

Chapter XII

Refugees and displaced persons

In 2004, the total number of persons of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) increased by some 13 per cent to 19.2 million, from 17 million in 2003. An estimated 1.5 million refugees returned to their places of origin during the year, while hundreds of thousands of others were driven out by conflicts and related instability in various parts of the world. UNHCR made progress in seeking durable solutions for those affected, but its efforts were undermined in some areas by such obstacles and challenges as new refugee outflows, attacks on humanitarian personnel, measures that eroded the international protection regime, the increasing volume and complexity of migratory flows and difficulties in sustaining voluntary repatriation.

During the year, repatriation was one of the key areas of UNHCR focus. Through its efforts, momentum in the repatriation of Afghan refugees was maintained, with some 1 million returning home—the highest number of returns during the year—despite persisting instability in parts of the country. Similar repatriation operations resulted in thousands returning to their places of origin in Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sri Lanka. The Office helped to resettle approximately 30,000, as compared to 26,000 in 2003, and worked to reduce statelessness and protect stateless persons, estimated at over 1 million worldwide. However, despite UNHCR's concerted efforts, millions of others—some two thirds of the global refugee population—remained out of reach of durable solutions and continued to suffer in protracted refugee situations, most notably Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh, Bhutanese nationals in Nepal and Saharawi refugees in Algeria. An estimated 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia and hundreds of thousands of other IDPs and refugees were awaiting solutions in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. In many cases, already complex situations were exacerbated by fresh refugee outflows that sometimes created large-scale emergencies, as in the Darfur region of the Sudan; in the DRC, where 20,000 persons fled the outbreak of fighting in the town of Bukavu; and in Somalia, where tension caused 19,000 persons

to flee their homes. Other outflows included nationals of Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq and Yemen.

In continuing efforts to implement the "Convention Plus" initiative launched in 2003 to help strengthen the commitment of States and other partners to resolving refugee situations through multilateral action plans, UNHCR established in June a Framework of Understandings on the strategic use of resettlement and developed a methodology for assessing gaps in protection capacity. In October, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), following its review of UNHCR's management and administration, recommended measures for their improvement, including streamlining and rationalizing its organizational structure. In December, the General Assembly encouraged UNHCR to continue to improve its management systems. To enhance protection and durable solutions to refugee problems, UNHCR proposed the establishment of a post of Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) to oversee protection and the related advocacy role of the Office. As part of its ongoing headquarters review process, UNHCR re-examined its security procedures and made recommendations for improvement, which complemented the UN-wide changes in security management practices.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Programme policy

Executive Committee action. At its fifty-fifth session (Geneva, 4-8 October) [A/59/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee of the UNHCR Programme, in a conclusion on international protection, emphasized the continuing importance of the Agenda for Protection [YUN 2002, p. 1205], the multi-year programme of action for improving the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. It acknowledged the increasing complexities of the international protection environment and the many challenges facing States and UNHCR in ensuring and providing protection for refugees and other persons of concern. The Committee expressed concern at the persecution, violence and

human rights violations perpetuating the displacement of populations within and beyond national borders and increasing the challenges to durable solutions. It called on States to address those challenges, and on UNHCR to strengthen its protection presence in the field. The Committee also adopted conclusions on international co-operation and burden- and responsibility-sharing in mass influx situations and on legal safety issues in the context of the voluntary repatriation of refugees. Decisions were adopted on administrative, programme and financial, and institutional matters.

In his opening statement to the Committee, the High Commissioner drew attention to the crisis in the Sudan, particularly in the Darfur region, and to the challenges facing UNHCR in its response, as part of the wider UN effort. To oversee that response, a Director of Operations for the Sudan situation was appointed. Elsewhere in Africa, the number of repatriation programmes reached record levels. UNHCR continued to assist Burundian refugees, who were returning home at the rate of some 10,000 monthly, as well as hundreds of thousands of displaced persons to return to Angola, Eritrea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It also helped some 14,000 refugees to return to Iraq from neighbouring countries, and about 775,000 to Afghanistan, despite the deteriorating security situation there, bringing the total repatriated since 2002 to over 3.5 million. In Western Sahara, UNHCR's oldest caseload, the year witnessed a breakthrough with the first exchange of visits between family members separated for decades by the conflict there. Unfortunately, no such progress was made in the Middle East, where UNHCR continued to address the potential for population displacement. In Europe, the number of displaced persons and refugees returning home to Bosnia and Herzegovina reached 1 million. UNHCR increased its field presence in the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), thus enabling it to find solutions to a range of problems and to make significant progress in capacity-building in the asylum field. However, in the North Caucasus, which continued to be plagued by insecurity and conflict, UNHCR was committed to working with the Russian Federation in responding to displacements from Chechnya. In Asia, while developments in Myanmar provided a rationale for planning the eventual return of 120,000 refugees from Thailand, less encouraging was the situation of Bhutanese people in camps in Nepal. Other situations of displacement requiring attention included those in Sri Lanka, the plight of North Korean asylum-seekers in China, and protection and resettle-

ment issues in Latin America, which was commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration—a regional initiative for refugee welfare.

One of UNHCR's global operational challenges was translating its priority commitments on refugee women into action in all its operations, especially their participation in food distribution. It reviewed its security procedures and made recommendations complementing anticipated UN system-wide changes, as part of the overall review of the Organization's global security management practices. Other notable operational developments during the year included proposals by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) relating to UNHCR's organizational structure, budget planning, and the work of its Inspector-General, (see p. 1199), and the High Commissioner's proposal for the establishment of a new position of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection (see p. 1200). UNHCR also made efforts to improve the use of partnerships, including with UN bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The High Commissioner reported that, for the first time in recent memory, UNCHR did not face a funding crisis, owing to increased donor support and better financial management.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 20 December [meeting 74], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee [A/59/498], adopted **resolution 59/170** without vote [agenda item 100].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the activities of his Office and the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its fifty-fifth session and the conclusions and decisions contained therein,

Recalling its previous annual resolutions on the work of the Office of the High Commissioner since its establishment by the General Assembly,

Recalling also its resolution 58/153 of 22 December 2003 on implementing actions proposed by the High Commissioner to strengthen the capacity of his Office to carry out its mandate,

Expressing its appreciation for the leadership shown by the High Commissioner, commending the staff and implementing partners of the Office of the High Commissioner for the competent, courageous and dedicated manner in which they discharge their responsibilities, and underscoring its strong condemnation of all forms of violence to which humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel are increasingly exposed,

1. *Endorses* the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its fifty-fifth session;

2. *Welcomes* the important work undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Executive Committee in the course of the year, and notes in this context the adoption of the general conclusion on international protection, the conclusion on international cooperation and burden- and responsibility-sharing in mass influx situations and the conclusion on legal safety issues in the context of voluntary repatriation of refugees, which are aimed at strengthening the international protection regime, consistent with the Agenda for Protection, and at assisting Governments in meeting their protection responsibilities in today's changing international environment;

3. *Reaffirms* the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as the foundation of the international refugee protection regime, and recognizes the importance of their full and effective application by States parties and the values that they embody, notes with satisfaction that one hundred and forty-five States are now parties to one instrument or to both, encourages States not parties to consider acceding to those instruments, underlines in particular the importance of full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, and recognizes that a number of States not parties to the international refugee instruments have shown a generous approach to hosting refugees;

4. *Notes* that fifty-seven States are now parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and that twenty-nine States are parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his activities on behalf of stateless persons;

5. *Notes also* that 2004 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and that States convened in Mexico City in November 2004 to commemorate this anniversary, recalls the contribution to refugee protection which regional approaches can make, and encourages States to strengthen further international protection of refugees in the region, in conjunction with relevant international organizations as well as representatives of civil society;

6. *Re-emphasizes* that the protection of refugees is primarily the responsibility of States, whose full and effective cooperation, action and political resolve are required to enable the Office of the High Commissioner to fulfil its mandated functions;

7. *Urges* all States and relevant non-governmental and other organizations, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner and in a spirit of international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to cooperate and to mobilize resources with a view to enhancing the capacity of, and reducing the heavy burden borne by, countries that have received large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, including by holding international consultations aimed at developing a comprehensive plan of action, as appropriate, to respond to a specific mass influx or protracted refugee situation, and calls upon the Office to continue to play its catalytic role in mobilizing assistance from the international community to address the root causes as well as the economic, environmental and so-

cial impact of large-scale refugee populations in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition;

8. *Emphasizes* that international protection of refugees is a dynamic and action-oriented function that is at the core of the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner and that includes, in cooperation with States and other partners, the promotion and facilitation of, inter alia, the admission, reception and treatment of refugees and the ensuring of durable, protection-oriented solutions, bearing in mind the particular needs of vulnerable groups, and notes in this context that the delivery of international protection is a staff-intensive service that requires adequate staff with the appropriate expertise, especially at the field level;

9. *Welcomes* the progress attained so far in regard to the High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative, including the development of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on the strategic use of resettlement, and encourages the High Commissioner and interested States to strengthen the international protection regime through the development of comprehensive approaches to resolving refugee situations, including improving international burden- and responsibility-sharing and realizing durable solutions that give due regard to the importance of both protection and, where possible, refugee self-reliance;

10. *Recalls* the important role of effective partnerships and coordination in meeting the needs of refugees and other displaced persons and in finding durable solutions to their situations, welcomes the efforts under way, in cooperation with refugee-hosting countries and countries of origin, including their respective local communities, United Nations agencies and other development actors, to promote a framework for durable solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations, which includes the "4Rs" approach (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) to sustainable return, and encourages States, in cooperation with United Nations agencies and other development actors, to support, inter alia, through the allocation of funds, the development and implementation of the 4Rs and of other programming tools to facilitate the transition from relief to development;

11. *Strongly reaffirms* the fundamental importance and the purely humanitarian and non-political character of the function of the Office of the High Commissioner of providing international protection to refugees and seeking permanent solutions to refugee problems, and recalls that these solutions include voluntary repatriation and, where appropriate and feasible, local integration and resettlement in a third country, while reaffirming that voluntary repatriation, supported by necessary rehabilitation and development assistance to facilitate sustainable reintegration, remains the preferred solution;

12. *Recognizes* the desirability of countries of origin, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner, other States and other concerned actors, as necessary and appropriate, addressing, at an early stage, issues of a legal and administrative nature which are likely to hinder voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, bearing in mind that some legal safety or administrative issues may be addressed only over time and that voluntary repatriation can and does take place

without all legal and administrative issues having first been resolved;

13. *Emphasizes* the obligation of all States to accept the return of their nationals, calls upon States to facilitate the return of their nationals who have been determined not to be in need of international protection, and affirms the need for the return of persons to be undertaken in a safe and humane manner and with full respect for their human rights and dignity, irrespective of the status of the persons concerned;

14. *Condemns* all acts that pose a threat to the personal security and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers, such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion and physical attacks, deplores, in particular, the armed attacks that took place in the Gatumba transit centre in Burundi in August 2004, calls upon all States of refuge, in cooperation with international organizations, where appropriate, to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for the principles of refugee protection, including the humane treatment of asylum-seekers, notes with interest that the High Commissioner has continued to take steps to encourage the development of measures to better ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue those efforts in consultation with States and other relevant actors;

15. *Encourages* the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to improve its management systems and to ensure effective and transparent use of its resources, recognizes that adequate and timely resources are essential for the Office to continue to fulfil the mandate conferred upon it through its statute and by subsequent General Assembly resolutions on refugees and other persons of concern, recalls its resolutions 58/153 and 58/270 of 23 December 2003 concerning the implementation of paragraph 20 of the statute of the Office, and urges Governments and other donors to respond promptly to the annual and supplementary appeals issued by the Office for requirements under its programmes;

16. *Requests* the High Commissioner to report on his activities to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

Strengthening UNHCR

Oral report of High Commissioner. In response to General Assembly resolution 58/153 [YUN 2003, p. 1226] on strengthening UNHCR's capacity to carry out its mandate, the UNHCR representative, in an oral report to the Economic and Social Council on 22 July [E/2004/SR.48], said that the Office had worked with the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to strengthen refugee protection through cooperation, particularly by contributing to the work of the IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises and to the inter-agency review of the collaborative approach on internally displaced persons (IDPs). UNHCR developed a Framework for Durable Solutions under the key strategies of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and

reconstruction (the "4Rs"); development through local integration; and development assistance for refugees. Regarding security issues, UNHCR worked with the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, IASC and ECHA to develop a clearer vision and strategy for managing increased risks to humanitarian personnel. It also worked with other UN bodies to address refugee welfare, including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In April, the High Commissioner and the Under-Secretary-General of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) signed a joint letter on enhanced cooperation, particularly regarding security for refugees, IDPs and returnees, among other areas.

Addressing Africa's refugee situation, the High Commissioner highlighted UNHCR's various repatriation operations on the continent, in particular those in Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia; its enhanced resettlement operations; and the development of a methodology for comprehensive plans of action for specific refugee situations. UNHCR recognized that it could not address the challenge of the reintegration of returnees alone, as rapidly evolving situations in Africa called for a strong emergency preparedness and response capacity. It had built innovative partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, with which it was advocating for the recognition of good governance, peace and security, and conflict resolution as preconditions for sustainable development and successful repatriation on the continent. The Office was chairing the sub-cluster on humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (see p. 920).

By **decision 2004/317** of 23 July, the Economic and Social Council took note of the High Commissioner's oral report on coordination aspects of UNHCR's work and on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance

In 2004 [A/60/12], UNHCR continued to collaborate in the development of more effective UN system inter-agency coordination, particularly within the context of the humanitarian response review commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. The Office remained committed to the collaborative approach to internal displacement, adopting a more active and predictable disposition to address related protection

challenges. As part of inter-agency efforts to develop guidelines and training support, UNHCR developed emergency team leadership training and helped to address such aspects as HIV/AIDS field training, an early warning/early action system, and gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings. Regarding collaboration on lessons learned, a key function of inter-agency forums, UNHCR participated in reviewing and adjusting the needs-assessment framework into a more analytical tool. The Office commented on a DPKO/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) study of UN integrated missions, and was promoting and implementing the Secretary-General's bulletin on sexual exploitation and abuse [YUN 2003, p. 1238]. UNHCR and DPKO agreed to enhance cooperation in refugee/returnee security; the rule of law; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; mine action; and technical cooperation. As part of efforts to develop a more systematic and timely system for reporting on key protection concerns in situations of armed conflict, UNHCR convened an expert meeting (Geneva, 9-11 June) on maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, which was part of the process of developing operational guidelines. In related action, UNHCR was preparing operational guidelines on the separation of armed elements from refugee populations.

Bilateral partnerships to assist displaced persons improved in 2004. UNHCR and WFP were developing a joint donor communication strategy to address the challenges of securing acceptable levels of food and water for refugees, and agreed that WFP would participate in all future UNHCR appeals and reports. Cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ILO increased in the area of refugee welfare. Partnerships with NGOs also grew, as those organizations were more actively involved in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation phases of UNHCR operations. In 2004, implementation agreements were signed with over 600 of them, and the Office was establishing guidelines to help build their capacity at the national level to respond to protection and assistance needs in field operations.

Evaluation activities

UNHCR, in a July report [A/AC.96/994] on its evaluation function, stated that interest had grown in inter-agency collaboration in joint evaluation activities, as the UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU), together with the WFP evaluation service, began a joint evaluation of five pilot countries in which WFP was responsible for food distribution to refugees. The find-

ings would help determine whether or not to replicate the arrangement globally. EPAU and the Technical Support Section, in coordination with the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health Services for Refugees, led an inter-agency global evaluation of reproductive health services for refugees and IDPs, the final report of which was expected in September. EPAU was also cooperating with the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in developing an evaluation methodology for ECHO's 2004 evaluation of the effectiveness of its financial support to UNHCR. The findings of its 2002 evaluations, including those on refugee children and women and on community services [YUN 2002, p. 1201], informed changes to UNHCR's operational policies and implementation procedures. The Office intended to ensure that evaluation findings were more widely discussed and that lessons learned were fully absorbed. EPAU was developing an electronic follow-up mechanism for compiling and cataloguing evaluation recommendations, so that their impact could be better measured against policy changes in the respective functional areas.

Evaluation projects undertaken or initiated in 2004 related to the needs of IDPs, real-time evaluations of emergency operations, refugee livelihoods, reintegration, a Canadian Government-sponsored pilot project on Royal Canadian Mounted Police secondment to UNHCR field operations in Guinea, UNHCR's worldwide vehicle fleet, and building capacity through training. Evaluations were conducted on regional resettlement activities in West Africa to ascertain the validity of some of the assumptions underpinning the regional resettlement scheme, and on enhancing UNHCR's capacity to monitor the protection, rights and well-being of refugees, based on a review of the Office's multiple roles in both protection and programme monitoring.

Inspections

In 2004 [A/60/12], standard inspections of UNHCR activities by its Inspector General's Office (IGO) were conducted in Japan, Sierra Leone and Spain, while ad hoc inspections were undertaken in Kazakhstan, Uganda and Uzbekistan. Operational reviews were undertaken in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Sudan to assess specific operational strategies, focusing on finding solutions to refugee problems and on the effectiveness of UNHCR's partnerships with other organizations. In 2004, IGO received 105 complaints of alleged misconduct. Some one third of them, where the investigation supported a finding of misconduct, were forwarded to the Division of Human Resources

Management for disciplinary action. The Investigation Unit produced a number of management implication reports to highlight vulnerabilities in UNHCR operations and to help managers adjust their actions accordingly. In September, UNHCR's Oversight Committee, whose terms of reference were revised and strengthened, was reconstituted as a decision-making body, chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner, with the mandate to decide on and oversee administrative measures to be taken in cases of continuing failure to comply with oversight recommendations. IGO no longer served as the secretariat of the Oversight Committee.

The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) audited UNHCR operations and activities involving expenditure of \$362 million, or 34 per cent of UNHCR's total expenditure of \$1,063 million in 2004. Those audits covered operations in 26 countries, as well as the payroll, mobility and hardship allowances and the headquarters management systems renewal project. OIOS also reviewed the functions of headquarters desk officers, and of two international NGOs to assess their systems and procedures and to advise on ways of complying with UN auditing requirements.

Enlargement of the Executive Committee

On 21 July, the Economic and Social Council, by **decision 2004/238**, took note of requests from Romania [E/2004/49] and Ghana [E/2004/76] for admission to membership in the UNHCR Executive Committee and recommended that the General Assembly take a decision at its fifty-ninth (2004) session on the question of enlarging the Committee's membership from 66 to 68 States.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 20 December [meeting 74], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/59/498], adopted **resolution 59/169** without vote [agenda item 100].

Enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly,

Taking note of Economic and Social Council decision 2004/238 of 21 July 2004 concerning the enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Taking note also of the requests regarding the enlargement of the Executive Committee contained in the letter dated 23 March 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the letter dated 2 June 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,

1. *Decides* to increase the number of members of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from sixty-six to sixty-eight States;

2. *Requests* the Economic and Social Council to elect the additional members at its resumed organizational session for 2005.

Financial and administrative questions

UNHCR's initial annual programme budget target for 2004 was set at \$923 million by the Executive Committee in 2003 [YUN 2003, p. 1227]. Total income for 2004 amounted to \$1,001.2 million, comprising \$805.2 million in contributions and miscellaneous income (including currency exchange gains) for the annual programme budget, \$10 million for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme, \$27.7 million provided by the UN regular budget, and \$158.3 million in contributions for the 2004 supplementary programmes. Expenditures totalled \$1,062.6 million, of which Africa accounted for some \$468.3 million; Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, \$192.5 million; Europe, \$114.3 million; Asia and the Pacific, \$50.8 million; and the Americas, \$28.5 million.

In October, the Executive Committee approved the revised 2004 annual programme budget, amounting to \$955.8 million, including the UN regular budget contribution of \$25.8 million, which, with the provision of \$7 million for JPOs and \$170.6 million for the supplementary programmes, brought total requirements for 2004 to \$1,126 million.

The Committee approved \$974.6 million for the 2005 annual programme budget, including an operational reserve of \$62.5 million, or 7.5 per cent, of programme activities, and \$50 million, continued on a further trial basis to provide appropriation authority for fully funded additional activities. Those provisions, together with \$7 million for the JPO programme, brought total requirements in 2005 to \$981.6 million. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, within the total appropriation, to effect adjustments in regional and global programmes and in headquarters budgets, and to create supplementary programmes and issue corresponding special appeals to meet any additional new emergency needs that could not be filled from the operational reserve.

The Committee noted the proposal to create a post of Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) [A/AC.96/992/Add.1], at the Assistant Secretary-General level, for which an amount of \$300,000 had been included in the annual programme budget. It stated that no expenditure should be charged against the item until the matter had

been discussed by the Standing Committee in 2005 and a decision taken by the Executive Committee. In that regard, the Committee requested UNHCR to provide more detailed terms of reference for the proposed position. It requested UNHCR to commission an independent evaluation of the operational reserve, category II, including a review of the criteria for accepting contributions. The Committee welcomed the High Commissioner's initiative to consolidate UNHCR's information technology functions within the new Division of Information Systems and Technology.

Implementation of article 20 of the UNHCR statute

In response to General Assembly resolution 58/270 [YUN 2003, p. 1399], the Secretary-General, in August [A/59/294], described efforts made over the past two bienniums to progressively implement article 20 of the UNHCR statute, which required that no expenditure other than administrative expenditures relating to the functioning of the Office should be borne by the UN regular budget and that all other expenditures be borne by voluntary contributions. Towards meeting that goal, the Assembly had approved some \$2 million in increases to UNHCR's proposed 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 programme budgets to meet management and administrative post and non-post costs, using a ratio of 50.8 per cent. For future bienniums, the Secretary-General proposed increased contributions similar to that applied for the 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 bienniums.

In November [A/C.5/59/SR.26], the ACABQ Chairman, in an oral statement to the Fifth Committee, recommended that the Assembly note the Secretary-General's report, with the understanding that proposals for subsequent increases in UN contributions to UNHCR's management and administrative costs would be submitted for its review in the context of the proposed programme budget for future bienniums.

The Assembly, in Part III of **resolution 59/276** of 23 December (see p. 1384), took note of the Secretary-General's report and ACABQ's related comments and recommendations. It requested the Secretary-General to include in the programme budget proposals for progressive increases of contributions from the UN regular budget to UNHCR, with a view to the full implementation of article 20 of the statute of the Office and to report in 2005 on progress made in the context of the 2006-2007 proposed programme budget, while recognizing that the 50.8 percentage referred to in his report did not represent a ceiling. The Assembly called on UNHCR to keep its support costs, including management and administration, under review, with the objective

of reducing them as a percentage of total budget expenditure.

Accounts (2003)

The audited financial statements of voluntary funds administered by UNHCR for the year ended 31 December 2003 [A/59/5/Add.5] showed total expenditures of some \$957.4 million and total income of \$981.2 million, with a reserve balance of \$171 million.

The Board of Auditors found that: the unallocated available reserves at the end of 2003 (\$78 million) were insufficient to cover the staff termination liabilities of some \$290 million; the value of the non-expendable property as at 31 December 2003 remained inaccurate due to errors in data entry and non-recording of assets; the 2003 operational expenditure not unsupported by implementing partners' financial reports totalled \$9.6 million as at 15 June 2004, an improvement over previous years; the accounting of unliquidated obligations still suffered from inaccurate disclosure; after spending some \$13 million on the decentralization of its Africa Bureau (1999-2001), UNHCR recentralized its structure; UNHCR did not fully monitor the management of its many offices and buildings around the world and had no proactive policy to comply with UN common premises policy; and the Office had not developed a plan against the risk of corruption and fraud. The Board made recommendations for improving financial management and reporting, information technology and programme management, while noting that UNHCR had, in some respects, responded to the recommendations, although some had yet to be implemented.

In an October report [A/59/400], the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) expressed concern at the level of cash assistance from UNHCR implementing partners not yet justified, and over the extent of continued overstatement of unliquidated obligations. ACABQ was also concerned that UNHCR did not have a clear picture of its numerous buildings worldwide and had no proactive policy to comply with UN instructions on common premises at the country level.

The Executive Committee, in a decision on administrative, financial and programme matters [A/59/12/Add.1], requested that it be informed regularly on measures taken to address the recommendations and observations made by the Board of Auditors and ACABQ.

Management and administrative review

JIU report. On 1 October [A/59/394], the Secretary-General transmitted a report of the

Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on its review of UNHCR's management and administration, as part of the ongoing reform to improve the functioning of the Office. JIU focused on UNHCR's organizational structure; planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation activities; information management; human resources management; oversight activities; and field operations, using Tanzania as a case study. It took into consideration, for benchmarking purposes, the management practices of other UN system organizations.

The Inspectors found that UNHCR's management was characterized by multiple managerial policies and guidelines, formulated through various internal committees and boards. Its current organizational structure was fragmented and revealed shortcomings related to functional duplications between departmental units, the placement of some functional units, and non-uniformity in the organizational nomenclature. The structure was also anomalous in terms of the functional hierarchy, with the Deputy High Commissioner responsible for management and administration and the Assistant High Commissioner overseeing programmes and operations, both employed at the Assistant Secretary-General level. The structure suffered from a cumbersome, lengthy and expensive programme and budget process, a multitude of separate information systems with a proliferated information structure, a problematic flow of communication technology information, a failure to fully recognize results-based management in developing the Enterprise Resource Planning System, shortcomings in its internal oversight system, a lack of correlation between refugee caseloads and structural staffing levels of the different field offices, and high vacancy rates at some duty stations classified as family-duty stations.

JIU proposed that the Executive Committee recommend that the General Assembly authorize the creation of a second Deputy High Commissioner post by upgrading the existing Assistant High Commissioner position, resulting in two Deputies—one in charge of programme/operations and the other in charge of administration/management, with the understanding that such a measure would have no financial implications, and that the UNHCR Statute would be amended accordingly. The High Commissioner should present to the Executive Committee a streamlined and rationalized structure of the UNHCR secretariat, consolidating functions and relocating some organizational units, based on a uniform organizational nomenclature. The Executive Committee should modify the programme budget cycle from the current annual to a biennial

cycle, in alignment with the UN regular budget. To further enhance the results-based approach to planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, the High Commissioner should apply the UN logical framework to the UNHCR budget; integrate the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP) into the results-based management process; incorporate evaluation findings and recommendations into planning, programming, budgeting and monitoring; and enhance real-time evaluation. The High Commissioner should submit to the Executive Committee a long-term strategic framework containing UNHCR's guiding principles, organizational priorities and strategic goals, linked to activities, indicators of achievement, and target dates for completion. The High Commissioner should prepare a comprehensive information management strategy, consolidate information and communication technology (ICT) related functions into a centralized organizational entity and appoint a Chief Information Officer as the head of that entity. The Division of Human Resources should prepare a comprehensive strategic corporate policy on human resources management for submission to the Executive Committee in 2005, and an annual report on the composition of the secretariat. The High Commissioner should strengthen the role of the Oversight Committee, and the Executive Committee should approve a non-career five-year, non-renewable Inspector General position. JIU made a number of other recommendations to help strengthen UNHCR's human resources management and field operations.

In a September report [A/AC.96/992/Add.2], ACABQ concurred with JIU on the need for UNHCR to modify its programme cycle from annual to biennial but was not convinced of UNHCR's concern that biennialization would lead to loss of flexibility in responding to emergencies and possible resistance by donors who had annual budgets. UNHCR needed to move towards longer-term planning and strategic goals, particularly with its change from a five-year mandate to an open-ended one, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/153 [YUN 2003, p. 1226]. Regarding the creation of the additional post of Deputy High Commissioner, ACABQ, while favouring the proposal, believed that UNHCR should await the results of its headquarters review before establishing another top management post. ACABQ encouraged UNHCR to support the JIU recommendations on its oversight activities, especially that relating to the Office of the Inspector General.

A December report of the Secretary-General [A/59/394/Add.1], containing his comments on the

JIU report, indicated UNHCR's general agreement with most of the findings and recommendations of the Inspectors, and the High Commissioner's intention to take them into account during the review of the Office.

Standing Committee

The UNHCR Standing Committee held three meetings in 2004 (9-11 March [A/AC.96/988]; 29 June-1 July [A/AC.96/998]; and 23-24 September [A/AC.96/1001]). It considered issues relating to UNHCR's programmes, budgets and funding; international protection; protection/programme policy; coordination; management, finance, oversight and human resources; governance; and consultations.

In October [A/59/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee adopted the following items for the Standing Committee's 2005 programme of work: international protection; protection programme policy; programme budgets and funding; regional activities and Global Programmes; management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources; coordination; and governance. The Standing Committee was authorized to add or delete items, as appropriate, to its intersessional work programme.

Staff safety

At the September meeting of the Standing Committee (23-24 September) [A/AC.96/1001], the Director of UNHCR's Emergency and Security Service (ESS), in an update on staff safety and security management, stated that UNHCR was taking innovative measures to meet its safety obligations to staff. The High Commissioner was considering some 80 recommendations made by the Steering Committee on Security Policy and Policy Implementation, which had conducted a comprehensive review of the issue. The policy changes envisaged would enable UNHCR to: integrate security considerations fully into its operations, including through a restructured ESS; train staff in effective security management concepts; emphasize levels of accountability; promote the conduct of operations from a risk management and risk mitigation perspective; and ensure its role within the wider scope of the United Nations' global security management. UNHCR's reforms, which would complement those of the United Nations, would require additional resources, with significant initial requirements particularly in the field of telecommunications. In addition to the estimated funding needs presented in the 2005 annual programme budget, further requirements were being quantified in

relation to the needs outlined in the Steering Committee's report.

ACABQ, in its September report [A/AC.96/992/Add.2], noted that \$28.9 million had been included in the 2005 programme budget for security, which did not include an additional estimated \$17.5 million to implement the Steering Committee's recommendations. ACABQ was of the opinion that the UNHCR security arrangements and related resource requirements should be kept under review to ensure that they were in harmony with the overall UN system security plan as might be adopted by the General Assembly, following consideration of the Steering Committee's report.

Refugee protection and assistance

Protection issues

In his annual report covering 2004 [A/60/12], the High Commissioner described the main challenges facing UNHCR and the international community to protect refugees, including concerns about terrorism and the confusion between migration and asylum issues, which affected the international protection regime and the right of refugees to seek asylum. UNHCR was working to preserve access to asylum for those seeking it on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution. By mainstreaming the goals and objectives of the 2002 Agenda for Protection [YUN 2002, p. 1205], UNHCR had reinforced links between its Department of International Protection and its field operations, thereby helping to give focus to protection interventions. The physical security of refugees remained an issue of central concern for UNHCR during the year, particularly the rape of refugee women as a weapon of conflict and the abduction and humiliation of refugee children in displacement situations. There were also worrisome instances of refoulement, occasionally carried out under curious arrangements between asylum host States and countries of origin. The Office closely monitored developments in migration-related forums to ensure that the protection needs of the forcibly displaced were met. It developed a comprehensive framework for assessing protection capacity needs and facilitated a consultative process to develop activities to address the gaps identified. Particular efforts were made to enhance the protection of refugee women and children through a pilot project on age, gender and diversity mainstreaming, launched in February in 16 countries. UNHCR continued to promote accession to the 1951 Con-

vention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477], and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [YUN 1954, p. 416] and other related instruments.

In a July note on international protection [A/AC.96/989], the High Commissioner stated that, despite positive developments, particularly the repatriation of significant numbers of refugees, the movement of several countries towards peace and the impetus to implement the 1951 Convention in many regions, major challenges persisted due to non-existent or weak legal frameworks, measures taken that undermined the protection regime, the increasing volume and complexities of migratory flows and the difficulties associated with ensuring the sustainability of voluntary repatriation. The High Commissioner noted that protection responses were intrinsically linked, and the successful implementation of each element of the Agenda for Protection helped to reinforce the international protection regime as a whole. The strength and effectiveness of the regime would grow proportionately with the political and operational commitment of States and actors to resolving long-standing refugee situations, and the improvement of the conditions on which humanitarian action depended, among other factors.

The Executive Committee, in October [A/59/12/Add.1], acknowledged the increasing complexities of the environment in which international protection was provided and the many challenges faced by States and UNHCR in ensuring the protection of refugees and other persons of concern. Recognizing that the delivery of international protection was resource-intensive, the Committee reaffirmed the need for UNHCR to address protection in a holistic manner, and called on States to support it through the timely and predictable provision of resources. The Committee emphasized the continuing importance of the Agenda for Protection and encouraged all concerned actors to provide timely information on their follow-up initiatives to enable UNHCR to keep it informed on implementation initiatives.

International instruments

As at 31 December 2004, the number of States parties to both the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and to its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477] stood at 142. The accessions of the Czech Republic and Uruguay to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [YUN 1954, p. 416], and of Liberia and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

[YUN 1961, p. 533], increased the number of States parties to those instruments to 57 and 29, respectively.

Convention Plus

In 2004, the “Convention Plus” initiative, launched in 2003 [YUN 2003, p. 1229] to help strengthen the commitment of States and UNHCR partners to resolving refugee situations, continued to provide the basis for action on behalf of refugees through enhanced burden sharing. Activities designed to make international cooperation more robust and effective in that regard included the establishment in June of a Framework of Understandings on Resettlement and discussions on irregular secondary movement of asylum-seekers and refugees and targeting development assistance to achieve durable solutions to refugee problems. Future efforts would focus on situation-specific approaches, notably for protracted refugee situations. Another innovative initiative under Convention Plus was the project on strengthening protection capacity, which helped develop a comprehensive methodology for assessing gaps in protection capacity and generated multilateral approaches to enhancing the protection capacity of host countries. In October, the High Commissioner’s Forum, a mechanism for engaging States and humanitarian actors in dialogue on refugee issues, considered a methodology for making comprehensive approaches to resolving refugee problems more systematic.

Assistance measures

According to the High Commissioner’s 2004 report [A/60/12], the global population of concern to UNHCR rose to 19.2 million in 2004, from 17 million in 2003. Despite the repatriation of significant numbers of refugees to their countries of origin in 2004, following the resolution of many conflict situations, new mass outflows resulted from other conflicts and human rights abuses around the world, with over 232,000 refugees fleeing their countries. The main refugee outflows comprised hundreds of thousands of Sudanese forced by militia attacks in that country’s Darfur region to flee to Chad, Uganda and Kenya, resulting in one of the most complex and demanding UNHCR humanitarian operations in 2004. Others affected elsewhere included 37,900 who fled the DRC into Burundi, Rwanda, Zambia and Uganda; 19,000 from Somalia to Yemen and Kenya; and 5,500 from Côte d’Ivoire to Liberia. Another outflow was the movement of Iraqis fleeing to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The main IDP situations of concern were in Colombia, esti-

mated to have over 2 million displaced persons, the Sudan's Darfur region and Liberia. During the year, an estimated 1.5 million refugees repatriated voluntarily to their countries of origin, of whom the largest number (approximately 1 million) returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan. Others returned to Angola (80,000), Burundi (90,000), the DRC (13,800), Iraq (194,000), Liberia (56,900), Rwanda (14,100), Sierra Leone (26,300), Somalia (18,100) and Sri Lanka (10,000). The number of those resettled during the year rose to approximately 30,000, from 26,000 in 2003, while the number of stateless persons was estimated at 1.5 million.

Refugees and the environment

In 2004, UNHCR continued to incorporate environmental concerns into all aspects of refugee operations. It updated sectoral guidelines on forestry and livestock management and publications on permaculture in refugee situations and sustainable land use. It enhanced technical support in operations in Africa and Asia, notably in Chad, where it collaborated with the Government on an environmental assessment in refugee-hosting areas. In cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Programme for Education for Emergencies and Reconstruction, UNHCR continued environmental education for refugees to raise awareness and compliance with environmental strategies.

Refugees and HIV/AIDS

In 2004, as one of the co-sponsors of UNAIDS, UNHCR facilitated synergy and coordination of action in combating HIV/AIDS among persons of concern. Issues relating to conflicts, displacement and refugees featured more prominently in global and regional strategies on prevention, education, food and nutrition, and in interventions in emergency settings. UNHCR staff worked to improve measures to reduce stigmatization or discrimination against refugees affected by HIV/AIDS and to increase refugee access to public sector care and treatment programmes, including anti-retroviral therapy. Collaboration with partners and Governments on subregional initiatives was prioritized, and in that regard, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the participating States of the Great Lakes Initiative on AIDS and developed similar initiatives in West and Central Africa for improving continuity of services to mobile populations. The strategy involved building agreements on diagnostic and treatment protocols, bulk ordering of medi-

cation and supplies, and helping with repatriation planning and implementation.

Refugee women

During the year, UNHCR launched a pilot project on age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in 16 countries, through multifunctional teams and country-level work plans to promote gender equality and the rights of refugees of all ages. Initial results indicated that the project had helped boost awareness of gender issues in refugee situations and facilitated interaction between UNHCR staff and refugee men and women, better knowledge of refugee concerns and the identification of protection risks and gaps by age and gender. UNHCR supplemented its Guidelines for Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence in refugee and refugee-like settings with regular capacity-building sessions for its staff and those of its partners. In mid-2004, a joint UNHCR-WFP study on effective operational practices in relation to women's control of food and participation in food distribution identified ways to further secure women's interests in that regard. In collaboration with ILO, UNHCR secured technical support for refugee women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in several countries.

Refugee children

In 2004, UNHCR promoted a rights-based approach to enhancing the protection and care of refugee children and adolescents. The strategy included the continuing prioritization of protection concerns, such as separation; sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; military recruitment; education; and the specific needs of adolescents. In collaboration with other humanitarian agencies and NGOs, the Office published a global registration form for unaccompanied and separated children, and through the inter-agency Action for the Rights of Children, undertook field-focused capacity-building initiatives in Africa, Latin America and Asia. UNHCR continued to support the education of persons of concern, with particular focus on access to primary education. It launched a number of capacity-building projects, and pursued the development of educational tools and the provision of scholarships for secondary and post-secondary education. Innovative strategies, undertaken in partnership with others, including through private sector funding and support, showed positive results in Kenya, demonstrating the value of affirmative action for girls' education.

Regional activities

Africa

In 2004, the total population of concern to UNHCR in Africa, excluding North Africa, totalled 4.5 million, of whom 2.8 million were refugees, 1 million IDPs and 199,603 asylum-seekers, compared to 3.3 million in 2003 [YUN 2003, p. 1232].

The Secretary-General, in an August report submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 58/149 [YUN 2003, p. 1234], updated information on assistance provided by UNHCR to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa [A/59/317], covering 2003 and the first half of 2004. He noted that, despite the continuing decrease in the number of refugees in Africa in 2004, their situation and that of displaced persons in many parts of the continent remained precarious, especially in the Darfur province of the Sudan, from where some 200,000 refugees had fled into Chad and up to 1.5 million were displaced in the Sudan itself (see p. 235). UNHCR assisted hundreds of thousands of refugees on the continent to repatriate to their countries of origin, mainly nationals of Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia. The main refugee groups continued to originate from some of those countries, and from the Sudan and the DRC, which recorded major new outflows during 2004.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, UNHCR assisted over 17,000 of the 770,517 refugees registered in the region to repatriate to Eritrea from the Sudan, and supported the Eritrean Government in protecting and assisting other camp-based refugees and asylum-seekers inside Eritrea. In Ethiopia, the deterioration of the security situation in the western region of Gambella hampered UNHCR's access to refugee camps and affected humanitarian assistance. However, the Office assisted refugees in other parts of the country and promoted the voluntary repatriation of thousands of Somali refugees there. In Kenya, where some 240,000 refugees were in camps, an expanded multisectoral approach to combating HIV/AIDS increased awareness of preventive patient care among the camp population. Over 10,000 Somali refugees repatriated voluntarily from neighbouring countries, but the return programme was undermined by continuing instability in most parts of southern Somalia, the lack of social services and economic prospects upon return, severe drought in the north and endemic human rights violations. The deteriorating security situation hampered humanitarian access to the 200,000 refugees from the Darfur region living in Chad and malnourished IDPs. In Uganda, an estimated 1.6 million

people were displaced as a result of the conflict between the Government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army, whose continuing operation around settlements in the north of the country remained a major constraint for refugee programmes.

In the Central Africa and Great Lakes sub-region, host to some 1.3 million refugees, some 55,000 Burundians and 23,300 Rwandans were assisted in returning to their places of origin. However, hopes for the further repatriation of hundreds of thousands more refugees as a result of the improved political climate in Burundi and the DRC were not realized owing to continuing instability in some areas, including northern Central African Republic, where tension prevented some 41,000 of its nationals from repatriating from Chad. Meanwhile, the situation in Chad was further aggravated by the new influx of Sudanese fleeing from the Darfur region. UNHCR relocated 122,000 refugees to safer locations away from the border in eastern Chad during the first half of 2004. At mid-year, the Office faced another challenging situation, following the outbreak of fighting in the DRC town of Bukavu, which resulted in a fresh outflow of an estimated 20,000 refugees to Rwanda and Burundi (see p. 124).

In West Africa, where 471,328 refugees resided, the continuing instability in Côte d'Ivoire limited access to refugee-hosting areas, a situation further aggravated by the involvement of Liberian fighters in the Ivorian conflict, which fuelled animosity towards Liberian refugees in the country. An emergency resettlement programme for some 8,000 of those refugees was initiated in the United States. In Liberia itself, marked improvement in the security situation, following the deployment of UN peacekeepers, facilitated the spontaneous return of 50,000 refugees and several thousand IDPs. The challenge facing the international community was the return and reintegration of another 300,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries and 260,000 IDPs residing in camps in the country. Similar progress in the peace process in Sierra Leone (see p. 212) facilitated the repatriation of some 270,000 refugees, mainly from Guinea and Liberia. Reintegration programmes for the returnees would continue throughout 2004 and into 2005.

In Southern Africa, host to some 245,064 refugees, organized return programmes in Angola resumed in May, allowing some 8,000 refugees to be repatriated with UNHCR assistance. However, the lack of access to some parts of the country, owing to landmines and poor infrastructure, prevented repatriation to some 40 per cent of the key areas of refugee return. Another major con-

straint was the lack of adequate implementing partners. In South Africa, host to the largest number of urban refugees in the subregion, the phenomenon of mixed migration movements continued to pose a major challenge. Syndicates engaged in illegal activities abused the asylum system, thereby tarnishing the image of refugees and contributing to xenophobia, which prompted UNHCR to embark on a sensitization drive to raise government awareness and mobilize civil society support. In Zambia, the Office protected and assisted an estimated 200,000 refugees and promoted repatriation and resettlement programmes for many of them, particularly those returning mostly to Angola. Others opting to remain in Zambia benefited from economic and social empowerment programmes.

The Secretary-General also described inter-agency cooperation efforts to protect and assist refugees and displaced persons in Africa, and UNHCR's cooperation with regional bodies and initiatives. In that regard, UNHCR seconded one of its staff to the African Union (AU) to help build that organization's capacity to respond effectively to issues relating to refugees, IDPs and returnees in the continent. In collaboration with the African Parliamentary Union, UNHCR organized a regional conference on refugees in Africa: the challenges of protection and solutions (Cotonou, Benin, 1-3 June), which adopted a declaration and programme of action on ways to promote solutions to refugee problems on the continent, including through heightened awareness of international and regional refugee law.

UNHCR report. According to UNHCR's *Global Report 2004*, which provided information to the end of the year, UNHCR assisted almost 130,000 people to return to their countries in Central Africa and the Great Lakes subregion. However, the instability in eastern DRC and the insurrection by elements of the Congolese army in Bukavu in May/June led to an exodus of refugees into Rwanda and Burundi. Militia groups operating from the DRC attacked refugee sites in Gatumba in Burundi, killing some 160 refugees (see p. 149). In Gabon where repatriation was not successful, UNHCR made progress with local economic integration as the most durable solution. In the Sudan, UNHCR also maintained efforts in search of durable solutions for thousands of refugees from other countries, most notably Eritrea, and for an estimated 80,000 IDPs. One of the main constraints to its programmes in that country was its simultaneous involvement in three operations in the east, west and north, which overstretched its resources.

Repatriation programmes in East Africa and the Horn of Africa were facilitated by increased

prospects for stability in Somalia, owing to the formation of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and significant international impetus to peace processes in the subregion. UNHCR assisted approximately 18,000 refugees to return to the Somaliland region from Ethiopia and Djibouti, and another 9,900 to repatriate to Eritrea from the Sudan. The Office continued to use resettlement as a tool to enhance the physical safety and security of refugees at risk, and succeeded in resettling, in the United States, thousands of refugees from Ethiopia. In West Africa, increasing stability in Sierra Leone and Liberia enabled UNHCR to assist the repatriation of 26,000 Sierra Leonean and some 72,000 Liberian refugees from neighbouring countries. Nonetheless, the subregion still hosted over 400,000 refugees from various conflicts on the continent. In some cases, particularly in protracted refugee situations, resettlement was considered a viable durable solution, with over 7,300 persons submitted for resettlement in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States. UNHCR's overriding concerns in the subregion were conflict prevention and the negative effects of socio-economic and political instability, as well as food insufficiency. The main challenges for the reintegration of returnees were the absence of employment opportunities and the implementation of the regional disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process. In Southern Africa, UNHCR concentrated on durable solutions for the protracted refugee situations in various countries of asylum in the region. The integration of HIV/AIDS programmes into refugee operations remained a high priority, as did effective resource management. Progress was made with the repatriation of Angolan refugees, some 90,000 of whom returned from Botswana, the DRC, Namibia, the Republic of the Congo, South Africa and Zambia. For those who did not wish to repatriate, local integration schemes were initiated in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, for implementation in 2005. However, the backlog of asylum applications remained a serious challenge, as did the continuing reluctance of Rwandan refugees to repatriate; the outbreak of a meningitis epidemic in Namibia, which disrupted the return programme to Angola; and the general lack of facilities and hardship in areas of return in Angola, which discouraged voluntary returns.

UNHCR assisted 1.4 million persons in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, which received \$185.4 million in agency expenditures; East Africa and the Horn of Africa, \$111 million for 1.5 million persons of concern; West Africa, some \$118 million for 1.1 million persons in need;

and Southern Africa, \$54.2 million for 463,202 persons of concern.

Other developments. The Executive Council of the African Union (AU), at its fifth ordinary session (Addis Ababa, 30 June–3 July), adopted decision EX.CL/Dec.127(V) on the situation of refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa, reaffirming the importance of voluntary repatriation and urging AU member States to create conditions conducive to the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of refugees in their communities.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 20 December [meeting 74], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/59/498], adopted **resolution 59/172** without vote [agenda item 100].

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 58/149 of 22 December 2003,

Recalling also the Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa of 1969 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,

Reaffirming that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, together with the 1967 Protocol thereto, as complemented by the Organization of African Unity Convention of 1969, remains the foundation of the international refugee protection regime in Africa,

1. *Takes note* of the reports of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

2. *Notes* the need for African States to address resolutely the root causes of all forms of forced displacement in Africa and to foster peace, stability and prosperity throughout the African continent so as to forestall refugee flows, and calls upon the international community, including States, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and other relevant United Nations organizations, within their respective mandates, to take concrete action to meet the protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons and to contribute generously to projects and programmes aimed at alleviating their plight and facilitating durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons;

3. *Welcomes* decision EX.CL/Dec.127(V) on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union at its fifth ordinary session, held at Addis Ababa from 30 June to 3 July 2004;

4. *Takes note* of the holding of the conference organized by the African Parliamentary Union and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on "Refugees in Africa: the challenges of protection and solutions" at Cotonou, Benin, from 1 to 3 June 2004;

5. *Expresses its appreciation* for the leadership shown by the High Commissioner since assuming office in January 2001, and commends the Office of the High Commissioner for its ongoing efforts, with the support of the international community, to assist African coun-

tries of asylum and to respond to the protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa;

6. *Encourages* the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to continue to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in conjunction with relevant agencies of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations, within their respective mandates, in the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, and welcomes in this regard the appointment by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of its Special Rapporteur on refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa;

7. *Recognizes* that, among refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, women and children are the majority of the population affected by conflict and bear the brunt of atrocities and other consequences of conflict, and in this regard takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security submitted to and discussed by the Security Council;

8. *Reiterates* the importance of the full and effective implementation of standards and procedures to better address the specific protection needs of refugee children and adolescents and to safeguard rights and, in particular, to ensure adequate attention to unaccompanied and separated children and former child soldiers in refugee settings, as well as in the context of voluntary repatriation and reintegration measures;

9. *Notes with great concern* that, despite all of the efforts made so far by the United Nations, the African Union and others, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa remains precarious, calls upon States and other parties to armed conflict to observe scrupulously the letter and the spirit of international humanitarian law, bearing in mind that armed conflict is one of the principal causes of forced displacement in Africa, and welcomes in this regard the appointment by the African Union of its Special Representative on the protection of civilians in armed conflict;

10. *Recognizes* the importance of early registration and effective registration systems and censuses as a tool of protection and as a means to enable the quantification and assessment of needs for the provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance and to implement appropriate durable solutions;

11. *Also recognizes* the need to strengthen the capacity of States to provide assistance to and protection for refugees, returnees and displaced persons, and calls upon the international community, in the context of burden- and responsibility-sharing, to increase its material, financial and technical assistance in countries affected by refugees, returnees and displaced persons, to address simultaneously the inadequacies of existing assistance arrangements and to support initiatives in this regard;

12. *Reaffirms* that host States have the primary responsibility to ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, and calls upon States, in cooperation with international organizations, within their mandates, to take all necessary measures to ensure re-

spect for the principles of refugee protection and, in particular, to ensure that the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps is not compromised by the presence or the activities of armed elements or used for purposes that are incompatible with their civilian character;

13. *Condemns* all acts that pose a threat to the personal security and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers, such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion and physical attacks, deplures, in particular, the armed attacks that took place in the Gatumba transit centre in Burundi in August 2004, calls upon States of refuge, in cooperation with international organizations, where appropriate, to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for the principles of refugee protection, including the humane treatment of asylum-seekers, notes with interest that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has continued to take steps to encourage the development of measures to better ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue these efforts in consultation with States and other relevant actors;

14. *Deplures* the deaths, injuries and other forms of violence sustained by staff members of the Office of the High Commissioner and other humanitarian organizations, urges States, parties to conflict and all other relevant actors to take all necessary measures to protect activities related to humanitarian assistance, prevent attacks on and kidnapping of national and international humanitarian workers and ensure their safety and security, calls upon States to investigate fully any crime committed against humanitarian personnel and bring to justice the persons responsible for such crimes, and calls upon organizations and aid workers to abide by the national laws and regulations of the countries in which they operate;

15. *Calls upon* the Office of the High Commissioner, the African Union, subregional organizations and all African States, in conjunction with agencies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community, to strengthen and revitalize existing partnerships and forge new ones in support of the international refugee protection system, and welcomes in this regard the High Commissioner joining the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS in 2004 as a co-sponsor;

16. *Calls upon* the Office of the High Commissioner, the international community and other concerned entities to intensify their support to African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities, including training of relevant officers, disseminating information about refugee instruments and principles, providing financial, technical and advisory services to accelerate the enactment or amendment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees, strengthening emergency response and enhancing capacities for the coordination of humanitarian activities, and welcomes in this regard the conclusion on international cooperation and burden- and responsibility-sharing in mass influx situations adopted by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at its fifty-fifth session;

17. *Reaffirms* the right of return and the principle of voluntary repatriation, appeals to countries of origin and countries of asylum to create conditions that are conducive to voluntary repatriation, and recognizes that, while voluntary repatriation remains the pre-eminent solution, local integration and third-country resettlement, where appropriate and feasible, are also viable options for dealing with the situation of African refugees who, owing to prevailing circumstances in their respective countries of origin, are unable to return home;

18. *Notes with satisfaction* the voluntary return of thousands of refugees to their countries of origin, and welcomes in this regard the conclusion on legal safety issues in the context of voluntary repatriation of refugees adopted by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at its fifty-fifth session;

19. *Reaffirms* that voluntary repatriation should not necessarily be conditioned on the accomplishment of political solutions in the country of origin in order not to impede the exercise of the refugees' right to return, and recognizes that the voluntary repatriation and reintegration process is normally guided by the conditions in the country of origin, in particular that voluntary repatriation can be accomplished in conditions of safety and dignity;

20. *Welcomes* the development by the High Commissioner, in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and development actors, of the framework for durable solutions, aimed at promoting lasting solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations, including the "4Rs" approach (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) to sustainable return;

21. *Appeals* to the international community to respond positively, in the spirit of solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to the third-country resettlement needs of African refugees, and in this regard notes with interest the development of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on the strategic use of resettlement in the context of the High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative;

22. *Calls upon* the international donor community to provide financial and material assistance that allows for the implementation of community-based development programmes that benefit both refugees and host communities, as appropriate, in agreement with host countries and consistent with humanitarian objectives;

23. *Also calls upon* the international donor community to provide material and financial assistance for the implementation of programmes intended for the rehabilitation of the environment and infrastructure affected by refugees in countries of asylum;

24. *Urges* the international community, in the spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing, to continue to fund generously the refugee programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner and, taking into account the substantially increased needs of programmes in Africa, to ensure that Africa receives a fair and equitable share of the resources designated for refugees;

25. *Expresses grave concern* about the plight of internally displaced persons in Africa, calls upon States to take concrete action to pre-empt internal displacement and to meet the protection and assistance needs of in-

ternally displaced persons, recalls in that regard the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and urges the international community, led by relevant United Nations organizations, to contribute generously to national projects and programmes aimed at alleviating the plight of internally displaced persons;

26. *Invites* the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons to continue his ongoing dialogue with Member States and the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, in accordance with his mandate, and to include information thereon in his reports to the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly;

27. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session, taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum, under the item entitled "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions", and to present an oral report to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2005.

The Americas

Notable developments in North America and the Caribbean during the year included the entry into force of the 2002 "safe third country" agreement (STCA) between Canada and the United States [YUN 2002, p. 1212], the implementation of which UNHCR was formally invited to monitor. In both countries, UNHCR remained active on the issue of access and undertook missions to various ports of entry, particularly land borders, which would be the focus of its monitoring role within the STCA framework. In Canada, the Office worked to ensure that asylum-seekers were guaranteed legal aid, advocated for the protection of victims of human smuggling and/or trafficking and intercepted persons, and helped resettle some 7,400 persons of concern. A major development in the region was the exodus of an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 Haitian refugees who fled the political violence sparked by the departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (see p. 292). Most were intercepted and returned home by the United States Coast Guard. UNHCR assisted those who sought refuge in neighbouring islands, particularly Cuba and Jamaica. In another development, the United States reinvigorated its resettlement programme, admitting over 53,000 refugees during the year. However, concern about international terrorism and national security in the country resulted in consideration by the United States House of Representatives of asylum and immigration measures that would be detrimental to refugees and asylum-seekers. Policy changes were also expected in Canada, where UNHCR worked closely with the authorities to en-

sure that persons of concern were not adversely affected. In Central America and Mexico, which recorded 2,010 new refugee arrivals during the year, UNHCR assisted Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua to strengthen their national institutions to protect and assist asylum-seekers and refugees, with special attention to women and children, to manage fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures, to interpret international refugee law and to improve related national legal frameworks. UNHCR's direct assistance to refugees in the subregion included the provision of food, lodging and other necessities. A notable challenge in the subregion was irregular migration northwards through Mexico, forcing regional States to apply restrictive measures, which made the identification of asylum-seekers difficult. In South America, the conflict in Colombia led over half a million of its citizens to seek protection in neighbouring Ecuador (250,000), Costa Rica (50,000), Panama (100,000) and Venezuela (270,000). In all refugee-receiving countries, the Office helped to strengthen and increase access to national protection regimes and to improve refugees' self-reliance through community-based projects. It facilitated resettlement programmes in Brazil, Canada, Chile and the United States, promoted refugee education in Ecuador and Venezuela, and implemented refugee welfare pilot programmes on gender and age in a number of subregional States. Elsewhere in South America, UNHCR focused on intra-regional debates on migration and human rights and helped register and assist new arrivals of asylum-seekers, mostly in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. At events organized in collaboration with UNHCR to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration (Mexico City, 16 November), the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action for strengthening the international protection of refugees in Latin America were adopted. Under the Plan of Action, resettlement programmes in Brazil and Chile were accelerated during the year. In a related development, the regional States established a common agenda on the development of refugee legislation, local integration and resettlement.

Total UNHCR expenditure in the Americas in 2004 was \$28.5 million, for a population of concern numbering 2.4 million.

Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States

In 2004, UNHCR spent approximately \$51 million on activities in Asia and the Pacific, for a total population of concern of 1.3 million. For operations in Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, a total of \$192.5 mil-

lion was spent for a population of concern of 4.2 million.

South Asia

In late 2004, UNHCR responded, as part of the overall UN effort, to the devastation caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami (see p. 952) in Sri Lanka, Indonesia's Aceh province and Bangladesh, where the protracted nature of the operation resulted in increased security problems in the refugee camps, disrupting programme delivery. At the end of the year, some 20,300 refugees remained in two camps in Bangladesh, and UNHCR worked closely with WFP to assist them, as well as over 11,000 other Afghan and Myanmar refugees in India. In Nepal, where UNHCR had accorded a high priority to ending the protracted plight of Bhutanese refugees, not much progress was made in securing durable solutions, partly owing to security. In Sri Lanka, 33,700 IDPs were repatriated to their places of origin, relatively fewer than in previous years, owing to human rights violations and other protection problems. Durable solutions were yet to be found for another 353,000 IDPs and 61,000 refugees living in camps.

East Asia and the Pacific

In East Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government of Myanmar, gained access to the main areas of origin of 140,000 Myanmar refugees in Thailand and assisted the return of IDPs to those areas. In Malaysia, progress was made in protecting persons of concern through greater government involvement and increased public awareness and visibility of refugee issues. In other regional States, including Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Timor-Leste, the Office undertook a variety of activities to assist and protect refugees. Notably, it initiated a five-point plan in Indonesia to ensure the effective local integration of East Timorese remaining in the country, and assisted with the family reunification of over 2,350 formerly separated children and the local integration of another 1,100 children. UNHCR also strengthened mechanisms for addressing issues related to sexual and gender-based violence for refugees and asylum-seekers in the subregion. Operational challenges concerned the status of North Koreans seeking refuge and asylum in China, the lack of a legal framework in the Hong Kong region of China for determining asylum and refugee status, the lack of durable solutions for mandate refugees in Ja-

pan and strained relations with Viet Nam and Cambodia over asylum issues.

Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East

In Central Asia, UNHCR assisted Turkmenistan to initiate the registration of all refugees in the country, to be completed in 2005, including the estimated 12,100 Tajik and 1,000 Afghan refugees in the country. UNHCR planned to discuss with the Turkmenistan Government durable solutions for them. In Uzbekistan, the Office successfully implemented a project funded by the European Union (EU) to rehabilitate two border crossing points in the country, which subsequently led to an agreement by the EU on technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States for funding a regional project to strengthen protection capacity and support asylum systems in the subregion. In other action, UNHCR undertook an initiative in Central Asia to assess refugee protection gaps and identify solutions thereto, for discussion at a regional conference of Central Asian Governments. During the year, 605 refugees were repatriated, including nationals of Turkmenistan (249), Kyrgyzstan (174), Uzbekistan (89), Tajikistan (66) and Kazakhstan (27). Local integration in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan through citizenship was pursued on behalf of some 2,863 refugees, while resettlement, mostly in Canada and the United States, was sought for other refugees. Despite the progress made, operational challenges remained in efforts to strengthen asylum institutions and in achieving durable solutions. In South-West Asia, the repatriation programme for Afghan refugees, mostly from Iran and Pakistan, continued, facilitated by presidential elections in the country, the formation of the national army and police, accelerated demobilization and disarmament programmes and the strengthening of regional trade relations. Overall, approximately 761,000 Afghan refugees returned to their places of origin during the year. However, despite its relative economic and social recovery, conditions inside Afghanistan remained difficult, making the provision of incentives for voluntary repatriation a daunting task.

UNHCR's primary focus in North Africa remained the protracted plight of the Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, and while a political solution remained elusive, the Office continued to implement its basic humanitarian assistance activities for refugees. Owing to a marked increase in the mixed flow of asylum-seekers and economic migrants transiting through North Africa in an attempt to enter Europe illegally, the five countries of the Union of the Arab

Maghreb took measures to stem migratory flow through their territories. As many as 120,000 people, of whom 35,000 were of sub-Saharan origin, were estimated to have attempted to cross the Mediterranean during the year through unseaworthy vessels, which resulted in the drowning of some migrants. A strategy for addressing the phenomenon and for strengthening the institution of asylum were among UNHCR's concerns in the subregion, as was the fragility of the refugee protection framework in most of the subregional States.

In the Middle East, events in Iraq remained prominent in subregional operations. Although a small number of Iraqi refugees and IDPs had repatriated during the year, unfavourable conditions in parts of the country resulted in fresh outflows of thousands of other Iraqis, who fled mostly to Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The outbreak of fighting in Yemen in the summer of 2004 between Government forces and dissidents displaced several thousand Yemeni nationals, even as thousands of other asylum-seekers and refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia continued to embark on risky sea journeys to Yemen. In Egypt, the refugee status determination of Sudanese asylum-seekers was suspended in June, in view of progress towards peace in southern Sudan. Some 4,000 of those refugees who had already been recognized were resettled in Australia, Canada, Finland and the United States. During the year, UNHCR piloted a project in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, aimed at enhancing a community development approach to protection and assistance operations for refugees, and at mainstreaming age and gender concerns in related activities.

Europe

In 2004, UNHCR's expenditure for activities in Europe totalled \$114.2 million, for a population of concern numbering over 5 million. Nearly half of that amount (\$52 million) was spent for approximately 1 million persons of concern in South-Eastern Europe.

Western, Central and Eastern Europe

In Western Europe, asylum claims continued to drop markedly, with the 25 EU countries receiving 19 per cent fewer claims than the 288,100 recorded in 2003 [YUN 2003, p. 1239]. The drop, however, was uneven in individual States, and in a number of cases, claims actually increased. In leading asylum destinations, including Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, claims declined by 30 per cent or more, while in other popular destinations, particularly

France, which received the highest number of asylum applications (61,600), a 3 per cent rise in claims was recorded. Applications also increased by some 4 per cent on average for the 10 new EU member States. The largest group of asylum-seekers (30,100) were nationals of the Russian Federation, of whom the majority were reportedly Chechens. Others came from Serbia and Montenegro, particularly the province of Kosovo (22,300); China (19,700); Turkey (16,200); and India (11,900). In April, the first phase of the EU asylum harmonization process was completed with a political agreement on asylum procedures, comprising the establishment of databases and regulations that were designed to determine which EU member State would be responsible for examining asylum applications in another member State and a number of other directives relating to key aspects of asylum/refugee status. In November, EU member States adopted the Hague Programme, which, among other things, set out the parameters for the second phase in developing a common asylum system. While endorsing the initiative, UNHCR encouraged the EU to develop appropriate systems of responsibility/burden sharing in addressing asylum claims and hoped that the special needs of refugees and other persons of concern would be taken into consideration. The Office continued to concentrate on protection and advocacy, focusing on monitoring and commenting on legislative proposals at the national and regional levels. The operational challenges it confronted included more restrictive asylum laws and policies in some regional States, despite the declining number of asylum claims; poor reception and prolonged detention of asylum-seekers; abuse of the asylum procedure; variations in refugee recognition among the regional States; and aspects of the first phase of EU harmonization of the asylum system might lead to breaches of international law.

In Central Europe and the Baltic States, where asylum claims increased slightly to 43,390 from 43,370 in 2003, the experience of individual countries also differed sharply. Contrary to the situation of Cyprus, which saw a dramatic 124 per cent increase in applications, and of Poland and Slovakia, where significant increases had also occurred, the Czech Republic experienced a 52 per cent decline, while in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania, asylum applications dropped by over 20 per cent. The Central European countries that acceded to the EU in May 2004 began to enhance their structures and capacities as destination countries for asylum-seekers. UNHCR made considerable progress in strengthening asylum procedures and enhancing relevant

skills, which enabled more asylum-seekers to gain access to refugee status determination procedures and helped improve the quality of judicial reviews. Also, as a result of UNHCR's advocacy, NGOs and border guard agencies in 12 regional States were able to collaborate effectively, thereby enhancing their protection role and involvement in border monitoring. Despite the progress made, challenges remained, such as obstacles to the implementation of legislation by some regional States to enhance integration; the tenuous capacity of the new EU member States in the region to manage secondary movements and monitor irregular migration on the Union's eastern border; the tendency in some regional States to detain asylum-seekers; lengthy and cumbersome procedures in processing asylum claims; and the failure of some States to follow the legal procedure in determining the best interests of the child when assigning them to foster care.

In Eastern Europe, despite widespread violence and insecurity linked to the conflict in the Chechnya republic of the Russian Federation, some 19,000 Chechen IDPs returned to their homes during the year, while those left in Ingushetia moved closer to full integration. Other refugees repatriated from Ukraine, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova. Some 400 refugees found solutions through integration in Belarus, as did 255 others in Ukraine. In Georgia, where the international community continued to promote peace in its two breakaway provinces, UNHCR began verifying IDP registration to prepare for voluntary return programmes, should they become viable. The Office also helped to ensure more effective and targeted assistance to Chechen refugees in Georgia's Pankisi Valley region and assisted the displaced and other persons of concern in the Russian Federation's northern Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova. In May, it held discussions with CIS members, and began a detailed gaps analysis to define areas where further action was needed. The *Söderköping process*—the regional cross-border cooperation mechanism managed jointly by UNHCR, IOM and the Swedish Migration Board—expanded its activities in helping regional States strengthen asylum, migration, protection and border management. However, ongoing conflicts, particularly in Georgia, and the

restructuring of refugee and asylum services in Belarus and Ukraine hampered asylum system development in those countries. An additional source of concern was UNHCR's lack of sufficient funds, which limited its capacity to assist IDPs, particularly in Azerbaijan.

South-Eastern Europe

In South-Eastern Europe, where progress was maintained in securing durable solutions in the Balkans, over 20,000 persons of concern, including 2,400 refugees from abroad, returned to their places of origin in Bosnia and Herzegovina, bringing to over 1 million the total number of those who had returned since the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina [YUN 1995, p. 544]. Others returned to Croatia (over 7,400), Serbia and Montenegro (129) and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (725). UNHCR facilitated the return process, assisted the returnees, and helped to secure alternative options for durable solutions and to strengthen the regional asylum system. In Serbia and Montenegro, UNHCR enhanced its protection activities with the publication of a study, "Analysis of the situation of internally displaced persons from Kosovo: law and practice", which identified areas where action was needed to improve protection for IDPs. Another UNHCR publication facilitated asylum registration in the country. In Serbia itself, the Office helped the authorities provide alternative durable solutions to over 400 refugees and IDPs, and assisted with refugee registration, designed to review refugee status so as to reduce substantially the 275,000 refugees currently in the country. In the Serbian province of Kosovo, where the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in March displaced some 4,200 ethnic minorities, UNHCR led efforts to provide emergency assistance to those affected. However, the violence and its aftermath, coupled with continuing uncertainties over Kosovo's future status (see p. 404), posed the greatest challenge to UNHCR's activities in Serbia and Montenegro and neighbouring countries, as they hampered minority returns, which fell to some 2,400 in 2004, from 3,800 in 2003. The prospects for finding durable solutions for displaced Kosovars in general were also diminished.