

Central Asia

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Recent Developments

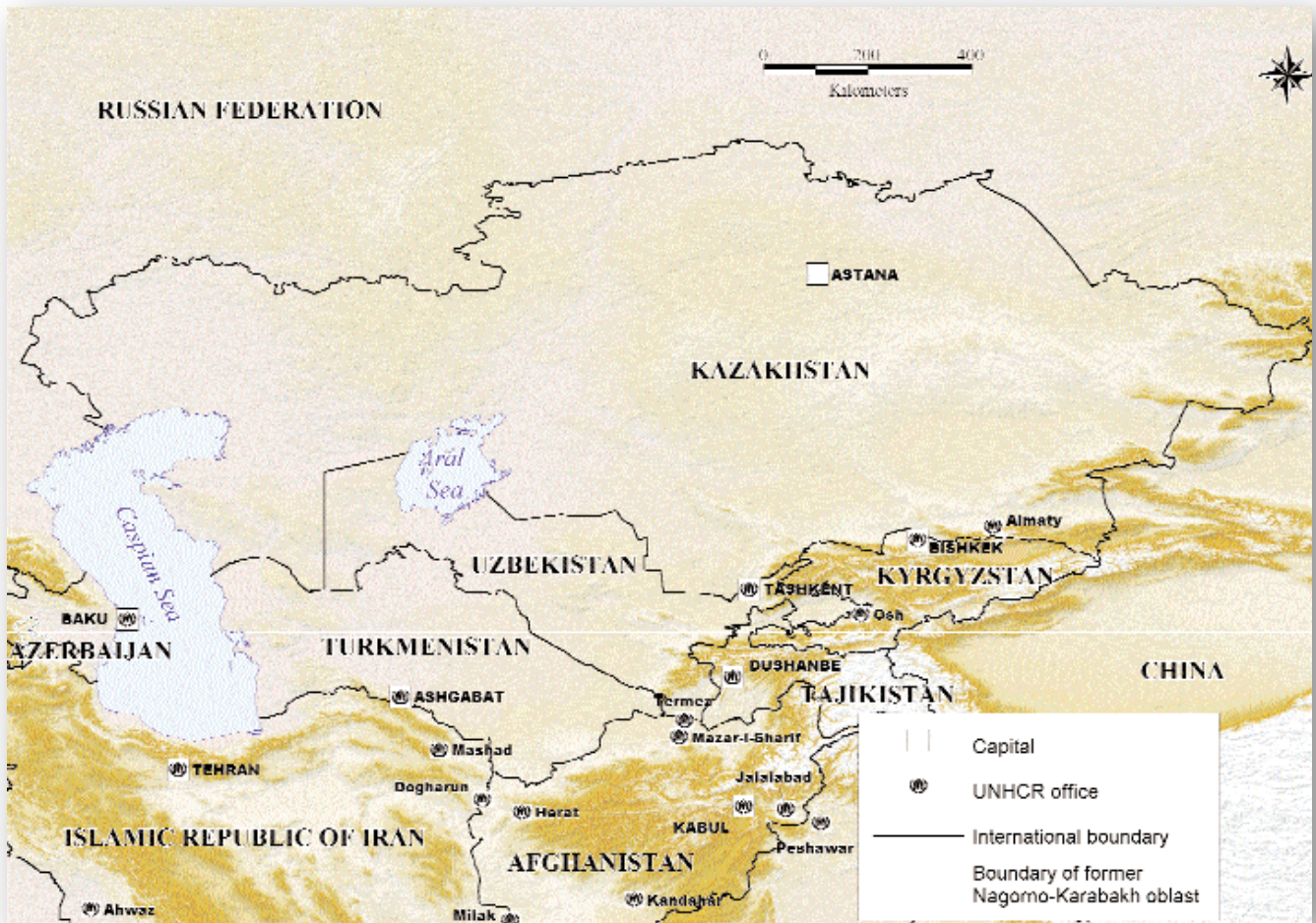
The current fighting in northern Afghanistan between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban forces has reportedly led to large-scale displacement of the civilian population. UNHCR in Dushanbe is closely monitoring the situation, and working with government and international agencies on contingency plans to cope with a possible influx of refugees into Tajikistan.

In August and September 2000 fighting took place in southern regions of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan between government forces and insurgents. Although the hostilities have subsided in recent weeks, there are still reports of sporadic incidents in the area. UNHCR has been following developments in both countries and has been involved in inter-agency co-ordination meetings regarding possible population displacement. UNHCR has also been involved in various inter-agency initiatives and discussions on the Ferghana Valley situation.

In Kazakhstan, limited UNHCR resources have been further strained by the refugees fleeing the war in Chechnya (Russian Federation) and its aftermath. The number of Chechen refugees is currently estimated at 10,000.

The repatriation of Tajiks from surrounding countries did not progress in 2000 as planned. By the end of September only 552 refugees had repatriated, so the planning target of 5,000 for the year could no longer be met. The reasons are complex and include issues of transit from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan, and the decision of the Tajik Government to suspend repatriation for several months following security incidents involving returnees.





The CIS Conference process officially came to an end with the Fifth Steering Group meeting held in Geneva in July 2000, which was attended by NGO and government officials from the Central Asian republics.

An international NGO has fielded a staff member to act as the NGO Co-ordinator in Central Asia. Based in the UNHCR office in Dushanbe, the Co-ordinator took up his functions in July 2000, and will be mainly concerned with training and the development of NGO emergency capacity in the region.

Strategic Objectives

One of the major objectives of the UNHCR programme in Central Asia for 2001 is to conclude the bulk of the Tajik repatriation process. Because of the delays encountered in 2000, the action plan is being revised to take account of all positions on the issue. Negotiations are continuing with the Tajik authorities in Dushanbe and, depending on the outcome, the objectives for the repatriation operation will be revised. The associated reintegration programme in returnee areas will be phased down in 2001, and development agencies will be encouraged to become more actively involved.

UNHCR will continue to protect and assist recognised refugees and other persons of concern in their respective coun-

tries, pending the identification of appropriate lasting solutions such as repatriation or local settlement. This includes Afghan refugees in all countries, and Chechens in Kazakhstan.

UNHCR will assist governments in the drafting and effective implementation of refugee legislation. Overall, refugee issues have received an encouraging response from the governments in the region; since UNHCR commenced its operations in



Central Asia, four of the five countries have signed the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. UNHCR will build upon the momentum of the past few years to maintain official interest in these issues. In Uzbekistan, the objective is to increase governmental awareness of the subject and encourage dialogue.

Given the possibility of conflict in parts of Central Asia, and the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan, UNHCR must increase its capacity to respond to potential emergencies in a timely and effective manner. This will be done through training of implementing partners and contingency planning, including pre-positioning of stocks of relief items (if funds permit).

UNHCR will continue to systematically push for the development of nascent local NGOs in a region where the concept was until recently completely unknown. Activities designed to help NGOs build up the expertise to address refugee issues will be incorporated into general programming, using concepts outlined in the PARinAc process. The work of the NGO Coordinator will contribute to this effort, especially in the area of emergency preparedness. In all programmes, special attention will be paid to the needs of women and children in the areas of education and health. The reintegration and local settlement programmes will in particular target female heads of household with projects to increase income and self-sufficiency.

Operations

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR will give material and medical assistance to the most needy amongst the Chechen refugees who have arrived over the past months, as well as to Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers. A new project has been developed, which will start in 2001, to assist the Government of Kazakhstan to increase its capacity to deal with the issue of statelessness arising from the return of ethnic Kazakhs who had left the country during the Soviet era. UNHCR will give the Government advice and technical support for the refugee status determination procedure and the drafting, adoption and implementation of national refugee legislation. Seminars and workshops will be organised for government officials dealing with refugee matters.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the project for the local settlement of Tajiks of Kyrgyz ethnicity will continue for a second year. It will focus on income-generation and the rehabilitation of social infrastructure, with the aim of facilitating the smooth integration of these refugees into local communities. One of the priority objectives is to assist these refugees to acquire Kyrgyz citizenship. UNHCR will pursue this through dialogue with the authorities on the introduction of simplified legal procedures and by providing guidance and advice. UNHCR will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to the nearly 700 Afghans (mostly residing in Bishkek) considered as persons of concern. The needs of 185 Chechens, who were assisted with additional funds from

the Operational Reserve in 2000, will be covered under the regular assistance programme in 2001. Besides the issue of citizenship for Tajiks mentioned above, UNHCR will advise legislators concerned with refugee affairs and continue to provide training for the State Agency for Migration and Demography.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will assist and protect 4,540 of the most needy Afghan and other refugees until a more lasting solution is identified. UNHCR will continue to assist the Government and local NGOs to improve their capacity to deal with refugee matters. UNHCR is negotiating with the Government on the repatriation programme for Tajiks from surrounding asylum countries. In view of the eventual phasing-down of UNHCR, the associated reintegration programme for returnee areas will be reduced, but simultaneous efforts will be made to increase the involvement of development-oriented agencies and institutions.



The programme in **Turkmenistan** will focus on a continuation of the local settlement project, which began in 2000, for the 14,000 Tajiks of Turkmen ethnicity who have opted to stay in Turkmenistan. UNHCR will also continue to assist 1,400 refugees in the country, mostly Afghans. This project provides for pumps and drinking water, sanitation and health facility improvements, community services, education (including the construction of schools), and small-scale tree planting. UNHCR will also provide assistance to help the refugees maintain their legal status, with a view to eventual acquisition of Turkmen nationality. Capacity-building for government officials will continue and assistance will be provided for the Refugee Office which is expected to be established either at the end of 2000 or in early 2001.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR's main objectives are to increase awareness, at various levels, of refugees and related issues, and to promote the adoption of legislation. In the absence

of a national refugee procedure, UNHCR will continue to carry out refugee status determination and to provide material assistance, through implementing partners, to those refugees of concern who are in need. Given the volatile situation in the region as a whole, the programme will extend the project with a national NGO to improve its ability to prepare for emergencies.

BUDGET (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Kazakhstan	1,072,578
Kyrgyzstan	1,206,206
Tajikistan	1,931,071
Turkmenistan	1,054,307
Uzbekistan	1,427,857
Total	6,692,019

