



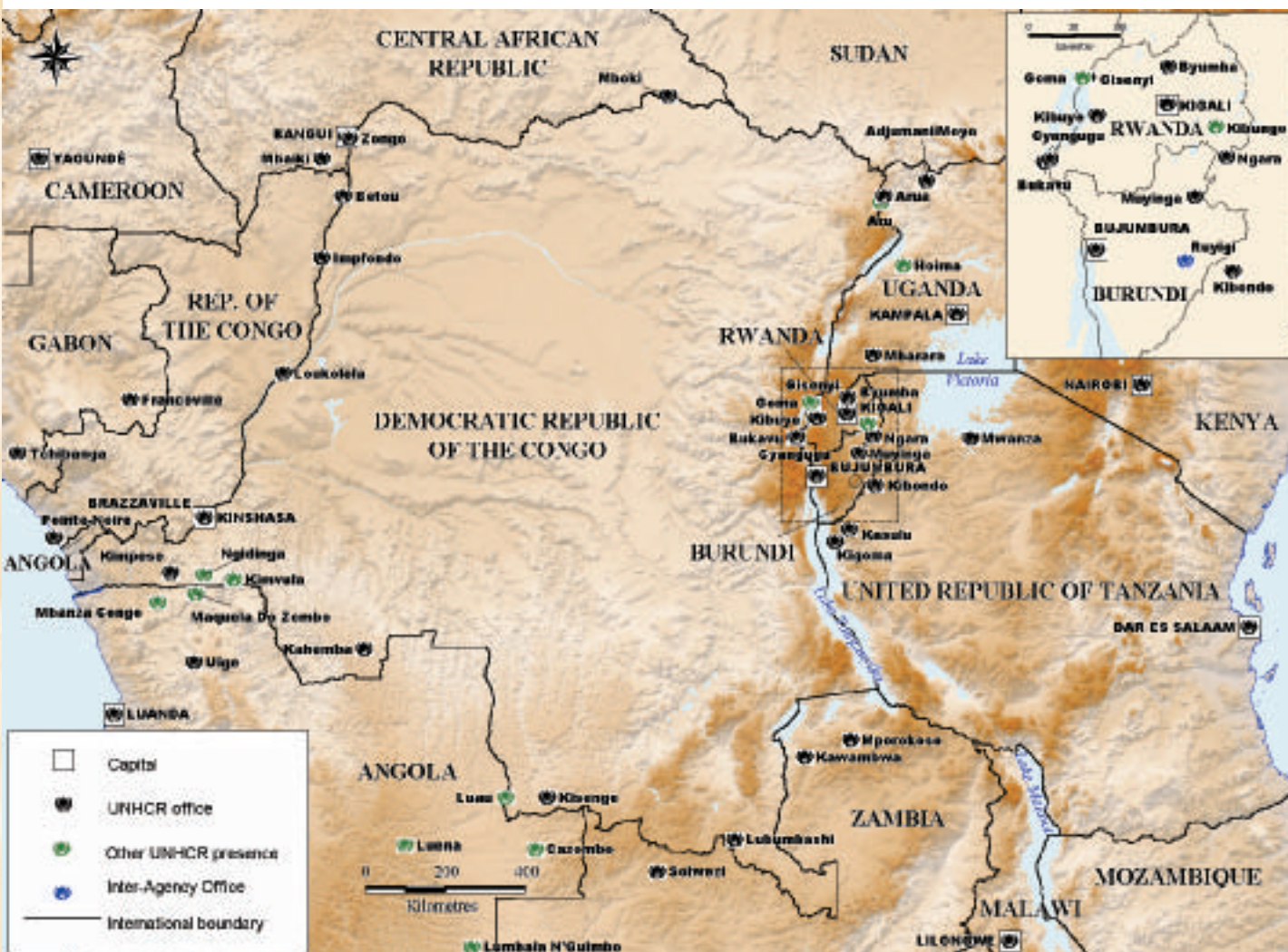
Great Lakes

Recent Developments

In 2002, the Great Lakes remained a highly complex and volatile region. Despite various efforts aimed at resolving some of the ongoing conflicts, the peace processes did not yield sufficient stability to warrant the repatriation of refugees. In addition to existing conflicts between governments and rebel groups, the populations have also suffered the ravages of drought, famine, disease and volcanic eruptions. These challenges have weakened already fragile communities, reducing their ability to host refugee populations. Host communities and refugees are now increasingly in competition for scarce resources. This tension aggravates the tendency to accuse refugees of responsibility for social and economic problems (e.g. disease or crime). These are major challenges for UNHCR.

Clashes between government forces and various armed groups frequently leave civilian populations

Burundi
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Republic of the Congo
Rwanda
United Republic of Tanzania



trapped. Local residents invariably end up in camps for the displaced while they wait for hostilities to subside and for some form of peace and security. Their predicament can worsen as international agencies experience grave difficulty in providing assistance (in the first instance, the difficulty of gaining physical access). Prolonged conflict and political instability have also resulted in fragmentation, making the negotiation of cease-fires an arduous and highly unpredictable task. It is in this overwhelmingly complex environment that UNHCR has been attempting to provide international protection and material assistance to refugees and other persons falling under the Office's mandate.

The safety of humanitarian workers continues to be of major concern to the international community. Security measures are continually monitored, reassessed and updated.

Strategic Objectives

As in previous years, UNHCR's main objectives for 2003 will remain the promotion of refugee law principles and the respect for human rights among the governments of the region. The promotion of durable solutions, especially the voluntary repatriation of refugees and their sustainable reintegration upon return to their home countries will also be pursued with special initiatives for refugee women, refugee children and unaccompanied minors. UNHCR will review the protracted refugee situations to determine the continued need for international protection and humanitarian assistance and promote activities conducive to self reliance. The Office will enhance its emergency preparedness and capacity for response by maintaining regular liaison with governments and other UN agencies as well as maintaining adequate emergency stockpiles. Efforts will be made to mobilise and efficiently manage human, financial and



Tanzania: Food distribution to refugees from Rwanda and Burundi in Kibondo. UNHCR / L. Taylor

material resources needed for effective implementation of its programmes in the region. The Office hopes to achieve these objectives by building consensus within the international community and among host/asylum countries to ensure that the protection of refugees and solutions to refugees problems are a shared responsibility.

Operations

In **Burundi**, despite several peace initiatives, the conflict drags on. Draft laws on genocide, “truth and reconciliation” and immunity for returning political exiles, are yet to be passed by Parliament. Despite these impediments hope of an eventual peace persist, which would allow for the repatriation of Burundian refugees, especially those in the United Republic of Tanzania. Burundi is itself host to over 27,000 refugees, the majority from DRC. In mid-October 2002, after the fall of Uvira in DRC,

approximately 6,000 refugees sought asylum in Burundi. The refugees are predominantly of Banyamulenge origin and are thought to have been affiliated to the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD). Some of the refugees from DRC, already in Burundi, have been moved to a site in the relatively safe northern province of the country (Gasorwe, Muyinga). This will ensure that more systematic assistance can be provided to this group. It is to be noted that some of the refugees from the DRC have refused to be relocated to this new site. UNHCR is working with the Government of Burundi to find solutions to address the needs of this group of refugees.¹

Encouraging political developments in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (DRC) have continued, albeit at a slower rate than initially expected. Impediments to this progress include: the failure to reach agreement at the first session of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue at the end of

¹ As several countries in the region will be involved in an organised repatriation to DRC, a regional repatriation plan will be presented separately to donors for funding at an opportune time.

2001, the incomplete nature of the agreement reached at its second session in Sun City, South Africa, in April 2002, the continued military interventions in the Kivus, and the continued insecurity and volatility in the north-east. These factors have resulted in extreme caution towards the possible repatriation of some 400,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries. The repatriation expected by UNHCR for 2001 and early 2002 did not take place. It is, however, expected that in 2003 conditions will have improved sufficiently to allow organised repatriation, and UNHCR foresees the return of 100,000 refugees.

The majority of the approximately 336,000 refugees hosted in DRC originate from neighbouring countries that are still at war or have initiated peace processes and/or national political dialogue. These refugees are settled throughout the country and include Angolans, Burundians, Central Africans, Congolese, Rwandans, Sudanese and Ugandans. Since the signature of the peace agreement in Angola in April 2002 the prospects of voluntary repatriation have become brighter. The Angolan refugees account for half of the refugee population in DRC.² For the remaining refugee groups, limited repatriation is foreseen in 2003 although recent developments in the peace negotiations between DRC and its neighbours (Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe) may provide further openings. While awaiting further positive political developments, UNHCR will continue to ensure that international protection and humanitarian assistance are provided, with the aim of progressively achieving self-sufficiency for the refugees. UNHCR will also continue to explore resettlement options as a durable solution for refugees in DRC.

During 2001, in the **Republic of the Congo**, the long awaited National Dialogue took place and in January 2002, a new Constitution was adopted by referendum. Presidential and legislative elections took place in the first half of 2002. These positive developments were clouded by the eruption of renewed conflict in the Pool Region in April 2002. The expected repatriation of Congolese refugees from Gabon and DRC has not yet taken place.

The country continues to host some 111,000 refugees from Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. If the current positive developments continue, the National Committee for Assistance to Refugees (CNAR), should be able to address individual protection cases in 2003, working through the National Eligibility Commission (NEC). UNHCR will promote voluntary repatriation while continuing to provide humanitarian assistance with the aim of gradually increasing self-sufficiency. It is expected that the majority of the Congolese refugees will repatriate during 2003 when conditions in DRC have improved sufficiently. UNHCR also foresees the voluntary repatriation of the refugees from the Central African Republic. Current political developments in Angola are also likely to increase opportunities for repatriation.

Throughout the year, **Rwanda** has continued to play host to a large number of refugees who originate from the Kivu province of DRC. After the peace agreement between the Governments of Rwanda and DRC in September 2002, over 8,500 refugees were repatriated in conditions that UNHCR deems less than ideal. This situation was brought to the attention of the Rwandan Government and it appears that forced repatriation has stopped for the time being. By contrast, the Government of Rwanda has been keen to receive its own expatriated citizens. In this context, within the tripartite framework between Rwanda, Tanzania and UNHCR, it has been agreed that UNHCR will start promoting the return of 24,000 Rwandan refugees in Tanzania as of October 2002. UNHCR hopes to encourage a limited reintegration programme for those returnees by providing them with a returnee kit consisting of iron sheets, seed, tools etc.

The **United Republic of Tanzania** is the country worst affected by the consequences of the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region. To date, over 505,000 Congolese, Burundian, Somali and Rwandan refugees are hosted in Tanzania, of whom the majority are in north-western Tanzania.³ The refugees are settled in camps along the borders of Tanzania with Rwanda, Burundi and DRC.

² As several countries in the region will be involved in an organised repatriation to Angola, a regional repatriation plan is being presented to donors for funding.

³ According to Government figures, an additional 470,000 Burundian refugees are to be found in Tanzania: 170,000 living in settlements and 300,000 living in Tanzanian villages. These refugees are not directly assisted by UNHCR. It should also be noted that there is an average increase in the refugee population of nearly 25,000 annually due to births alone.

Mounting insecurity and competition for scarce resources between host communities and refugees have exacerbated an increasingly challenging environment and the authorities are asking UNHCR to repatriate refugees to their countries of origin, despite the prevailing security situation. Since March 2002, UNHCR has been facilitating voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees from the camps in Tanzania (mostly to the northern provinces of Burundi). To date, some 45,000 have returned, over 25,000 with UNHCR's help, the remainder having returned spontaneously, mostly to southern provinces. There are

fears that some of these spontaneous returnees may have ended up in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) as insecurity prohibits their return to their places of origin. Simultaneously, south-west Tanzania continued to receive refugees from both Burundi and Congo. Within the framework of tripartite agreements between UNHCR and the Governments of Rwanda and Tanzania respectively, UNHCR will start promoting the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees in the Kagera Region of Tanzania in the last quarter of 2002. It is expected that the majority of this group will have returned by the end of 2002.

| Budget (USD) | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Country | Annual Programme | Supplementary Programme | Total |
| Burundi | 6,691,466 | 0 | 6,691,466 |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | 24,963,567 | 5,101,194 | 30,064,761 |
| Republic of the Congo | 7,440,393 | 82,271 | 7,522,664 |
| United Republic of Tanzania | 27,104,950 | 0 | 27,104,950 |
| Regional Activities ¹ | 8,220,000 | 0 | 8,220,000 |
| Sub-Total Great Lakes Operation | 74,420,376 | 5,183,465 | 79,603,841 |
| Rwanda | 8,036,195 | 0 | 8,036,195 |
| Total | 82,456,571 | 5,183,465 | 87,640,036 |

¹ Includes assistance to various refugees in the Great Lakes region, such as resettlement, care and maintenance, as well as support costs for UNVs and consultants, light aircraft charters costs and scholarships for refugee students.