

# MYANMAR



## IN SHORT

### Main Objectives

- Support the voluntary repatriation, reintegration and stabilisation of returnees in Northern Rakhine State, and monitor the situation in areas hosting them.
- Promote activities conducive to self-reliance, and provide special assistance to the most vulnerable within the Muslim population.
- Prepare for the United Nations Integrated Development Plan for Northern Rakhine State which will permit the gradual phasing out of UNHCR's assistance programme.

### Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2000	Dec. 2000
<b>(Northern Rakhine State)</b>		
Returnees from Bangladesh*	230,000	237,000
Local Population	570,000	570,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>800,000</b>	<b>807,000</b>

\* Includes returns since 1994.

**Total Requirements  
USD 10,647,822**





## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### Recent Developments

Voluntary repatriation came to a standstill in 1997 when the Myanmar authorities suspended the return of the remaining 22,500 Myanmar Muslims who sought refuge in Bangladesh in late 1991 and early 1992. Movement resumed in November 1998 as a result of UNHCR's interventions. Due to procedural restrictions, just over 600 persons were able to return to Myanmar between November 1998 and September 1999, bringing the total number of returnees to about 230,000. At present some 1,400 persons from among the already cleared group of 7,000 are awaiting re-verification of their names for repatriation.

Despite intervention by the High Commissioner, the Myanmar authorities have not yet agreed to increase the number of returnees from 50 per week to 600. On the other hand, the latter figure has not been rejected, nor have the Myanmar authorities put a limit on the total number, or set a deadline by which repatriation must be completed. Negotiations are still underway, so a planning figure of 7,000 returnees has been adopted for 2000.

UNHCR has continued to monitor and oppose discrimination against the Muslim population in Northern Rakhine State by making frequent visits to returnee areas and engaging in discussions with the authorities. UNHCR advocates increased freedom of movement, reduced imposition of compulsory labour, and an end to land reallocation and arbitrary taxation. In May 1999, the Myanmar authorities issued an instruction directing that compensation be provided for labour requisitioned under the Towns and Village Acts of 1907/8. UNHCR is monitoring the application of this instruction in Northern Rakhine State and observations suggest that labourers are now compensated for their work more frequently. Progress has also been made on the question of freedom of movement, but the issue of the legal status of this population, including the question of citizenship, remain unresolved.

UNHCR is helping set up a five-year United Nations Integrated Development Plan for Northern Rakhine State, beginning in 2000. The plan allows UNHCR to hand over assistance activities to other UN development agencies. So far, UNOPS and UNICEF have begun to implement UNHCR-funded activities. An agreement has also been negotiated with FAO.

### Constraints

The remote and very vulnerable situation of a significant number of Muslims in Northern Rakhine State, and the lack of economic and social development in the area, constitute a serious challenge to the sustainability of UNHCR's activities in the region. The geographical and social stability of this population are also threatened by the lack of progress on the question of the citizenship of Muslim residents.



## STRATEGY

### Protection and Solutions

UNHCR will continue to advocate citizenship and normal civil life for the residents of Northern Rakhine State. Consequently, its field-based staff will continue monitoring incidents of compulsory labour and arbitrary taxation. It will recommend that the authorities review current policy in order to eliminate such practices. This will contribute to a more stable socio-economic environment in Northern Rakhine State and reduce the factors that have caused population movements in the past.

The Office will pursue the issue of freedom of movement for the Muslim population, and advocate a pragmatic approach towards the provision of citizenship for the returnees and the local population. Questions related to the lack of employment opportunities will also be addressed. UNHCR will establish a joint working group with the relevant Government authorities to review the issues and formulate acceptable proposals.

### Assistance

Assistance provided by UNHCR and its partners aims to stabilise the social and economic environment in Northern Rakhine State, and thus mitigate the causes of population movement.

UNHCR will continue to support improvements in infrastructure and community-based facilities to assist the reintegration of returnees. These improvements will create better living conditions for the population of Northern Rakhine State as a whole by ensuring access to markets, health services, education and agricultural activities.

To achieve medium-term food security, sustainable employment and income, rice production will be increased, and a greater diversity of both



winter and summer crops, especially vegetables, will be grown on a greater acreage.

The operation will ensure that the returnees and host communities have access to a higher standard of health care than the national average by improving public facilities run by Government health staff and community health workers. The existing primary health care programme will be strengthened through training; this will establish a basis for community involvement in health planning. Access to water will improve, in terms of quality and quantity, and an information campaign will explain the dangers of water-borne contamination and the need to protect sources of water.

UNHCR will support the establishment of improved educational facilities and programmes for children and adolescents in Northern Rakhine State, in order to increase literacy, especially among women and girls. UNHCR will also continue to work closely with UNICEF in the promotion of children's rights in Myanmar.

<b>Offices</b>
Yangon Maungdaw
<b>Partners</b>
<b>Government Agencies</b>
Immigration and National Registration Department
<b>NGOs</b>
Bridge Asia Japan Care Australia Community and Family Services International <i>Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques</i> Myanmar and Red Cross Society Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association
<b>Other</b>
WFP FAO UNOPS UNICEF

UNHCR will continue to promote income-generating activities to strengthen the economic independence and self-reliance of vulnerable and needy target groups. These groups will be encouraged to spot potential economic opportunities. UNHCR will encourage Government institutions, NGOs and others to collaborate. The Myanmar Muslims adhere to traditional values and women's access to various social and economic activities is often limited. UNHCR will therefore continue to facilitate the participation of women in community-based activities. These efforts will be channelled through the Magsaysay Centres for Women, literacy programmes, food supplements for girl students, skills training and income-generating activities for female heads of households.

### Desired Impact

UNHCR has achieved the objective of repatriating and reintegrating 94 per cent of the Myanmar Muslim population that sought asylum in Bangladesh. The Office has contributed to the social and demographic stability of the returnee and local populations in Northern Rakhine State by creating more favourable social and economic conditions. These are significant achievements, but further efforts are needed. The personal freedom of returnee populations must be monitored and shortcomings taken up in discussions with local and central Government officials. UNHCR is also intent on reducing the general level of poverty in the area, and helping entire communities to create a better political and economic climate.

In 2000, UNHCR's role will shift from being the main agent operating in the region to that of facilitating the work of other, more development-oriented agencies. It is expected that by the end of 2000, other UN agencies and NGOs will be fully operational and ready to continue with their own resources under the umbrella of the United Nations Integrated Development Plan.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management Structure

UNHCR's activities in Myanmar are coordinated from the Office of the Chief of Mission in Yangon, which liaises with the Government, diplomatic missions, other UN agencies and NGOs. The field office in Maungdaw is expected to operate until the end of 2000. UNHCR plans to work with 12



international and 46 national staff in Myanmar in 2000. It is also expected that three Junior Professional Officers will be assigned to Myanmar. Technical support with information technology and telecommunications will be provided by specialist officers based in Islamabad and Colombo.

### Coordination

In view of the future hand-over of activities to UN agencies and NGOs, UNHCR has already begun to delegate responsibility for certain sectors. Health services, income-generation and rural credit projects have been delegated to UNOPS, agriculture, livestock and fisheries to FAO, and immunisation to UNICEF. This is an ongoing process, which will intensify during 2000. UNHCR will continue to work with WFP on Food-for-Work programmes and infrastructure like the construction of township roads for improved access to markets. To improve coordination, UNHCR organises monthly meetings with its implementing partners, both in Northern Rakhine State and in Yangon.

<b>Budget (USD)</b>	
<b>Activities and Services</b>	<b>Annual Programme</b>
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	1,450,946
Community Services	278,165
Crop Production	812,000
Education	823,243
Fisheries	68,500
Food	1,250,000
Health/Nutrition	1,128,553
Income Generation	268,602
Legal Assistance	36,562
Livestock	82,003
Operational Support (to Agencies)	933,372
Transport/Logistics	2,313,000
Water (non-agricultural)	6,000
<b>Total Operations</b>	<b>9,450,946</b>
<b>Programme Support</b>	<b>1,196,876</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,647,822</b>

