

# REFUGEE CHILDREN: ESCAPE FROM PERSECUTION AND WAR



UNHCR / P. Moazzes



UNHCR / A. Hoffmann



UNHCR / U. Weisner

 **UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

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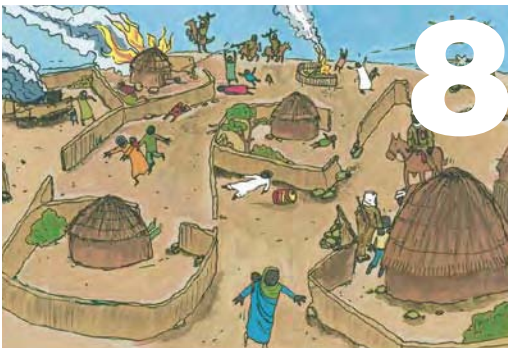
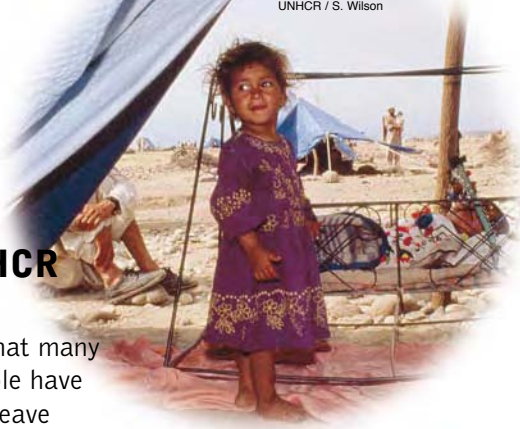


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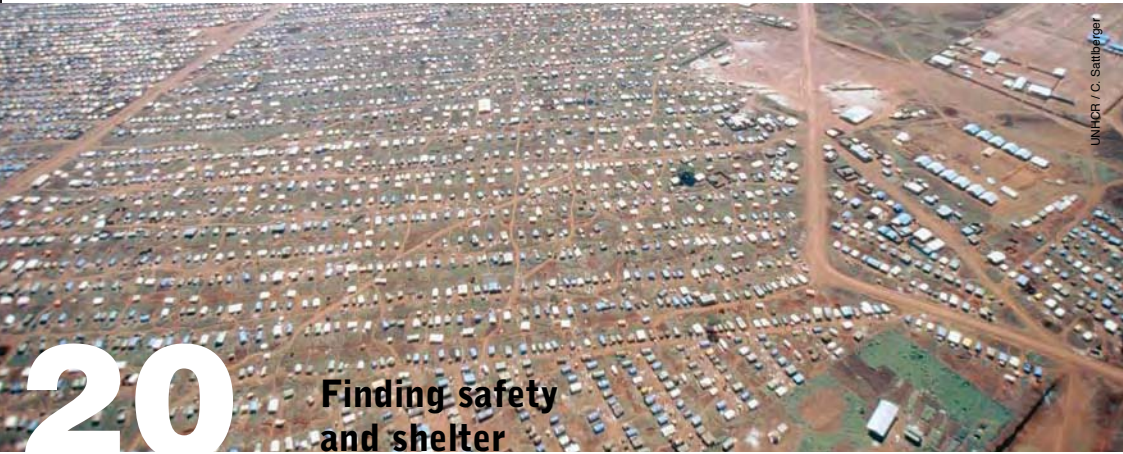
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# WHO ARE REFUGEE CHILDREN?

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





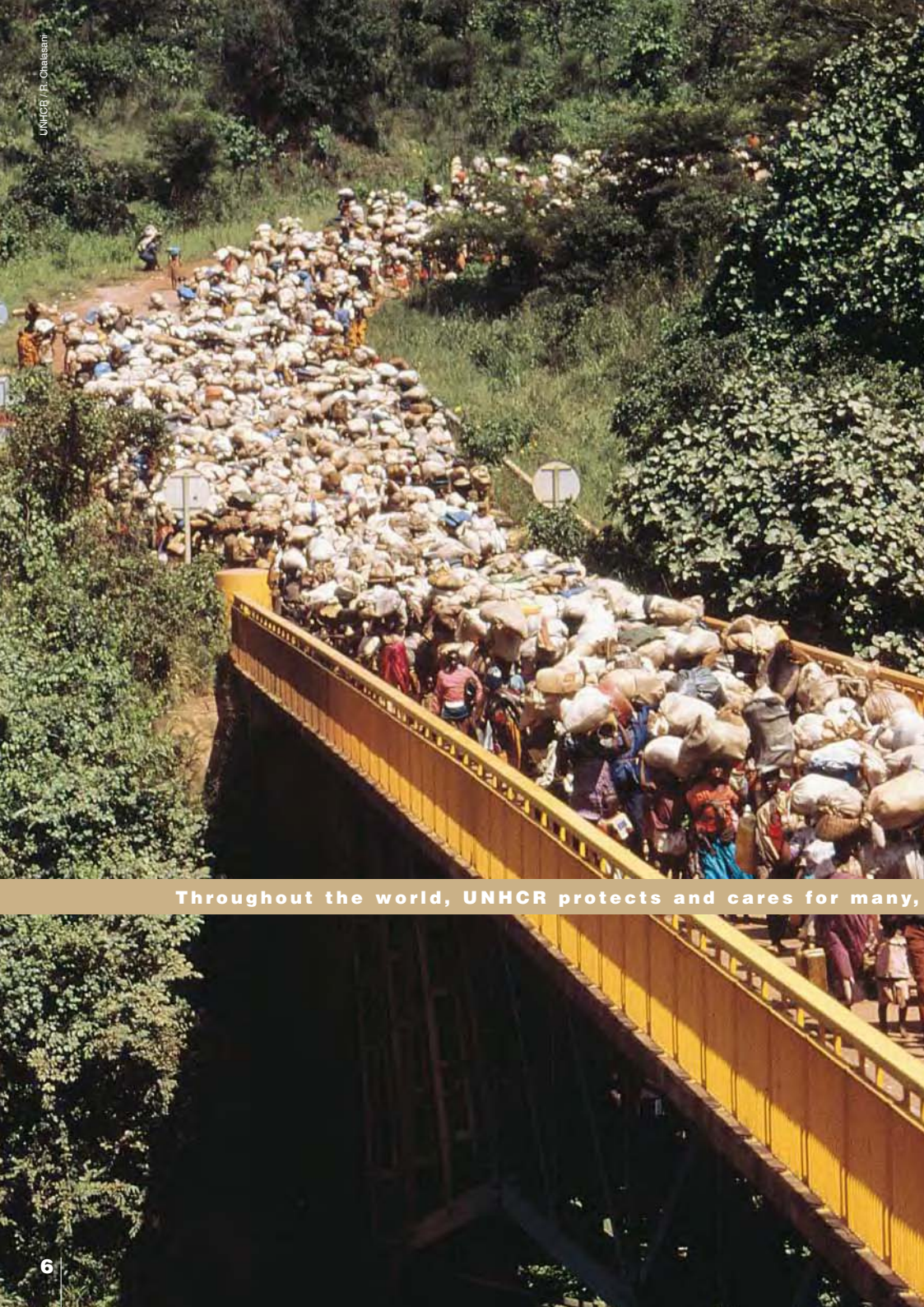
1. Refugee children no longer have a home, nor a country. Sometimes, they have lost their families. They are children whose childhood has been torn away.

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

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

2





Throughout the world, UNHCR protects and cares for many,

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



# THE PEOPLE UNHCR PROTECTS



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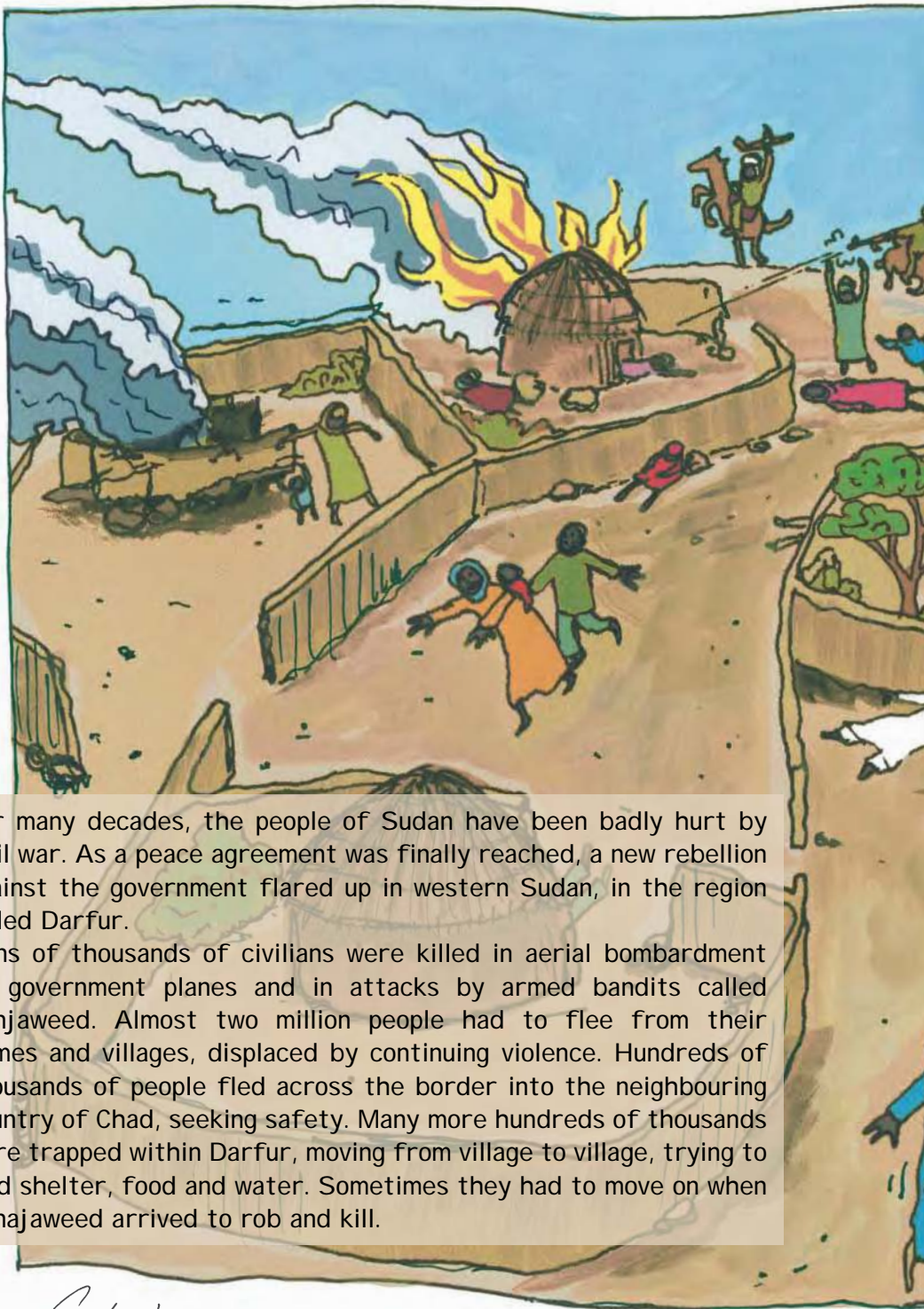
**many millions of people. Over half of them are children.**

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

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

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

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

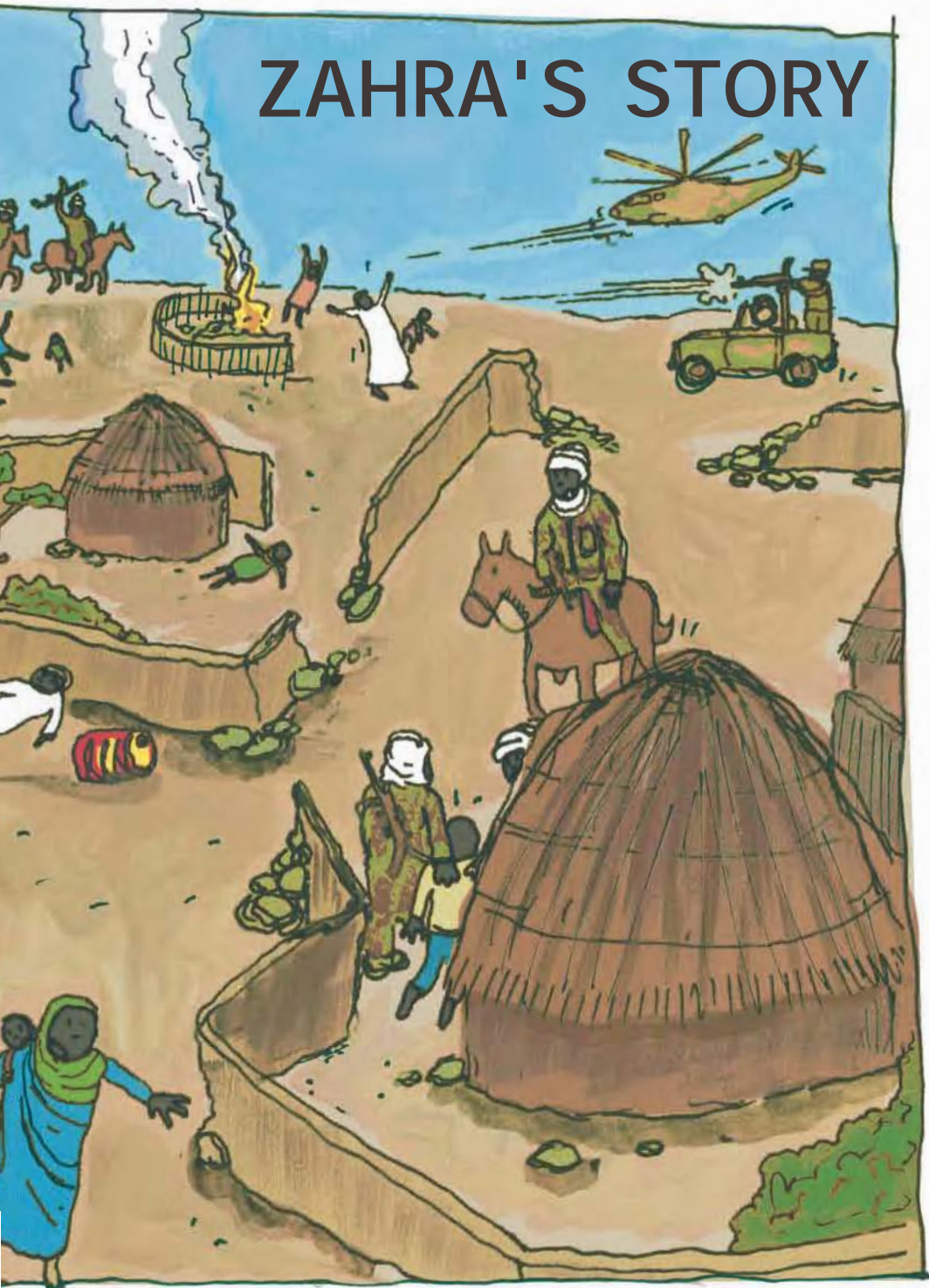


For many decades, the people of Sudan have been badly hurt by civil war. As a peace agreement was finally reached, a new rebellion against the government flared up in western Sudan, in the region called Darfur.

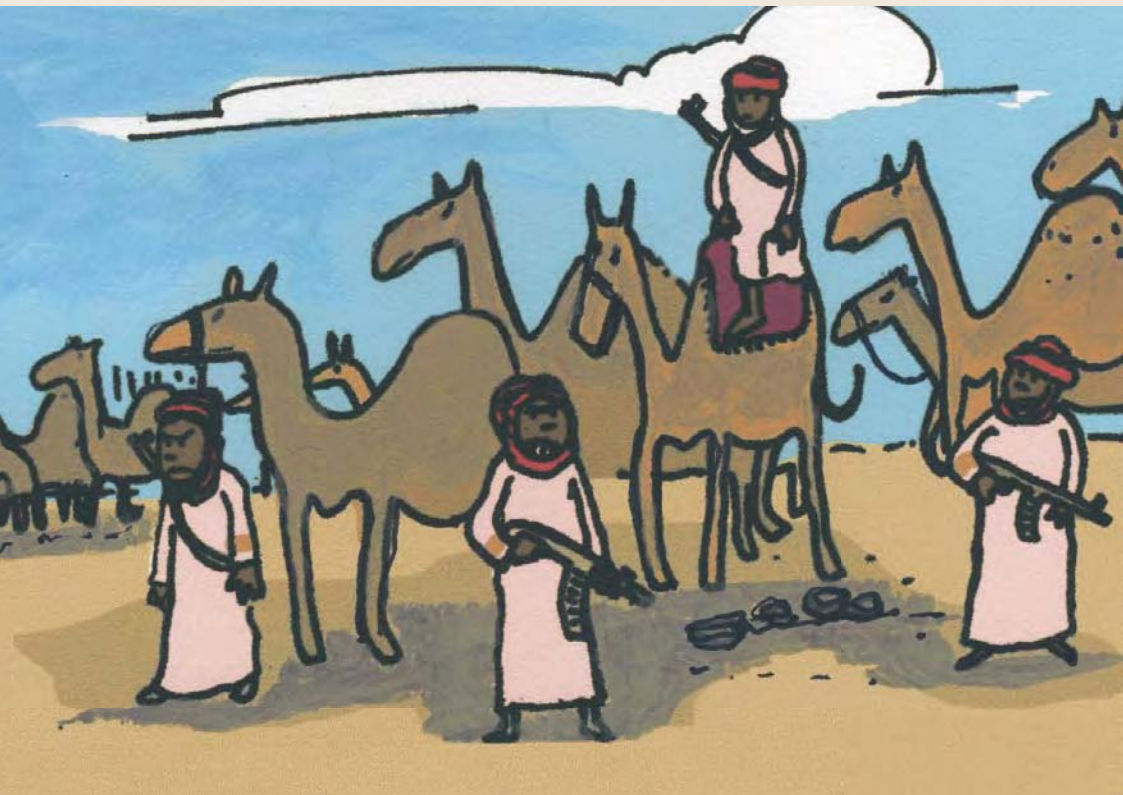
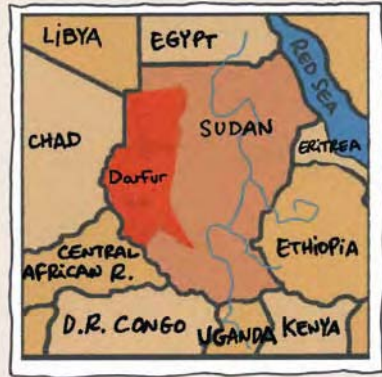
Tens of thousands of civilians were killed in aerial bombardment by government planes and in attacks by armed bandits called Janjaweed. Almost two million people had to flee from their homes and villages, displaced by continuing violence. Hundreds of thousands of people fled across the border into the neighbouring country of Chad, seeking safety. Many more hundreds of thousands were trapped within Darfur, moving from village to village, trying to find shelter, food and water. Sometimes they had to move on when Janjaweed arrived to rob and kill.



# ZAHRA'S STORY

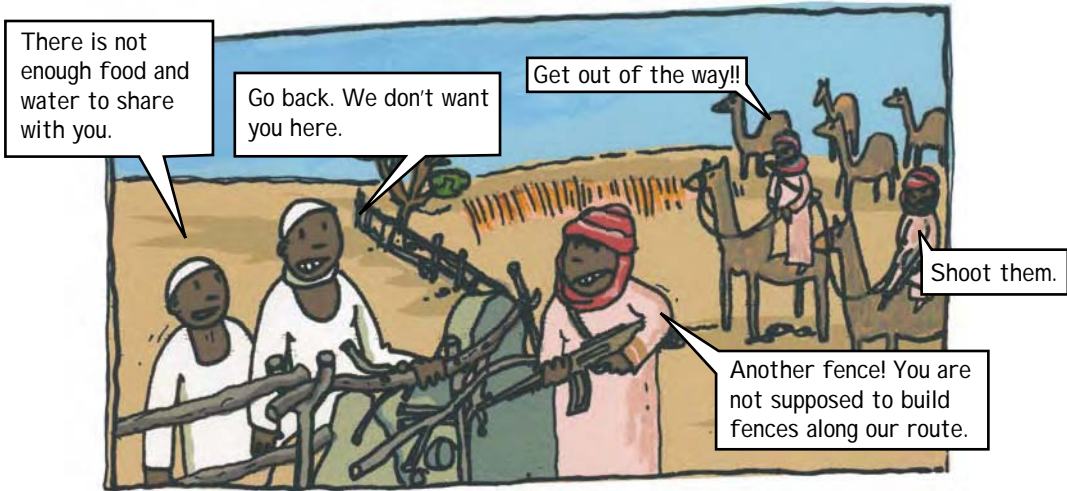


**D**arfur is a large region that is almost the size of France. In the rainy season, the dusty brown land turns a verdant green, and nomadic tribes take their herds of camels and cattle north to graze on seasonal grass. When the vegetation withers, the nomads retreat to the south with their animals, following regular routes. They have to seek water and grazing rights from farming communities along the route.



Often there were disputes between the farmers and the nomadic herders. During times of drought and famine, farmers needed to use every available bit of land to farm or forage for food, and they closed off the traditional routes used by the herders. Rather than watch their animals die of starvation in a dried up land, the herders tried to force open the routes and attacked farmers who tried to block their paths.

Traditionally, the herders arrived with their animals after harvest time but for many years, they arrived too early. Their animals trampled over crops and destroyed the harvest. Hostility between the farmers and the herders developed into violent conflict.



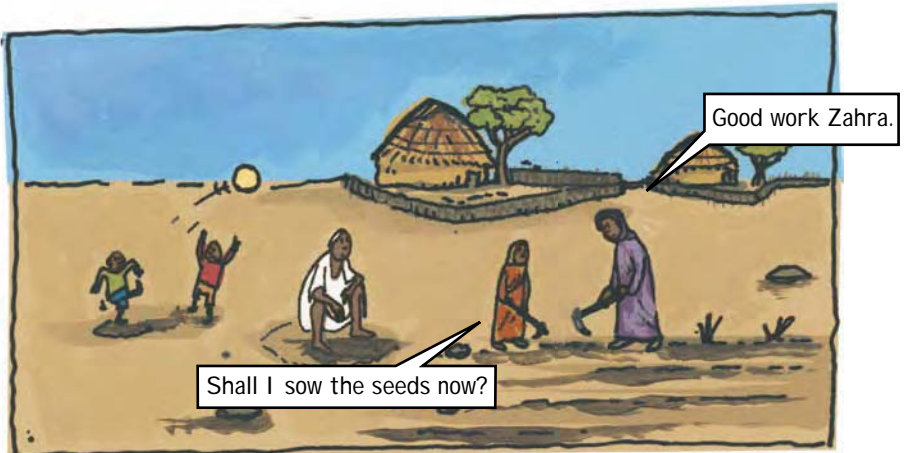
The people in Darfur were tired of a government who did not care or help them, who left the region in terrible poverty. Two rebel groups started up and began to fight the government forces. At first, their surprise attacks were successful. They were able to destroy a few government bomber planes and helicopter gunships at a small airport. They also killed several hundred government soldiers.



But the government fought back viciously, not just against rebel soldiers, but also against civilians. It used its air force and the Janjaweed, nomads who banded together to form militia groups. Village after village in Darfur was bombed by government planes and the people were shot at by helicopter gunships. Janjaweed riding horses and camels rounded up the local people - men, women and children - and tortured and killed them. They looted the villages and then destroyed them by fire.



Zahra's parents were farmers. They tried to grow enough crops to feed themselves and their family. During the rainy season, Zahra helped her parents plant sorghum and okra. Sometimes, they would plant tomatoes. Later in the year, she would help them harvest the crops which were stored, to be used for food until the next harvest.



Early one morning, Zahra and her family woke up to the noise of fast galloping hooves and the whirring of a helicopter above them. They rushed out of their hut and saw soldiers and Janjaweed men attacking their village.

The Janjaweed and soldiers ransacked the huts and took whatever they wanted. They loaded all the domestic animals into military trucks and drove away.

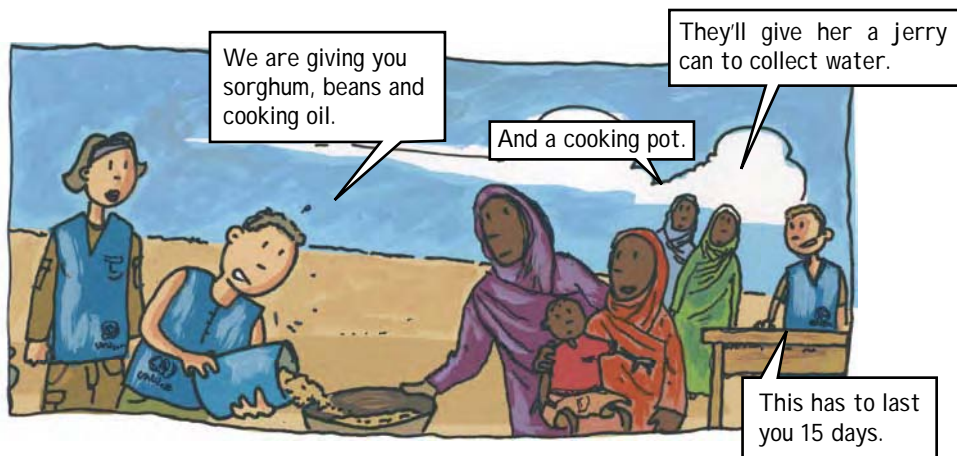


Many of the men and boys, including Zahra's father and younger brother were shot dead by the Janjaweed. The surviving villagers walked for hours to the town of El Geneina to find safety and shelter. Zahra, her mother and brother joined thousands of other displaced people in a makeshift camp.



It was very crowded in the camp. There was little food and not much clean water for the people but aid agencies tried to help as many people as they could.

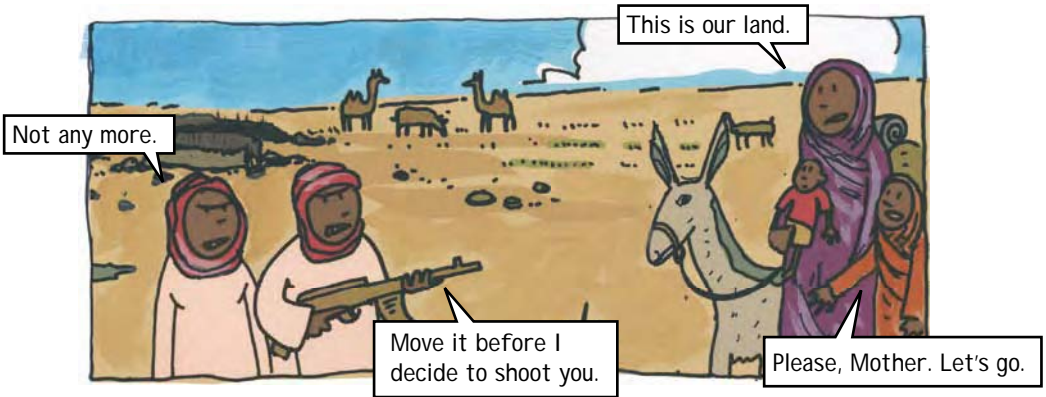
When supplies ran low, the women and children collected mukhet seeds from trees in the area surrounding the camp. They used to feed mukhet to their cattle but now they cooked it and ate it themselves.



When the rainy season came, many women decided to return to their villages to plant crops because they needed more food. Despite the danger of attacks by Janjaweed, Zahra and her mother returned to their home to plant sorghum and okra.



Several weeks later, they went back to harvest their crops but found all the plants destroyed by grazing cattle. Two herders had moved in.



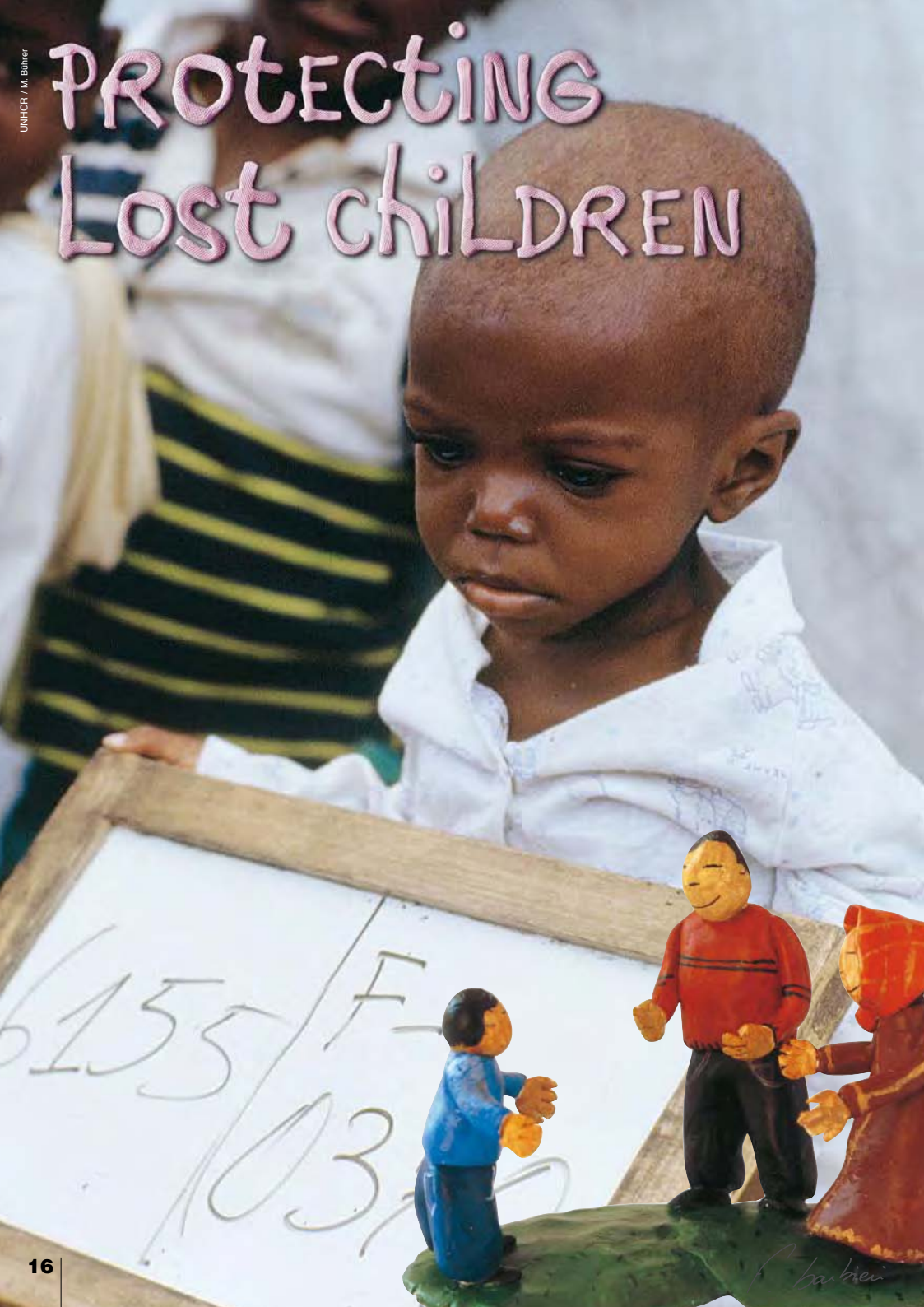
Zahra returned to the camp with her mother and brother, but the camp was not safe. One day, a horde of Janjaweed rode up to the camp and started shooting. The people scattered, trying to escape the new terror.



With many others, Zahra tried to find safety in another camp but the Janjaweed continued their attacks. It was time to cross into Chad. Perhaps there was safety and shelter in a refugee camp in Chad.



# PROTECTING Lost CHILDREN



*Barbier*



When people are persecuted and when war breaks out, children often suffer the most. In the chaos and confusion of escape, children can accidentally be separated from their parents and from their families. All alone, they need assistance and protection from harm. UNHCR and its partners help children who have been separated from their parents to find them again. Sometimes, this is not possible, and arrangements are made for the child to be cared for by the community.

Whether living with their families or with other caregivers in camps for refugees and displaced people, UNHCR works for children to make sure that they have the possibility to develop and play within a safe environment. This means that both boys and girls have the right to be protected from sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, and from military recruitment. One way of providing them protection is to establish safe schools for them. All children, including refugee and displaced children, have the right to education. By getting an education they have a better chance to support themselves and their families when they grow up.

UNHCR and its partners are committed to the protection of children and adolescents. They are there to help children if they feel sick or if they need somebody to share their feelings with. Children can get back to normal when they experience a safe and stimulating environment and will learn how to better cope with the future.



1. When they first arrived in the Mae Hong Son area of northern Thailand, refugees from Myanmar had to make do with makeshift shelters which could not cope with the rain.

2. All children need to be protected and be able to grow up in a safe environment. The family of this young refugee girl fled from violence in Somalia, seeking safety and shelter in Dadaab Camp in Kenya.

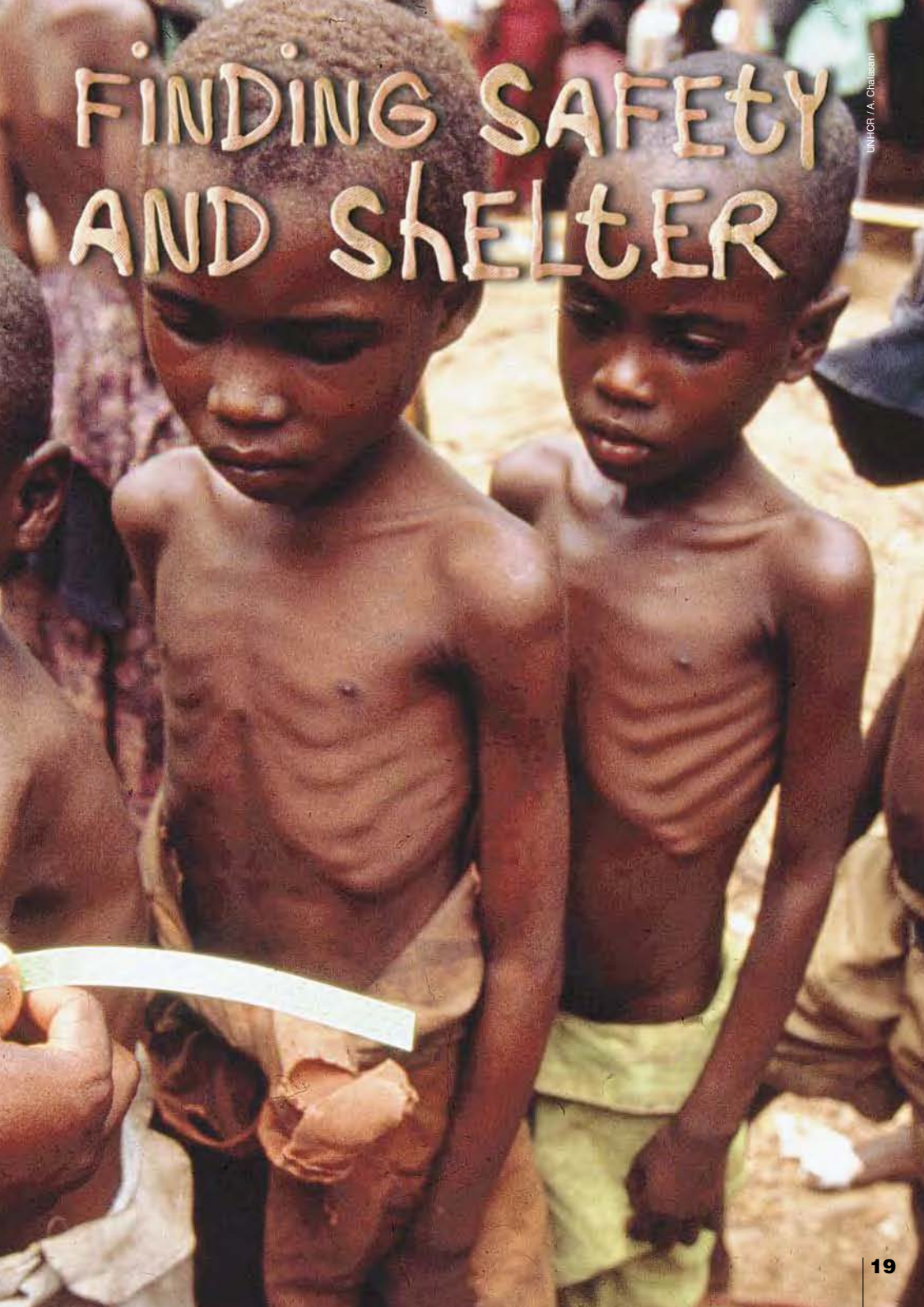
On the way to safety, thousands of refugee children suffer from hunger. Many fall sick with no hope of finding medical care. Even though they are children, they may have been tortured, physically abused or imprisoned. They have been through terrible experiences, which nobody, least of all children, should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

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



# FINDING SAFETY AND SHELTER

UNHCR / A. Chalesam

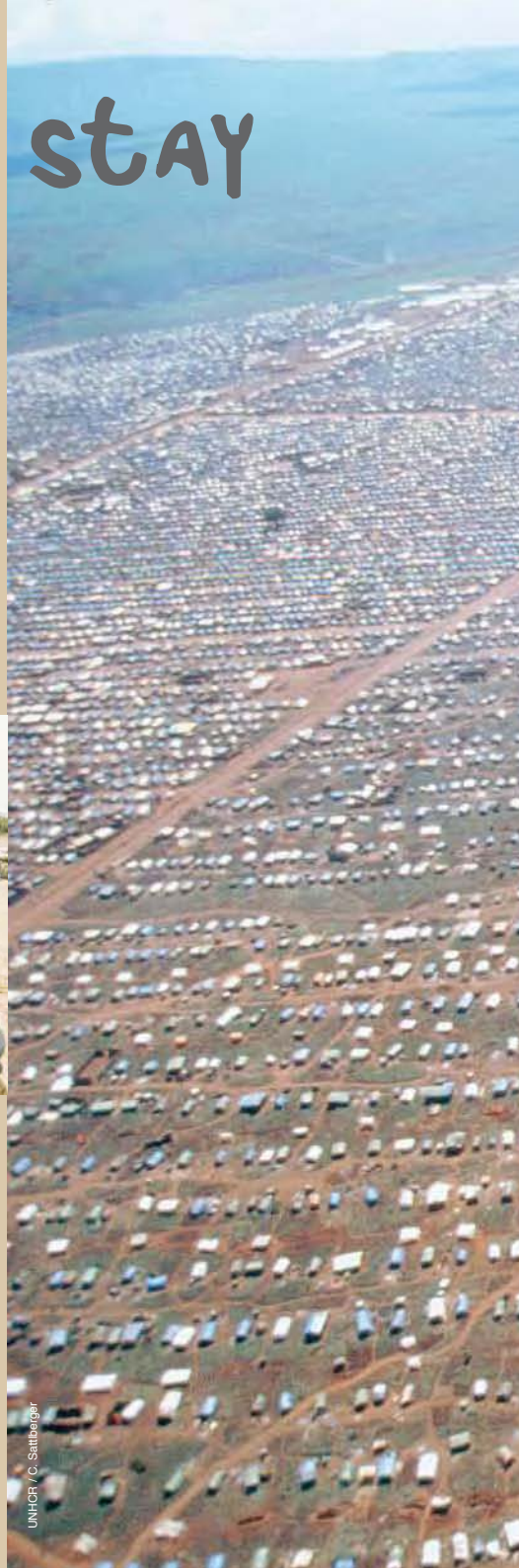


# A PLACE to STAY

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



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





# ENOUGH TO EAT

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

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

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





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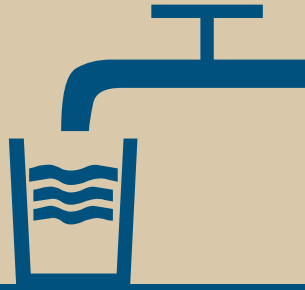
1. One healthy and natural way to obtain a more balanced diet is to help refugees grow enough food for themselves and their children. Sometimes this is possible. Refugee parents may be able to grow some fruits and vegetables in small gardens near their shelters.



2

2. In many camps, refugee and internally displaced children receive extra meals at school. These boys and girls are internally displaced children in a day home in Chigorodo, Colombia where they are given hot meals.

# CLEAN WATER



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

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

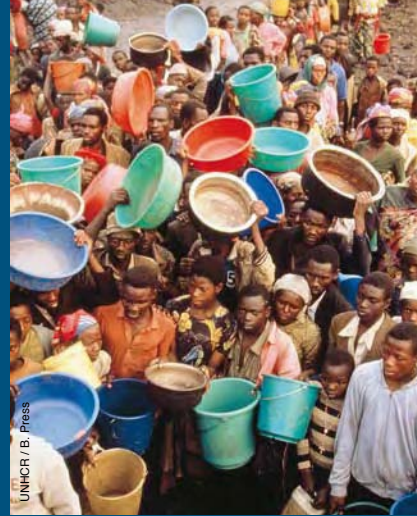


UNHCR / I. Guest

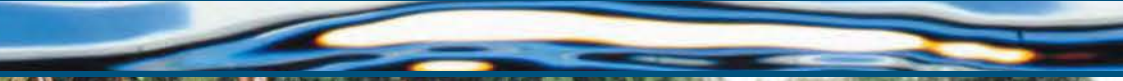




When water is scarce, each refugee is allowed only a limited amount of water each day which is collected in whatever container is at hand. Not a drop of water can be wasted.



UNHCR / B. Press



# HEALTH CARE



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

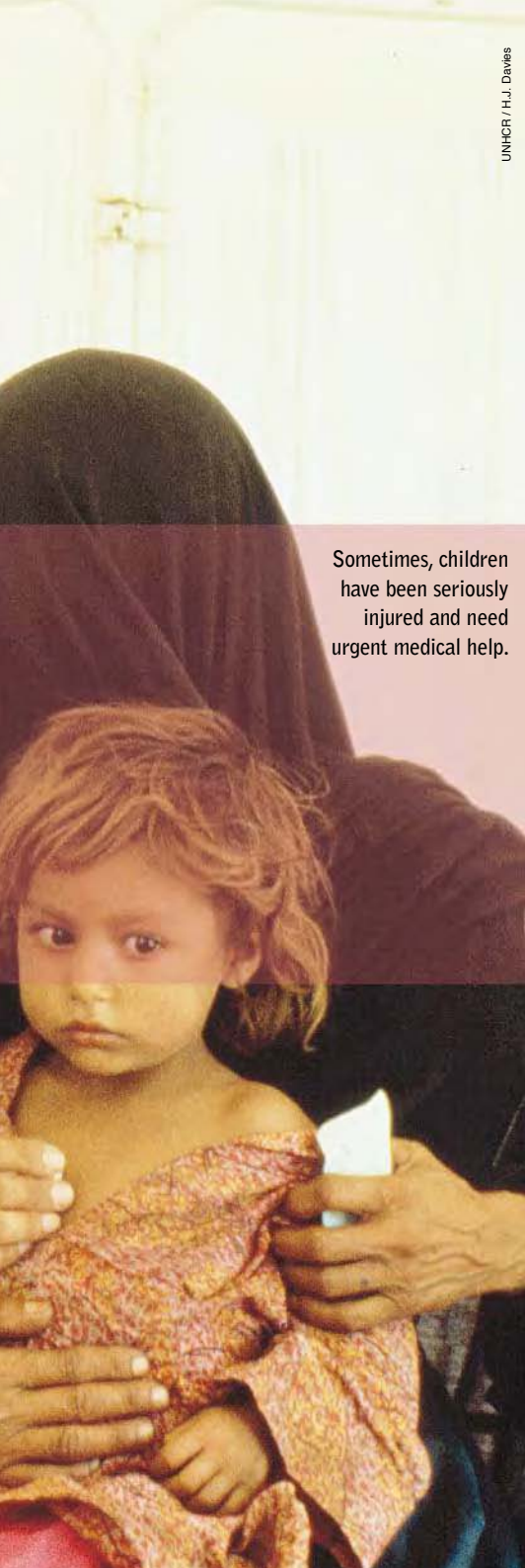
Refugee children need medical help. Like all children, it is best for them to receive regular checkups and vaccinations, to make sure that their health is fine and that they are growing up as they should. Doctors and nurses work among the refugees, even training some of them as medical helpers.

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



UNHCR / B. Press

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



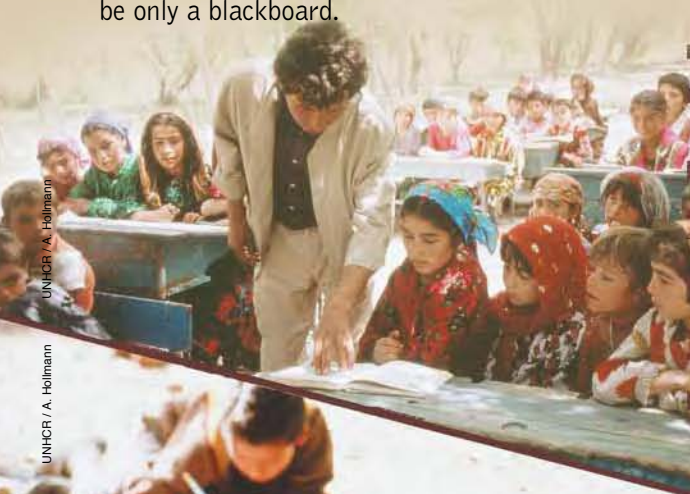
# GOING TO SCHOOL

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

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

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

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



UNHCR / A. Holmann



UNHCR / T. Belsaid

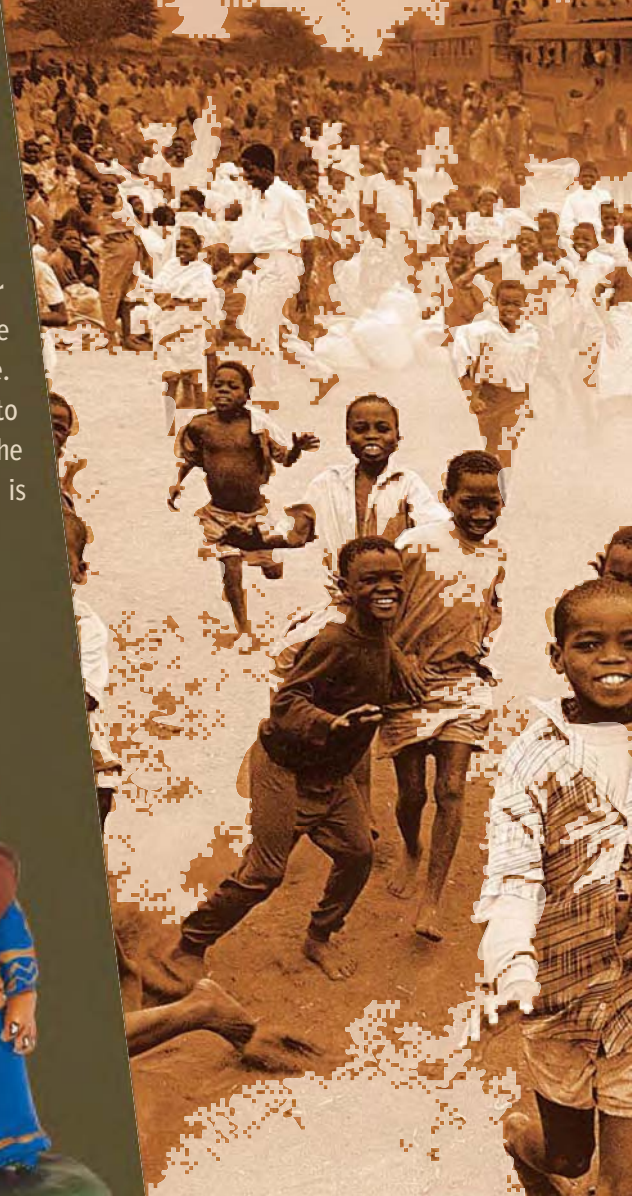




# ME

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

Refugees do not want to depend on others for their shelter, food and water. They prefer to be able to look after themselves, as they did in their own countries. Most refugees are like these children - they want to go home. So when it is safe, refugees return to their home countries, often with the help of UNHCR. This type of return is called **voluntary repatriation**.



# MEMORIES AND HOPES





## **ABDUL'S STORY – an example of “voluntary repatriation”**

Abdul was born in a refugee camp in Peshawar, Pakistan. His family fled their home in Afghanistan when war broke out in 1979 and was unable to return due to continued fighting in the country. This has caused many Afghans to remain in refugee camps in Pakistan for over 20 years.

Following the fall of Taleban regime in 2001, hundreds of thousands of Afghans, including Abdul's family, returned to their homeland.

"With UNHCR assistance, many people returned to Afghanistan. I came back in a brightly painted truck. My parents and my older brothers had packed the truck with everything we owned, including my bicycle. We were on the road for four hours but we finally reached this village where we now live.



I have never been in Afghanistan before but I am not afraid because I have many relatives here - cousins, uncles and aunties. We had to live with an uncle at first until my father had saved enough money to build our house. Now, I am helping my father build a really solid house which will keep us warm in winter.

There wasn't much here when we arrived. Just desert and dirt. But look — we have planted trees and other people are building their houses too. We are also building a mosque."

## **ALICIA'S STORY – an example of *“local integration”***

Soldiers from an armed group threatened the people in Alicia's village in Colombia, telling them to leave or be killed. Alicia and her family left. They made their way to a border town in Ecuador where they received help from UNHCR and a local aid group.

“The soldiers said they would kill my father and brother. We were so scared of them. There were soldiers everywhere. Some soldiers belonged to the army. Other soldiers belonged to different military groups. They all carried guns and took what they wanted from the villagers and we did not feel safe.

We feel safer here in Ecuador. UNHCR helped my family to get identification papers which say that we are refugees. I am allowed to go to school with the local children. My parents were given a small loan to set up a business. My mother makes lots of take away



meals for customers in our neighbourhood, and my father delivers the meals. My mother is a good cook and what she makes is delicious. So many people buy her food. My parents say it is time to get a second cart, and my brother and a local friend of his will help out with the food delivery.”

Through the business, Alicia and her family earn enough to support themselves. They have made their home among the local people in Ecuador.

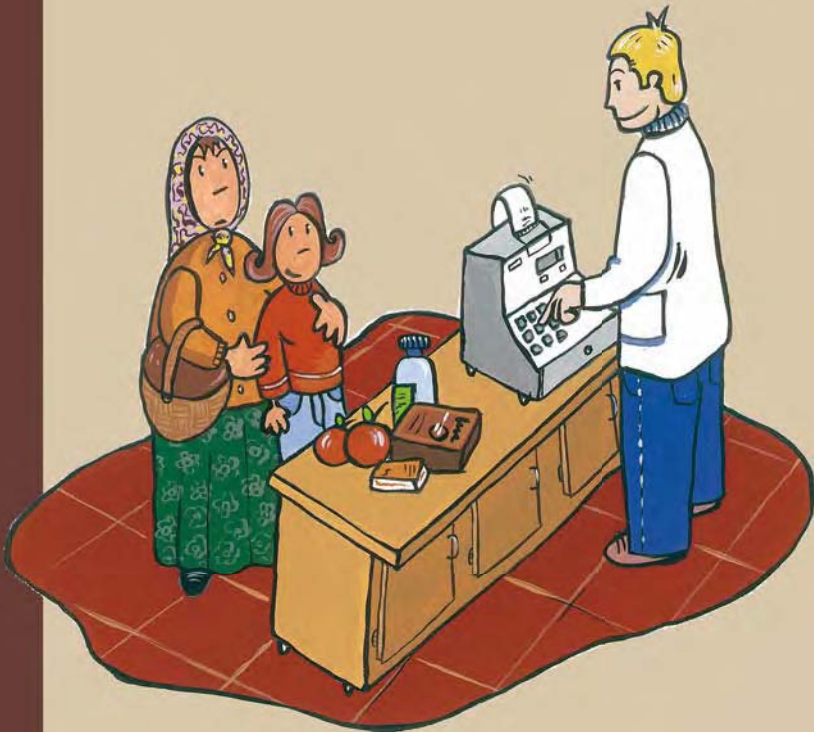
### **AZRA’S STORY – an example of “resettlement”**

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

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

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

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



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