Whenever possible, UNHCR tries to provide building materials, but refugees often have to use whatever is nearby to construct their shelters. Poles cut from the branches of surrounding trees may be used to build house-frames or fences. Grasses may be used as roof thatch or as wall-coverings. Sun-dried or baked bricks are made if there is suitable clay in the area.



UNHCR / C. Saubergier



ENOUGH TO EAT

It is very difficult for refugees to obtain enough food for themselves and their families. Without help, refugees in camps would suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

The food which most refugees receive comes from donations, usually surplus supplies such as dried beans and maize, that have been stored in warehouses. Refugee children do not always eat what they need most but what is available.

This means that their daily meals may not contain enough vitamins and nutrients needed for good health and normal growth.





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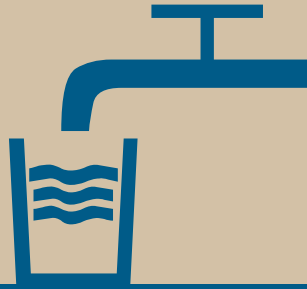
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1. One healthy and natural way to obtain a more balanced diet is to help refugees grow enough food for themselves and their children. Sometimes this is possible. Refugee parents may be able to grow some fruits and vegetables in small gardens near their shelters.



2. In many camps, refugee children receive extra meals at school. In other cases, young children receive special high-protein meals.

CLEAN WATER



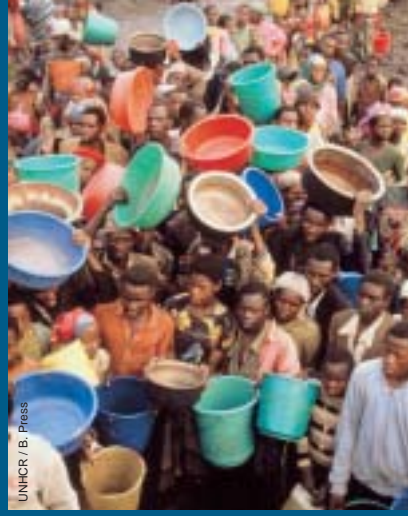
Everyone needs clean water for survival and good health. It is used for drinking, cooking, washing and growing vegetables. When water supplies are polluted, illnesses such as diarrhoea and diseases like cholera can occur, causing many deaths.

If clean water is not easily available nearby, UNHCR and its partners deliver it to the refugee camp by tanker truck. As soon as possible, clean water is supplied through the construction of water tanks and the digging of wells or boreholes.





When water is scarce, each refugee is allowed only a limited amount each day, which they have to collect, using whatever containers they have. They cannot waste a drop of water.



UNHCR / B. Press



HEALTH CARE



When refugee children finally arrive in a refugee camp, they are scared, tired and weakened by hunger and by their journey. They easily catch diseases.

Refugee children need medical help. Like all children, it is best for them to receive regular checkups and vaccinations, to make sure that their health is fine and that they are growing up as they should. Doctors and nurses work among the refugees, even training some of them as medical helpers.

Sometimes, children have been seriously injured and need urgent medical help.



UNHCR / B. Press

Because camps are often crowded, disease can break out and spread quickly. UNHCR and its partners provide proper sanitary facilities, such as well-built latrines. Good nutrition and hygiene are taught in schools. Refugees are also encouraged to clean up garbage and to drain stagnant water to remove breeding places for mosquitoes which may spread malaria.



GOING TO SCHOOL

Children who have seen loved ones killed, who have fled in terror from armed men, may have special problems. Attending school helps refugee children to adjust to something like normal life again.

Refugee children also go to school to learn to read, write and count, and to spend time with other children. They can also learn about their culture and the homeland that they left behind and to which they hope to return.

Because they have lost almost everything, children and their parents place enormous value on schooling. They know that education is the only hope for a better life, when they go home.

A classroom may be a simple building or a tent. Lessons may be held outside, on sand or under the shade of some trees. There may be desks to share with friends or when there are no desks, children sit on the ground and support their exercise book on their knees. Sometimes, there may be text books, other times, there may be only a blackboard.





MEMORIES AND HOPES

UNHCR / S. Salgado



These Mozambican children are jumping with happiness and excitement at the news that they are returning to their home country.

Refugees do not want to depend on others for their shelter, food and water. They prefer to be able to look after themselves, as they did in their own countries. Most refugees are like these Mozambican children - they want to go home.

So when it is safe, refugees return to their home countries, often with the help of UNHCR. This type of return is called **voluntary repatriation**.



Tomé was a refugee child from Mozambique. He had lived in a refugee camp in Zimbabwe most of his life.

His family, along with millions of other people, had fled Mozambique to escape civil war. When the war ended and there was peace in the country, Tomé's family returned to Mozambique.

" I came back home in a UNHCR truck. There was me, my parents, my two brothers and my cousins. We sang because we were happy. But when we arrived, we saw much of our village was destroyed during the fighting. Now, our homes have been rebuilt. UNHCR helped us dig a new well. We have a school. I was at school this morning but, right now, I have to help plant these vegetables.

I remember living as a refugee. Now I am living in my own country. I hope that we will not have to run away again. I want to be able to learn everything I can from the teacher at school. Then, perhaps I can go to the city, to another school and train to be a doctor."



John and his family fled from southern Sudan because there was so much fighting between government and rebel soldiers. His family made their way to Uganda where they have been allowed by the Ugandan government to settle among the local Ugandans. They have also been given a small plot of land on which they grow the food they need.

"I was very little when my family left Sudan. My parents tell me fighting in Sudan was so terrible that they could not work on their farm in safety. Often they could not grow enough food. In some years, there was famine.

Here in Uganda, my family grows enough food for ourselves and some to sell too. My parents have done very well - they have made enough money to buy a bicycle-cart to transport what we want to sell at the market, which is far away. We have to be very careful because there are bandits and rebels who attack people travelling along the road. I am working very hard to help my parents earn enough to pay for school fees, books and uniforms for my younger brother and sister."





Azra doesn't want to remember her past. She is a Bosnian who was driven from her home by soldiers. She doesn't want to remember the time when her father was taken away. Thinking about the night the neighbours set fire to her home gives her nightmares.

Azra prefers to dream of the future. With the help of UNHCR, Azra and her family were able to **resettle** in Sweden. Azra likes her new country.

"My father was taken away to a concentration camp. When he came back to us, we were allowed to come here to Sweden. I can speak Swedish now and I help my mother when she goes shopping. I translate for her when we go to the doctor's too. My father has learnt enough Swedish to work.

Many of my friends are Swedish. We go to school together. Sometimes on weekends, we go for walks in the forest. It is very peaceful. Next summer, during the holidays, we will take a bus trip around the country and visit beautiful places. We are so free - we can go anywhere we want to. One day, I will travel to other continents - to North America, perhaps even Australia. That is what I like to dream about."

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