

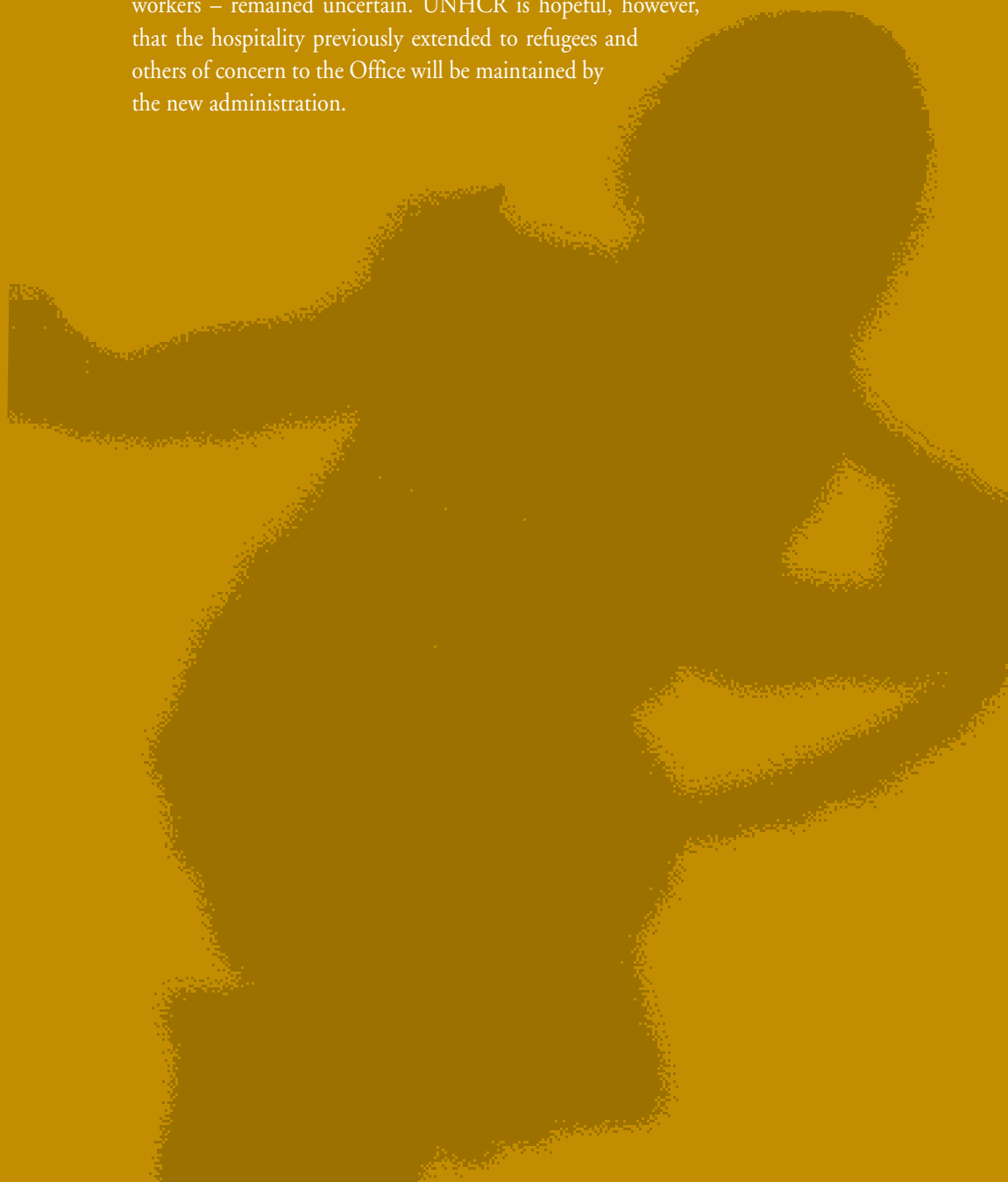
West and Central Africa

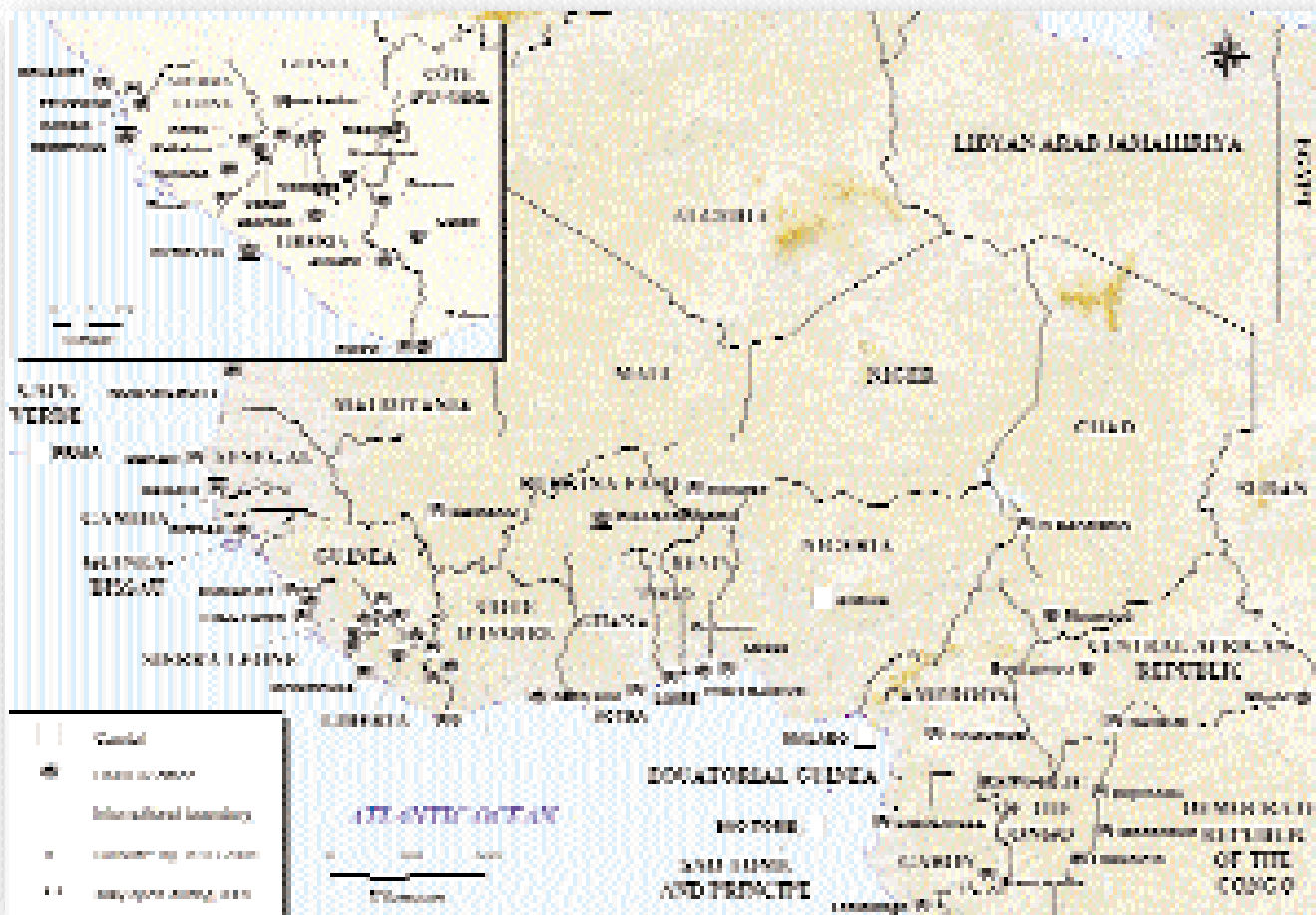
Benin
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Côte d'Ivoire
Equatorial Guinea
Gabon
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Liberia
Mali
Niger
Nigeria
Sao Tomé and Príncipe
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Togo

Recent Developments

Rising tensions in and between the countries of the Mano River Union (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) were at the top of the agenda at the most recent meeting of their ministers and observers in Mali in September. Guinea in particular was the setting of a dramatic turn of events when on 17 September an armed group attacked the Guinean border town of Macenta – home to tens of thousands of Liberian refugees – killing UNHCR's head of office and abducting another staff member for over a week. These events sent clear signals to the international community that unless rebel organisations are brought to heel and the security of borders is guaranteed, the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the safety of local residents and refugees will continue to be seriously compromised. At the time of writing, staff in all field locations in Guinea have temporarily relocated to the capital, Conakry. UNHCR is monitoring the situation closely and will re-establish a field presence as soon as security improves.

Côte d'Ivoire's reputation as a haven of stability in the sub-region was shaken during the presidential elections in October. Civil unrest contesting the results reportedly caused the death and injury of hundreds of people and prompted a change to civilian rule. Although opposition forces called for calm, the future of the Ivorian people – including some 60,000 Liberian refugees and hundreds of thousands of migrant workers – remained uncertain. UNHCR is hopeful, however, that the hospitality previously extended to refugees and others of concern to the Office will be maintained by the new administration.





Intensified fighting in parts of northern and eastern Sierra Leone has caused renewed population displacement within the country and across its borders. Access to the affected civilians remains limited due to the inability of humanitarian agencies to operate safely in many areas where conflict still rages. At the same time, the return of some 7,000 Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea placed additional strains on already stretched national and international humanitarian resources as the returnees had to be moved from their point of arrival to safer locations. Returnees continue to arrive from Guinea at the time of writing.

UNHCR was concerned about the arrival in Monrovia, Liberia as of September of ships from the Guinean capital carrying Liberian nationals. Returnees have been registered, vaccinated and medically screened by UNHCR, NGOs and the Government before being transferred to a transit centre where they have received relief items. Returnees have also been helped to organise transport to their final destinations, mainly in Montserrado county.

Intensified fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has led to the arrival of close to 10,000 refugees in the Central African Republic, many in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. The refugees have settled in 15 sites along the Ubangui River or in Mongoumba town (near the border).

Repeated rebel activity in the area has provoked panic among both refugees and the local population. UNHCR and the Government are therefore currently identifying alternative sites further up-country to which the refugees could be relocated for improved safety and better prospects of local integration.

The situation in other countries in the sub-region remained relatively stable, although over the past few months Chad and Nigeria have experienced various degrees of unrest related to calls for democracy, rebel activity or inter-ethnic confrontation.

Strategic Objectives

Chronic hostilities in the sub-region and increasing tension in countries previously considered stable (i.e. Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea) precludes the setting at this juncture of any firm longer-term objectives. UNHCR's primary goals in the short-term will therefore be to: step up its preparations for possible new refugee crises through the development and implementation of a regional contingency plan; ensure that refugees and returnees continue to have access to basic humanitarian assistance; and to work with governments, local and regional organisations (such as ECOWAS) to ensure respect for the work and security of humanitarian workers. UNHCR will also encourage host governments to maintain a spirit of hospitality towards refugees and others of concern.

UNHCR will advocate the deployment of military observers along the borders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and support measures to reinforce national security forces through the provision of vehicles, fuel, communications equipment and other materials. Police and security forces will be trained on refugee law, child protection, human rights and international law. UNHCR will also begin relocating up to 125,000 refugees from dangerous border zones in Guinea to safer areas inland. While some of these activities will commence in the latter part of 2000, the bulk of the relocation is expected to take place in early 2001. Early and flexible funding decisions by donors are therefore of great importance. The agency is also considering funding a local armed police force to patrol the camps in Guinea. UNHCR will have to pay considerable attention to the security of its staff, particularly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Lofa county in Liberia. Measures to improve security will include the gradual relocation of offices to safer zones in Guinea, the deployment of UNAMSIL troops in returnee areas in Sierra Leone and a guarantee of full protection for humanitarian workers by the governments concerned.

While the prevailing instability is detrimental to achieving lasting solutions for refugees in the sub-region, UNHCR will aim to consolidate reintegration activities in Chad. The Office is also making preparations for the repatriation of up to 5,000 Congolese refugees from Gabon.

UNHCR will support Liberian refugees who wish to return home from asylum countries on an individual basis. Some 20,000 Liberians in Côte d'Ivoire may decide to do so in 2001. However, the return of up to 30,000 Liberian refugees from Guinea to Lofa county is contingent upon the security situation there and the ability of the authorities to guarantee the returnees' safety. Security permitting, UNHCR plans to carry out reintegration activities for returnees in Lofa county while reducing its involvement elsewhere. In some instances, the Office may provide limited assistance to communities receiving returnees who are unable to return to their places of origin.

The repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees is expected to proceed slowly due to the many obstacles impeding their return, principally the lack of security and facilities in their areas of origin. An escalation of the fighting could trigger new population movements, both within and beyond the country's borders. Further deterioration of the security situation in Guinea may also lead to an increase in spontaneous repatriation movements. On the other hand, the situation could rapidly improve, particularly if the Lomé Peace Agreement is revived.

UNHCR and other aid agencies must remain vigilant as any of these scenarios would activate UNHCR's comprehensive repatriation and reintegration plan. The plan covers assistance for up to 110,000 returnees (including reintegration packages), community-based reintegration assistance to increase the

absorption capacity of returnee localities and support for up to 50,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).

UNHCR's efforts will be directed towards redressing the deteriorating quality of asylum in the sub-region. The Office will continue implementing an initiative which began in 2000 in Chad, Gabon and Niger entailing the establishment of a Refugee Status Determination (RSD) project in each country aimed at clearing up the backlog of asylum requests and training members of the national eligibility committees on how to carry out their RSD responsibilities. UNHCR will also continue to search for lasting solutions for refugees in the sub-region and urge states to accede to the international refugee instruments while encouraging those states which have already done so to enact their national law on refugees.

Operations

The sub-region comprises 21 countries, which fall under the responsibility of the Regional Directorate based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. UNHCR's country programmes in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are described in separate chapters.

Benin continues to adhere to a very generous asylum policy allowing refugees access to social and economic benefits on a par with nationals. The number of persons seeking international protection has now passed the 5,000 mark – the majority originating from Central Africa and the Great Lakes region – of which 4,300 have been recognised as refugees. A pilot resettlement project will allow up to 240 refugees facing security problems in their first country of asylum to resettle in Benin. To date, 41 refugees have been successfully integrated under this programme. The authorities have announced a planned selection mission for the end of 2000 which could result in the resettlement of up to 60 refugees in 2001. The Office will also continue to provide basic assistance to refugees residing in urban centres as well as to some 1,000 persons residing at the camp in Kpomassè. Residents of the camp, especially women, will be offered skills-training and income-generating activities with a view to local integration. Efforts will be made to raise school attendance. Refugees will also plant trees to mitigate the impact of the refugee camp on the





local environment. A limited number of scholarships will be offered to refugee students to allow them to pursue studies at university level. The resettlement in a third country of some 60 refugees from the DRC will be completed, and the search will continue for resettlement opportunities for Togolese refugees with security problems.

The refugee population in **Burkina Faso** is estimated at nearly 700 urban refugees of different nationalities. About 400 persons are assisted by UNHCR. Of these, 75 refugees have been resettled in Burkina Faso under a pilot project. The agency will ensure that refugees receive appropriate care, with a special emphasis on income-generating activities and skills development to foster increased self-reliance. Vulnerable refugees will have access to housing and medical services, and receive a subsistence allowance. Post-secondary scholarships will be offered to a limited number of refugee students for

university and/or technical studies. UNHCR will support durable solutions for refugees by facilitating voluntary repatriation. The Office will also provide additional support for the National Refugee Commission (training on international protection, interviewing techniques, etc.) with a view to gradually handing over the responsibility for refugee status determination. Given the magnitude of the problems encountered during the course of 2000, the office in Ouagadougou will be strengthened by the presence of an international staff member to deal with protection issues.

The voluntary repatriation of Chadian refugees from **Cameroon** is slated for completion by December 2000. UNHCR will continue to screen a group of refugees from the DRC (categorised as 'at risk') living at Langui. The Office will support the local integration of up to 2,000 urban refugees through income-generating activities and skills training. About

200 new refugees and asylum-seekers will receive medical assistance and subsistence allowances. The Office will also continue to urge relevant government bodies to hasten the passage of national legislation on refugees.

Up to 10,000 newly arrived Congolese refugees in the **Central African Republic** have received food from WFP while a number of NGOs have supplied clean water, adequate sanitation, shelter and health care. After the emergency phase, and as the situation in the refugee areas becomes more stable, UNHCR will focus on projects conducive to self-reliance through the distribution of seeds and agricultural tools as well as materials for the construction of shelters. In view of these plans, UNHCR will increase its presence in the country. Some 1,000 Congolese refugees who arrived in 1999 and are now living in Boubou will be helped to integrate locally. More than 35,000 Sudanese refugees living in Mboki in the north-east (some 1,200 kms from the capital, Bangui) have attained almost complete self-reliance, but vulnerable individuals still depend upon UNHCR for food assistance. New arrivals will continue to receive domestic items and limited support will be extended, (via the Government and NGOs) for drinking water and sanitation, and health services. Refugee women will receive support for micro-projects. About 8,600 urban refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities also require UNHCR's attention. Recognised refugees and the most vulnerable among the asylum-seekers (some 4,240 persons) will receive financial support for six months as well as help with medical services. About 600 refugee students will also receive educational support. UNHCR will continue to organise training on international protection and refugee law for government officials.

UNHCR's aim is to ensure that Chadian refugees voluntarily returning to southern **Chad** from neighbouring countries have access to adequate reintegration assistance (clean water, shelter, sanitation and health services). In 2001, an estimated 1,000 returnee families will receive household items and the means to engage in farming (tools, seeds and loans). A revolving credit scheme is expected to allow UNHCR to gradually scale down its support over the next two years. As UNHCR's resources are limited, the involvement of the Government and other agencies will be actively sought. Approximately 1,000 urban refugees live in the capital N'djamena and an additional 500 asylum-seekers are awaiting a decision on their claims. Working with its national partner, the Office will provide limited material assistance for the most vulnerable among them. It will support income-generating activities, mainly for women, to help them become more self-reliant and refugee children will be able to attend school. To enhance the capacity of the National Commission on Refugees to assume increased responsibility for refugee issues, UNHCR will conduct training on refugee law, protection and refugee status determination

for its employees. The Office will also work closely with the Government to amend its national law on refugees. The agency will continue to monitor the situation of some 23,000 Sudanese refugees who are settled locally in the country's eastern provinces. Limited assistance for agricultural activities (distribution of seeds and tools and micro-credits) will continue until mid-2001, when the national partner is expected to take over. Women will be the primary beneficiaries of this assistance, as they are responsible for cultivating family plots. Some support will also be provided for 13 primary schools attended by refugee children.

The Government of **Gabon** has been instrumental in the peace process in the Republic of the Congo. Cross-border missions have been organised with the participation of UNHCR and refugee representatives in order to assess the security situation in areas of origin. Although conditions are not yet conducive to any massive voluntary repatriation movements, it is estimated that up to 5,000 Congolese refugees may choose this solution in 2001. Of the 14,000 Congolese who sought refuge in Gabon two years ago, the majority have settled in Nyanga and Haut-Ogooué provinces. A number are living in the urban centres of Libreville, Franceville, Tchibanga and Moanda. In 2001 UNHCR's main objectives for this population will be to: complete the ongoing vaccination campaign; improve access to schools for 3,600 refugee children; encourage refugees to settle in communities where they have access to wells, schools and health clinics; assist up to 1,500 refugee families to attain self-reliance through support for income-generating activities and agriculture; and provide clean water by overhauling wells (and digging six new ones in areas with a high concentration of refugees). The Government estimates that some 3,500 asylum-seekers from a variety of African nations are present in the country. UNHCR will extend material assistance to a limited number of vulnerable individuals, pending a decision on their status. The Office will also continue to advocate the implementation of a national law on refugees and ensure that the National Commission on Refugees becomes operational.

The population of concern in **Gambia** is estimated at 15,800 persons (Senegalese, Sierra Leoneans and other African nationalities). Of these, a small number of Senegalese refugees have expressed their desire to return home. Most refugees and asylum-seekers in Gambia live in urban centres. Pending a decision on their status, vulnerable individuals, women and children will continue to receive support from UNHCR (financial and material) to cover their basic needs. About 700 Sierra Leonean and 600 Senegalese refugees (subsistence farmers) live in camps. They will continue to receive assistance to underpin their local integration until conditions in their countries of origin permit their voluntary return. UNHCR will continue to support the Government and partner NGOs in the delivery of basic services (health and education), agri-

cultural tools and seeds, income-generating activities (carpentry, masonry and tailoring) and vocational training. The Office will also assist the Government with the reception, registration and screening of all new arrivals.

Ghana hosts some 13,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. The assistance programme for Liberian refugees in Buduburam camp has been terminated since most of them have become self-sufficient. However, following completion of a screening exercise, many Liberians have been found to still be in need of international protection. They will continue to receive protection and support from UNHCR and be encouraged to integrate into Ghanaian society. Sierra Leonean refugees will also be protected and assisted until the situation in their country allows them to return. Up to 3,000 refugees in Krisan camp, the majority of them Sierra Leoneans, will receive food, shelter and basic services (water and sanitation, health care and education). Recognised refugees in Ghana have the right to work but high unemployment is making it increasingly difficult for them to find jobs. Consequently, UNHCR will continue to support agricultural activities and skills-training in order to maximise their chances of attaining self-sufficiency. UNHCR will pursue its search for third country resettlement opportunities for a group of 350 Togolese refugees who also live in Krisan camp. About 1,000 urban refugees from a variety of African countries will be helped to become self-sufficient through income-generating projects and skills-training. Vulnerable individuals will receive help to cover the costs of accommodation, health care and basic necessities. Several projects for secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education will also be implemented.

In **Guinea-Bissau**, UNHCR will phase out humanitarian assistance for a group of 600 refugees from the Casamance region in Senegal. They remain at Jolmète camp where they continue to have access to potable water, health services and primary education for their children. Women will be encouraged to sit on refugee committees and take part in decision-making affecting the camp. The production and use of charcoal (instead of wood cutting) forms part of the refugees' daily activities to minimise the impact of their presence on the environment. As UNHCR plans to close its office in Bissau by the end of 2000,



some 870 refugees there will in 2001 continue to receive assistance through NGOs under the supervision of UNHCR's office in Dakar, Senegal.

The vast majority of the more than 2,300 refugees and asylum-seekers in **Mali** are Sierra Leoneans and Liberians. UNHCR will continue to give vulnerable individuals (including female heads of household) access to basic services (medical care, primary education for refugee children and subsistence allowances) through national NGO partners. However, a proportion of this group – up to 900 people – are expected to voluntarily repatriate in 2001 and will therefore need assistance to do so. In collaboration with the National Eligibility Commission, UNHCR will also monitor the management of the transit centre for vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers at Faragouaran. Refugees who cannot return to their home country for security reasons will be helped to find resettlement opportunities in a third country.

In **Niger**, of an estimated 1,000 urban refugees and asylum-seekers from a variety of African nations, UNHCR will help

the most vulnerable cover their basic needs. Assistance will include micro-credits, scholarships (for secondary and post-secondary education) and health services. Government officials and implementing partners will receive training on international refugee law and the principles of refugee protection. 2001 represents the last year of UNHCR's support for reintegration of the 3,500 Tuaregs who returned from Mali to some 15 sites in a semi-desert environment in the north. The project focuses on ensuring an adequate water supply, support for income-generating activities, community-based initiatives and training to further the socio-economic development of returnee areas. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation in the south in case of displacement due to the ongoing religious confrontations in Nigeria.

Nigeria hosts some 6,900 refugees, the majority from Chad, Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, only about 1,500 refugees (mainly those at Oru camp) receive material assistance from UNHCR. Food rations and support for camp services (water, sanitation and health care) will be gradually reduced and greater emphasis will be placed on activities leading to reduced dependency on humanitarian aid – including individual and group counselling and support for income-generating activities (fish farming, chicken breeding, vegetable gardening, etc.). Children of Sierra Leonean refugees will be given access to primary and secondary education as well as vocational skills-training. Those able to support themselves live in urban areas, mainly in Lagos. No assistance will be provided to refugees living outside the camp, except for medical care. If circumstances in the country of origin permit, voluntary repatriation of up to 500 Sierra Leonean refugees will begin as of mid-2001. The office in Lagos will link up with the ECOWAS Secretariat located in the capital Abuja to seek a formal accreditation to this regional body. This will enable UNHCR to play a more significant role in the development of a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution in the sub-region.

Senegal still hosts about 20,000 Mauritanian refugees in four districts along the Senegal river who are considered to be fully integrated into their local communities. More than 1,400 urban refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda reside in Dakar and the surrounding area (260 of them are recognised under UNHCR's mandate and the remainder are recognised by the Government). UNHCR's main objective for this refugee population will be to reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid by reinforcing their self-sufficiency through support for income-generating activities, skills-training and education. The Office will also give refugees advice and help to find local employment and a limited number will receive scholarships for secondary and higher education. However, vulnerable refugees (women and children) will continue to receive financial support. The Office will also provide support to the National Eligibility Commission for the processing of about 2,000 asylum applications. Up to 350 Sierra

Leonean refugees may wish to repatriate voluntarily and UNHCR will provide logistical support for those residing in Dakar. The agency is ready to establish a presence in the Casamance region if and when the security situation there allows the voluntary repatriation of refugees from neighbouring countries. UNHCR's office in Dakar also oversees the country programmes in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

Arriving in successive waves, refugees from the Great Lakes, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria continue to seek asylum in **Togo**, which has maintained a very generous policy despite social and economic constraints. Of an estimated 12,400 refugees (mostly Ghanaians), UNHCR will help some 770 urban refugees (mostly in Lomé) meet their basic needs. The Office will also offer micro-credits for small businesses, language training (particularly for refugee women), and scholarships from the DAFI fund for a limited number of refugees to pursue studies at college or university. UNHCR continues to monitor the situation of some 11,000 Ghanaian refugees living in villages in the north but they are no longer given any material assistance. Togo does not yet have a National Eligibility Commission, so UNHCR is assisting the transitional body CNAR (*Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés*) to review asylum requests. The Office will continue to advocate the establishment of a national law on refugees as well as adequate government structures to handle refugee questions.

BUDGET (USD)			
Country	Annual Programme	Supplementary Programme	Total
Benin	898,428	0	898,428
Burkina Faso	340,242	0	340,242
Cameroon	756,961	0	756,961
Central African Republic	3,070,809	0	3,070,809
Chad	2,023,644	0	2,023,644
Côte d'Ivoire ¹	9,974,346	430,000	10,404,346
Gabon	3,241,405	0	3,241,405
Gambia	740,100	0	740,100
Ghana	1,065,688	0	1,065,688
Guinea	28,512,093	3,045,000	31,557,093
Liberia	14,286,128	1,501,600	15,787,728
Mali	346,821	0	346,821
Niger	359,322	0	359,322
Nigeria	1,138,250	0	1,138,250
Senegal	1,425,205	0	1,425,205
Sierra Leone	2,183,918	14,013,739	16,197,657
Togo	429,714	0	429,714
Regional Projects ²	817,600	0	817,600
Total	71,610,674	18,990,339	90,601,013

¹ Includes administrative costs for the Regional Director's Office of USD 4,825,576.

² Includes voluntary repatriation assistance, resettlement assistance and scholarships for refugee students in West African countries.