RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Colombian conflict continues to escalate with ever-widening regional implications and increasing levels of mass displacement within the country. Displacement linked to aerial fumigation of coca plantations has been lower than initially feared and has largely been taking place internally rather than across borders. However, recurrent conflicts in border areas have resulted in periodic forced displacement to neighbouring countries. The peace dialogue between the Government and the two main armed factions, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) remains inconclusive. The neighbouring countries of Ecuador, Brazil, Panama, Peru and Venezuela are all to a greater or lesser extent affected by the spill-over effects of the conflict, namely violent incursions of armed groups, transfer of narco-trafficking structures and an irregular but continuous influx of Colombians in search of protection. The Peruvian Government has recently requested UNHCR's co-operation in assessing the likelihood and scope of future cross-border flows from Colombia.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, PROGRESS AND CONSTRAINTS

UNHCR's regional strategy is based on a two-pronged approach aimed at promoting protection and solutions for Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries, as well as for IDPs within Colombia itself. In 2001, UNHCR objectives in the asylum countries are:

- To improve contingency planning and emergency preparedness for potential mass influxes;
- To consolidate protection and solutions within the region for asylum-seekers and refugees;
- To promote solutions for urban refugees;
- To promote a better understanding of refugee issues and raise awareness of UNHCR's mandate.

The Government of Ecuador has extended protection to several thousand Colombians. However, those arriving at border areas in Venezuela and Panama faced more restrictive policies. Despite these constraints, progress has been made in strengthening national protection frameworks in the main countries of asylum. New strategic alliances have been forged with key civil society partners to expand UNHCR's outreach in remote border regions. Public information activities have been raising awareness at all levels of society.

In Colombia, UNHCR's objectives are:

- To help build an effective, integrated state and civil society capacity to ensure protection and solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- To ensure that humanitarian efforts in favour of IDPs and peace initiatives are mutually reinforcing;
- To contribute to the strengthening of the regional asylum framework;
- To facilitate co-ordination of IDP issues within the UN system.

Although the scope of the IDP crisis exceeds national capacities and resources, the Government's response has improved, both in terms of inter-institutional co-ordination and operational response. In March, the Constitutional Court took an important decision on protection of IDP rights, basing its conclusions largely on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement presented in 1998 by the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Displaced Persons. In addition,
implementing regulations pertaining to the new law have been adopted, covering IDP access to health, education and land rights. However, physical security of IDPs remains a major challenge for both national and international agencies in the absence of adequate State presence in conflict zones.

**ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE**

In **Ecuador**, out of 12,000 Colombians who arrived in Sucumbios province fleeing violence in Putumayo in the second half of last year, about 10,000 have returned to Colombia, and the remaining 2,000 have been registered as asylum-seekers. Early this year, an estimated 1,400 persons crossed into the provinces of Carchi and Esmeraldas. Their status is being determined on an individual basis. UNHCR despatched a special refugee status determination team in June to speed up processing of pending asylum claims and provide specialised training to local counterparts. UNHCR also co-ordinated the contingency plan for Sucumbios, providing shelter for some 1,200 persons. Rapid intervention kits consisting of household, personal and food items were prepared and sites identified in case of new refugee influxes. UNHCR also led emergency preparedness involving partners such as MSF, OXFAM, GTZ and the Red Cross, and facilitated an exchange of information on refugees between local media and the BBC World Service.

In **Panama**, UNHCR supported the Government in responding to the needs of some 1,000 Colombian refugees. Given the potential for further influxes, UNHCR presented a contingency plan to the Government, based on various tripartite missions to both sides of the border. The first tripartite meeting between UNHCR and the Governments of Panama and Colombia was held in Bogota in June to discuss protection and assistance issues related to Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees. A delegation from the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) visited Panama and recommended the establishment of a UNHCR presence in the country.

In **Venezuela**, UNHCR participated in the elaboration of a draft refugee law along with representatives from key ministries and civil society. If adopted by the National Assembly, the law will set up a national refugee status determination procedure. In the interim, however, little progress was made in ensuring access by individual asylum seekers to the current ad hoc refugee status procedure and to provisional documentation. At the same time, border authorities continue to deport undocumented Colombians. Through UNHCR’s presence at the border in San Cristobal, monitoring partnerships have been concluded with the Catholic Church and local NGOs, and a series of refugee law workshops carried out with the Armed Forces. To counter negative public perceptions of Colombian refugees, an emphasis was placed on information campaigns, including regular workshops with local journalists and educational events. A leading national newspaper created a special web page containing essential information on refugees, from both an international and regional perspective.

In **Colombia**, forced displacement worsened during the first half of the year, with some 75,000 additional IDPs officially registered (NGO estimates are even higher). Violence resulting from armed activity is increasingly affecting major cities, causing intra-urban displacement. Given the risk of new refugee outflows, added emphasis has been placed on border monitoring, as well as coordination and monitoring of voluntary repatriation to Colombia. Jointly with national counterparts, UNHCR has monitored the return of a limited number of Colombian refugees from Ecuador and Panama during this period.

**Activities on Behalf of IDPs**
UNHCR has been implementing activities in all five components of its *Operational Plan for IDPs* (namely Overall Institutional Framework, Prevention, Emergency Response, Solutions, and Advocacy and
Dissemination). Activities have been ongoing at both the national and local level in the three priority regions, Urabá, Magdalena Medio, and Southern Colombia.

Strengthening the National Institutional Framework for IDPs
UNHCR has continued to co-finance and provide expertise to the team of specialists within the Joint Technical Unit of the RSS (Red de Solidaridad Social), UNHCR's main government counterpart. In support of the revised IDP registration system required to enable access to state benefits, new standardised registration forms have been distributed to all public ministry offices in the country and training of key officials initiated. IDP protection has been improved through personal documentation campaigns carried out by the National Registry, benefiting a total of 16,172 IDPs. Coverage of more remote areas has been improved with the deployment of a Mobile Unit financed by UNHCR for the registration and documentation of IDPs. To strengthen the role of the armed forces in protecting IDP rights, four regional training courses were carried out with the participation of ICRC, benefiting over 200 officers. Media coverage of IDP issues and UNHCR's role has continued to increase, as evidenced by the broad publicity granted to World Refugee Day. Agreements have been signed with major universities to offer courses on displacement for public officials and national humanitarian personnel.

Area-based Programmes at the Local Level
In the three UNHCR priority regions, emphasis is placed on securing a coordinated application of national IDP policies at the local level. This includes training of municipal committees and support for 31 IDP organisations, representing some 15,000 IDPs. Child protection is being emphasised through a series of peace education pilot programmes, carried out jointly with UNHCR's main implementing partner Opcion Legal and the Ministry of Education. These are designed to respond to the psychosocial needs of IDP children and promote the creation of parent-teacher associations as a means of resolving social conflicts at the community level. UNHCR support for 27 schools in Magdalena Medio has been benefitting a total of 144 teachers and 4,314 students. In order to address the special vulnerability of indigenous communities to forced displacement, a programme of collaboration between UNHCR, RSS and three indigenous organisations has been developed.

Enhancing Co-ordination amongst International Partners Working with IDPs
UNHCR has been facilitating inter-agency co-ordination through its leadership of the Thematic Group for IDPs (GTD), with professional support from two OCHA staff members. The GTD produced a joint analysis of the IDP phenomenon, the findings of which were shared with donors and international organisations in January. A special inter-agency working group on gender created in April produced a workplan which has been agreed upon by GTD members.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY-DECEMBER
The regional implications of the Colombian conflict, coupled with the unstable socio-economic situation in countries in the region, require UNHCR to be prepared for potential population movements. The Office will continue to focus on strengthening the legal and protection framework; expanding its presence in key areas; building confidence with national counterparts; and consolidating co-ordination mechanisms between UNHCR offices.

In Colombia itself, UNHCR will continue to implement its Operational Plan for IDPs at national and local levels. Border monitoring will be intensified, given the potential for new cross border movements. In response to an official request from the Government of Colombia, UNHCR will assess the feasibility of opening a fourth office in the Atlantic Coast region in early 2002. This will be done in consultation with both national and international partners, including the donor community.
SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA
Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Socio-economic difficulties have deepened throughout the sub-region, straining national capacities and resources available for refugees and asylum-seekers. Civil unrest has occurred in both Bolivia and Paraguay, resulting in growing internal displacement (in the case of Bolivia) and migration flows. As of 30 June, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in the sub-region was estimated to total 6,556, with women comprising 40 per cent of this population. Some 46 per cent and 40 per cent of these people are located in Brazil and Argentina respectively. New arrivals have come from within Latin America, as well as Africa and Central Europe.

Strategic Objectives, Progress and Constraints

UNHCR’s main objectives for 2001 in Southern South America are to:
- Harmonise national laws and eligibility procedures within the MERCOSUR framework;
- Enhance local integration through strengthening of state-civil society partnerships in favour of refugees;
- Advocate and mobilise funds in the private sector through ARCA;
- Promote resettlement from abroad, especially to Chile and Brazil.

The prevailing socio-economic crisis in the sub-region and UNHCR's own budgetary constraints hampered fulfilment of UNHCR's goals, forcing the postponement or cancellation of key activities. While national partners continued to share generously in local integration cost-sharing schemes, refugees were increasingly competing with pressing national social needs.

Activities until 30 June

Regional/National Asylum Systems:
UNHCR has continued to promote regional harmonisation of refugee law within both the MERCOSUR framework and the IOM-sponsored regional conferences on migration. UNHCR participated in the IOM-sponsored "Puebla Sur" process of all South American governments, held in April in Santiago de Chile, as well as in a regional conference for immigration officials of MERCOSUR countries, held in Uruguay in June. While Brazil has a comprehensive national refugee law and a refugee commission, in other countries of the sub-region (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay), progress is uneven. In Bolivia, key ministries and human rights organisations are debating a draft refugee law to be submitted to Parliament. In Uruguay, the administration's support of resettlement has led to a commitment to strengthen the national legal framework for refugees.

UNHCR has also continued to promote national refugee status determination mechanisms. In Argentina, where UNHCR is concerned about the backlog in pending asylum claims and functional problems affecting CEPARE, the national eligibility commission, a joint technical co-operation project is being developed with the Government to address these issues. Special emphasis has been placed on involving new civil society partners in the provision of legal services and counselling to refugees. Contact has been established with a regional network of law school legal clinics to encourage the incorporation of refugees into their programmes.

Local Integration: Despite domestic difficulties and UNHCR's own budget reductions, national institutions have continued to share the costs of local
integration for refugees. In Argentina and Brazil, state/civil society cost-sharing amounts to 45 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Currently, care and maintenance assistance is given only to the most vulnerable cases, for a maximum of six months. In most countries, asylum-seekers and refugees have been integrated in the national health system and receive free medical treatment and medicine. Access to the local labour market has been constrained both by the economic situation and delays in obtaining work permits. To encourage self-reliance, UNHCR has been supporting 30 small businesses, 10 per cent of which are managed by refugee women. In Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay, a change in implementing partners has given UNHCR the opportunity to emphasise participation in protection and a solution-oriented approach to local integration.

Public Information and PSFR: The scope and impact of regional PI activities have been seriously curtailed by Action 2 reductions amounting to fifty percent of these programmes. Nonetheless, broad media coverage of refugee issues has been ensured, especially in Argentina, resulting in employment offers for refugees in some cases. Activities supported by ARCA (Argentina con ACNUR) helped raise 33 per cent more funds from the private sector in the first half of 2001 than total funds raised in the year 2000.

Resettlement: UNHCR’s efforts to promote resettlement in the sub-region have been focusing on Chile and Brazil. In April, a resettlement mission including Chilean government representatives visited Baku (Azerbaijan), resulting in the selection of a first group of refugees for resettlement in Chile. In Brazil, the first semester of 2001 was dedicated to identifying different locations in Brazil for pilot resettlement projects, selecting NGO implementing partners and establishing general selection criteria.

OUTLOOK FOR July-December

UNHCR’s main objectives in the sub-region remain essentially unchanged. Budget reductions have, however, required the cancellation of planned UNHCR support to curriculum development and training of national law enforcement academies. In addition to already planned activities, revised priorities until the end of the year include:

- In Argentina, promotion of a national law will be linked to the CEPARE technical co-operation programme; in Bolivia, this goal will be promoted through a PARINAC event scheduled for September 2001;
- Regional harmonisation of refugee law will be further pursued through a meeting organised by UNHCR in October on the human rights of migrants and refugees, with participation of human rights officials of MERCOSUR countries;
- Local integration and national cost-sharing will be further enhanced through the PARINAC process with both regional and national-level meetings planned in most countries with key civil society partners.
## FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

### Annual Programme Budget

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Initial Budget</th>
<th>Revised Budget</th>
<th>Total Funds Available</th>
<th>Obligation Level</th>
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1 Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.

2 Covers activities in Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

3 Covers activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.