



Central Africa and the Great Lakes

Recent developments

The year 2003 was marked by considerable optimism surrounding two protracted peace processes: in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Burundi peace process, which is supported by the regional leaders and South Africa, appeared to have entered a new phase, with the Government of Burundi and the main rebel group having signed a ceasefire agreement in early October. Many observers were impressed with the smooth transition that took place in Bujumbura at the end of 2002. The African Union began to deploy forces outside the capital to be followed by the cantonment of the fighting forces. These positive developments were almost thrown into disarray, however, when some rebels of *La force nationale de la libération* (FNL) marched into Bujumbura in early July 2003, leaving many civilians dead and thousands displaced. In late 2003, preparatory work will begin on national elections scheduled for late 2004.

Burundi
Central African Republic
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Gabon
Republic of Chad
Republic of the Congo
Rwanda
United Republic of Tanzania

Strategic objectives

UNHCR expects to continue to repatriate Burundian, Rwandan, Angolan and other refugees who volunteer to return to their homes in 2004. In addition, UNHCR



is already developing a strategy for the phased return of refugees originating from DRC, if security conditions permit.

Those refugees in the region who can neither return nor settle in countries of asylum will be assisted to resettle in third countries, especially the USA and Canada. After a series of consultations with the Government of Rwanda at the end of 2002, the Office agreed to enter tripartite agreements with African countries hosting Rwandan refugees. In close co-ordination with the asylum countries, UNHCR is changing its approach to the return of Rwandan refugees, estimated to be over 70,000 in Africa. It is believed that most Rwandans who had left the country before the end of 1994 could now safely return. UNHCR is therefore actively promoting the return of

Rwandans and is planning to invoke the ceased circumstances cessation clause (see glossary) for Rwandan refugees by the end of 2004.

Operations

Operations in **Burundi**, **Chad**, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo (RoC), **Rwanda** and the **United Republic of Tanzania** will be covered in the individual country chapters.

Having closed its offices in **Chad** in 2001, UNHCR had to reopen some offices in 2003: in the capital N'djamena (to assist the estimated 41,000 refugees from CAR in southern Chad) and, in eastern Chad (to assist the estimated 65,000 refugees from Sudan). Until a more durable solution can be found, UNHCR is planning to implement its operational strategy by moving refugees away from the border areas into settlements and will continue providing them with protection and humanitarian assistance.

In **Central African Republic (CAR)** the Government of President Patasse was overthrown by a *coup d'état* organised by his former chief of staff, General Bozize, in early March 2003. Consequently, over 41,000 Central African refugees fled and sought asylum in southern Chad. Chadian migrants who had for many years lived in CAR likewise fled the fighting and returned to their country of origin. At the same time, Central African refugees residing in neighbouring countries such as DRC and the Republic of the Congo opted to return to CAR, mainly to its capital Bangui. This led to the closure of Mole camp (Zongo) in DRC and a reduction in the numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers in Congo-Brazzaville. The political changes in CAR and DRC have prompted Congolese refugees to seek repatriation assistance from UNHCR.



Chad: In mid-2003, UNHCR provided emergency assistance, including cooking utensils to Central African refugees living together with Chadians.
UNHCR / E. Parsons.

In **DRC**, the inauguration of the Government of Transition in July 2003 heralded an important turning point in the recent political history of the country. President Kabila and his four Vice Presidents (drawn from the parties of former opposition and rebellion) were expected to lead the country to democratic elections within 18 months. Although fragile, the situation in DRC is moving in a positive direction, and has already given rise to return movements from the Central African Republic. However, the complexity of the political situation is likely to bedevil implementation of the provisions of the Sun City (South Africa) Peace Agreement. Furthermore, considerable tensions continue to exist in Bunia, Ituri province, and in other regions such as the Kivus and northern and eastern Katanga. The timely deployment of MONUC forces in Bunia succeeded in reducing these tensions with a firm response to rebel movements attempting to unsettle the mission.

The Congolese population and international observers are still concerned about the credibility and sustainability of the transitional arrangements. There are fears that co-habitation and power-sharing between four rebel movements, the previous Government, and elements of the unarmed political opposition, as well as other elected representatives, could prove impossible to manage. However, President Kabila is proceeding purposefully to establish institutions of governance, with the firm and committed backing of the international community.

The situation in Angola continued to improve in the wake of the peace accord between former UNITA rebels and the Government. As a result, UNHCR has been able to repatriate more than 20,000 Angolan refugees from DRC since mid-2003. The repatriation programme will continue into 2004.

The ultimate goal of UNHCR's programme in **Gabon** is to organise the repatriation or local settlement of the Congolese and other refugees. However, UNHCR will, in 2004, continue to provide basic humanitarian assistance with an emphasis on health, education, income generation and agriculture. The main focus will be to prepare refugees to become self-reliant, so that they are better able to improve their standard of living on their return home. Moreover, the Office aims to strengthen the capacity of the *Commission nationale pour les réfugiés* (CNR), local authorities and national NGOs in providing international protection and basic humanitarian assistance. UNHCR's office in Gabon also administers refugee matters in Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Rwanda consolidated efforts to attain peace and to improve relations with its neighbours. Nearly 40,000 prisoners formerly accused of genocide were released; the traditional judiciary system started functioning and presidential and legislative elections were held. The Government won with a majority of over 95 per cent of votes cast.

The country continues to encourage the return and reintegration of its citizens from various countries in the region. By the end of August 2003, UNHCR had helped almost 10,000 Rwandans from the Kivus (DRC) to return home. In the same context, UNHCR signed tripartite agreements with Zambia, the Republic of the Congo and Uganda, providing a legal framework for repatriation operations. In close co-ordination with the countries of asylum and with the support of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the DRC, UNHCR is promoting the return of Rwandan refugees.

Another positive development in 2003 is the final agreement of the Rwandan Government not to merge the two refugee

camps hosting Congolese refugees. This agreement was predicated on an improvement of the security situation in the vicinity of the camps, near the Ugandan border.

While the **Republic of the Congo (RoC)** continued to rebuild its socio-political institutions, RoC refugees hesitated to return, amid uncertainties concerning the inclusiveness of the political process. Most of the refugees living in Gabon chose to "wait and see", to allow more time to monitor developments in their country. By contrast, a large number of RoC refugees living in DRC opted for repatriation, mainly to Brazzaville.

The **United Republic of Tanzania** still hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa. In addition, Tanzania continues to play a pivotal role in hosting and convening the Arusha peace initiative, which seeks to end the conflict in Burundi. With UNHCR's assistance, Tanzania organised a regional conference in September 2003 that attracted participants from ten countries in the region. Topics such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the idea of "safe havens" in refugees' countries of origin, Convention Plus, as well as additional resources for African refugees were discussed. It was agreed that food shortages, restrictions on movement and the closure of markets in the camps put an additional burden on the refugees. Unfortunately, the perception persists that refugees contribute to insecurity and that there is too much mere lip service paid to international burden-sharing. Despite the pressure by the Tanzanian Government for the enhanced return of certain refugee groups in mid-2003, the matter is now closed. Tanzania continues to provide protection to some 500,000 refugees.

Budget (USD)			
Country	Annual Programme	Supplementary Programme	Total
Burundi	6,720,331	0	6,720,331
Central African Republic	2,042,258	0	2,042,258
Chad ¹	2,353,603	9,744,511	12,098,114
Democratic Republic of the Congo	23,114,682	0	23,114,682
Gabon	2,370,399	0	2,370,399
Republic of the Congo	6,422,141	0	6,422,141
United Republic of Tanzania	27,361,875	0	27,361,875
Regional Activities ²	8,693,500	0	8,693,500
Sub-total	79,078,789	9,744,511	88,823,300
Rwanda	6,639,929	0	6,639,929
Total	85,718,718	9,744,511	95,463,229

¹ The supplementary programme budget does not include 7 per cent support costs (USD 590,240) that are recovered from each contribution received to meet indirect costs for UNHCR (field and headquarters).

² Includes assistance to various refugees in the Central Africa and Great Lakes region, such as resettlement, care and maintenance, as well as support costs for UNVs and consultants, light aircraft charter costs and scholarships for refugee students.