

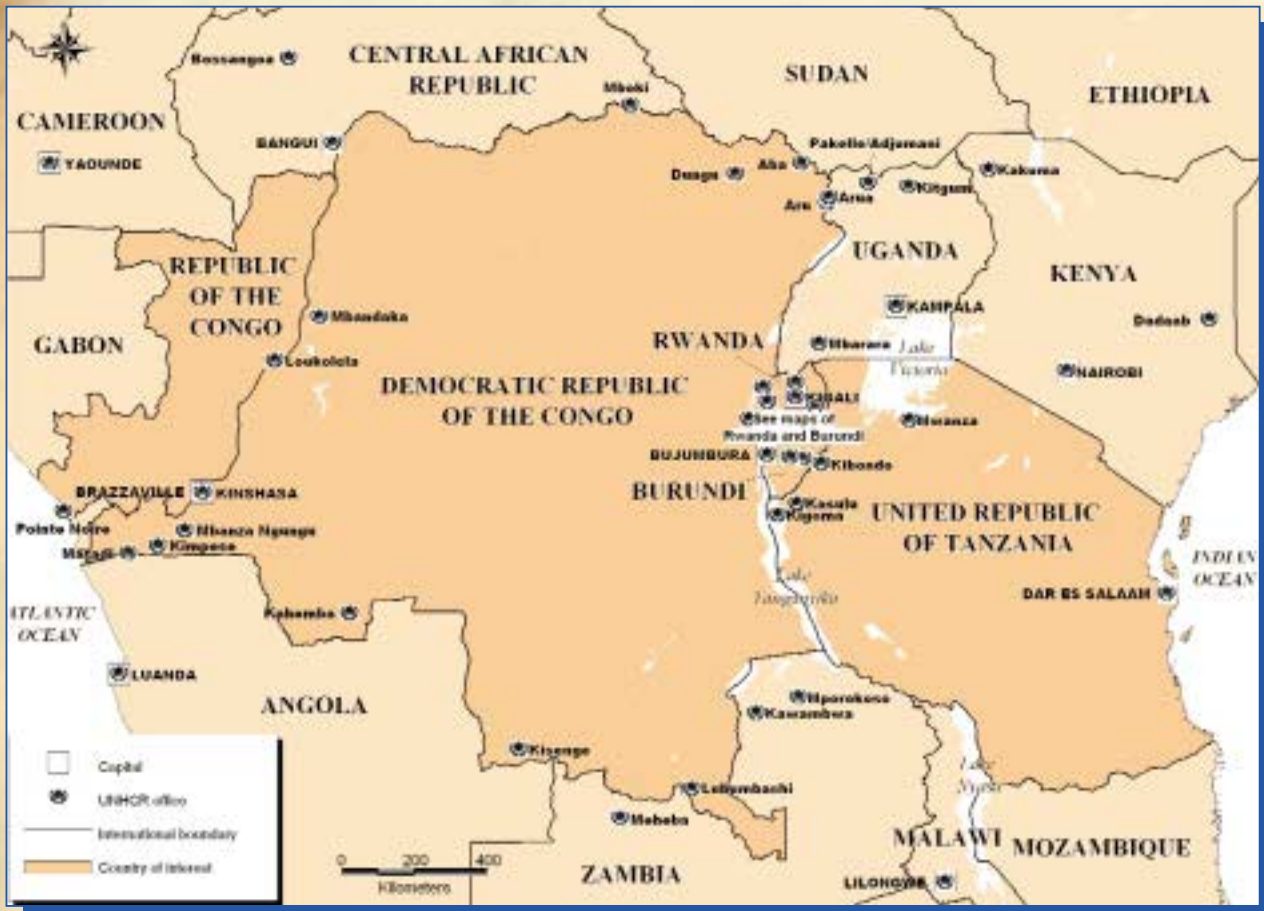
GREAT LAKES

Burundi,
Republic of the Congo,
Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Rwanda,
United Republic of Tanzania.

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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Recent Developments

Following the return of hundreds of thousands Rwandan refugees to their country in 1996 and 1997, the situation in the Great Lakes Region appeared to be more promising. However, security has remained precarious in many areas over the past two years. It is clear that continued peace and stability will largely depend on a successful reintegration of returnees and on general stability in the region.

The armed rebellion which began in August 1998 in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), quickly spread to various parts of the country and finally to Kinshasa. The counter-offensive prompted new outflows of refugees and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons all over the DRC. The largest movement of refugees occurred in Tanzania where, in January 1999 alone, UNHCR received

more than 12,000 new arrivals from DRC. These refugees also wound up in Zambia, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Angola, Uganda and Sudan.

The Lusaka peace agreement, signed in July 1999, is raising hopes of relative stability in the region. However, the situation remains precarious, and humanitarian agencies must remain vigilant and prepared for potential refugee influxes and the displacement of entire populations anywhere in the region.

Hopes for peace soared in Burundi for a while after the lifting of the economic embargo, the signature of the Arusha Agreement and the resumption of the Tripartite mechanism with Tanzania. Unfortunately, a series of setbacks, culminating in the security incident of October 1999, have clouded the prospect of durable repa-

triation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons in the country. At the time of writing, international agencies have evacuated non-essential staff from the country, leaving only a skeleton team in Bujumbura. This last incident has already led to new departures of Burundi refugees for Tanzania and to serious concerns about how the humanitarian situation could deteriorate.

It is in this context that throughout 1998 and 1999, UNHCR endeavoured to ensure that stockpiles of non-food items needed for emergencies remained at a sufficient level to accommodate the needs of some 300,000 persons in the region. The stocks were maintained in three strategic locations, Kampala (Uganda), Ngara (Tanzania), and Amsterdam (Netherlands), to permit rapid deployment. Moreover, in view of the paucity of good roads and the lack of regular commercial airlines in the region, it was necessary to charter several planes to transport personnel, refugees and non-food items.

Given the unrelenting challenges confronting UNHCR in the Great Lakes Region, supplies of non-food items will be increased to serve up to 500,000 beneficiaries.

Strategic Objectives

In the Great Lakes Region, UNHCR will strive to achieve the following objectives:

- promote respect for humanitarian principles and international law in the protection of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, contributing to a long-term impact on national and regional peace and security;
- ensure and coordinate the provision of assistance to refugees, returnees and other people of concern, strengthening regional coordination and support the cross-border delivery of assistance;
- spearhead the search, in collaboration with all relevant parties, for lasting solutions for populations of concern, so as to avoid future population displacement. These solutions must also strengthen peace and security in the region. At the same time, UNHCR will remain mindful of the possibility of population outflows, and internal displacements, address security issues arising from the presence of refugee camps in western Tanzania and promote voluntary repatriation, subject to adequate security as well as formal agreements with the respective governments;

- assist countries of origin to ensure the speedy reintegration of returnees and internally displaced populations in cooperation with other organisations, assist countries of asylum to address problems created by hosting large numbers of refugees in order to safeguard the concept of asylum, and protect the rights of refugees and returnees through relevant bilateral and tripartite legal instruments while maintaining an effective presence in the countries of origin and asylum;

- maintain regional contingency planning in collaboration with other agencies, rehearsing scenarios and coordinated responses particularly in Angola, Burundi and DRC and advocate increased international humanitarian support for the region.

Operations

In addition to the country programmes in **Burundi**, the **United Republic of Tanzania**, **DRC** and **Rwanda**, which are presented in separate chapters, UNHCR has operations in the Republic of the Congo, as described below.

The ongoing struggle for power in the **Republic of the Congo** has plunged that country once again into civil war. The war has caused substantial suffering among the civilian population. More than 200,000 people were displaced and living in abjection for months until, in December 1998, some 45,000 were able to cross into Bas Congo province of DRC. Many of them have in the meantime been repatriated following a stabilisation of the situation in Brazzaville.

In addition to the repatriation operation, UNHCR continues to assist Rwandans at two sites in the Republic of the Congo. The Rwandans, who first arrived in northern Congo in the spring of 1997, have been a controversial group. The majority of them were young males, some with alleged links with the Interhamwe or ex-FAR soldiers. Recognising this, an attempt was made to screen Rwandans to identify those of concern to UNHCR. However, the war in DRC, which was shortly followed by the war in the Republic of the Congo, made implementation of the screening programme impossible.

During the High Commissioner's recent visit to Kinshasa, it was decided to undertake a categorisation exercise to identify who among the estimated 7,000 Rwandans remaining in the Republic of the Congo are of concern to UNHCR. Those determined to be of concern will then be assisted to settle locally at sites identified north of

Brazzaville. The Government is reported to be in agreement with this plan, but, a formal document has yet to be signed. UNHCR then hopes to be able to cease assistance to this refugee population in the first quarter of 2000.

In addition, some 20,000 refugees from the enclave of Cabinda (Angola) are living in the environs of Pointe-Noire. Of these, 6,000 are assisted by UNHCR in the three camps of Kondi-Mbaka, Mavoadi and Komi. These refugees arrived in the country between 1993 and 1998. In 2000, UNHCR will continue, security permitting, to provide them with limited assistance in the fields of health, education, agriculture and forestry, while evaluating ways to wind down its involvement by facilitating local integration of these refugees. Depending on developments in the country of origin, UNHCR will undertake a voluntary repatriation programme for about 500 refugees.

An estimated 1,200 urban refugees also currently registered in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire are in receipt of medical assistance, essential domestic items and benefit from an income-generating

programme. These refugees are mainly from DRC. In order to help them become self-sufficient, the UNHCR assistance programme is focusing on financing micro-projects.

GREAT LAKES	
BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Burundi	15,404,721
Congo, Republic of the	2,419,743
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	24,720,036
United Republic of Tanzania	31,676,352
Regional Project*	10,107,200
Liaison Unit at Headquarters	1,794,300
Sub-total Great Lakes Operation	86,122,352
Rwanda	14,087,045
Total	100,209,397

* Covers activities in Burundi, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and United Republic of Tanzania.

The Situation of Refugees Originating from the Great Lakes

Over the past year, the humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes Region has been shaped by an eruption of inter-related conflicts whose fallout affected almost all the countries of the region: the Central African Republic, Zambia, Sudan, Gabon, the United Republic of Tanzania and Angola. The complexity of the problems in and around the region increases the likelihood of further population displacements in the future, and pushes UNHCR further towards establishing an integrated regional approach.

Conflicts and general instability in the countries of the Great Lakes Region are seriously affecting the Central African region as a whole. Movements of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Angola or from the Republic of the Congo, are so complex that some of these countries, although at war themselves and generating refugees, are also receiving refugees from neighbouring countries. This is particularly the case with Angola, DRC, and the Republic of the Congo.

In addition, the deteriorating social, political and economic environment in the DRC allowed other groups of people to use the country as a base for destabilisation activities elsewhere. DRC finds itself hosting not only gatherings of mili-

tias and rebel movements, but also groups of refugees from Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and Sudan, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons suffering as a result of domestic instability.

In this context, UNHCR's main objective in the year 2000 is to promote respect for humanitarian principles and refugee law among the countries of the region. UNHCR hopes to achieve this objective by building consensus among the asylum countries around the principle that the protection of refugees and the solutions to their problems are based on due process and the rule of law. UNHCR will also attempt to ensure protection and assistance for all groups of refugees in the countries of the region. Finally, UNHCR will strive to consolidate ongoing voluntary repatriation, including sustainable reintegration programmes in areas of return, whenever and wherever possible. At the same time, contingency preparedness will be maintained and, where necessary, stepped up.

UNHCR's requirements for the refugees originating from the Great Lakes Region total **USD 76,152,037.**