

The Year in Review

2002 was a year in which UNHCR achieved successes in some areas but was thwarted by different obstacles in others. In many operations, notably in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, there was little sign of resolution of long-standing refugee situations. Nevertheless, UNHCR pursued efforts under its mandate to provide international protection for some 20.8 million persons of concern. Ironically, one of the Office's greatest challenges was securing sufficient, predictable and timely funding.

On the positive side, the return of some two million Afghans to their home country was the largest repatriation of refugees for over three decades. This has brought enormous changes to Afghanistan and opened the way for its reconstruction, thereby giving hope for the sustainability of the returns. Other significant developments were the new peace agreements in Angola, Sierra Leone and in Sri Lanka. After nearly 30 years of war, almost 100,000 Angolan refugees from neighbouring countries repatriated spontaneously. An organised repatriation of Angolans from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia is to start in May 2003.

In January 2002, Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war was declared officially over. An unprecedented humanitarian, political and military effort by the international community helped to strengthen the peace process, heralding an era of cautious optimism. National parliamentary and presidential elections were held successfully in mid-year. There were noticeable improvements in the security situation as the Government gradually took responsibility for ensuring that forces were in place to secure stability. During the year, the disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants was completed throughout the country.

In Asia, there was a successful repatriation of 31,000 individuals to Timor-Leste during the year of its independence. The cease-fire in Sri Lanka in February 2002 brought an end to 20 years of hostilities and resulted in more than 300,000 IDPs spontaneously returning home.

On the negative side, millions of refugees lingered in protracted refugee situations in south west Algeria, Nepal and Tanzania with no clear prospects of durable solutions. In Liberia, the ongoing conflict led to thousands having to flee for their lives, some for the third or fourth time in a 10-year period. Côte d'Ivoire, a country long considered as a generous host to more than 100,000 refugees and millions of migrants, was plunged into political conflict. The results had disastrous repercussions for 35,000 Ivorians who fled into neighbouring countries, and for over 40,000 (mainly Liberian) refugees who had to be repatriated in great haste from the country. Similarly, in Burundi, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, refugees were on the move once again to escape conflict and general insecurity.

In Colombia, hostilities continued with increased intensity and no solution seemed to be in sight following the breakdown of the formal peace talks between the Government and the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias*) in February 2002. Thousands of civilians then crossed borders in search of protection.

In the Balkans, more than two million persons have returned home in the last few years. By the end of 2002, the main focus shifted from the refugees to reconstruction as the Office had to implement its phase out strategy.

While the primary responsibility for providing international protection and assistance for the



refugees lies with the governments of host countries, UNHCR has a worldwide mandate and continues to support the efforts of these countries in co-operation with other partners. In the ongoing search for solutions to end protracted refugee situations, the High Commissioner introduced the concepts of “4 Rs” (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) and Development through Local Integration (DLI). These are designed to ensure poverty reduction and create good local governance through the overarching framework of institutional partnerships.

Addressing the shortcomings of many asylum systems was one of the objectives of the *Global Consultations on International Protection*, which formally drew to a close in May 2002. These Consultations were UNHCR’s contribution to reinvigorating support for the international refugee protection framework by developing new tools and arrangements to buttress the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. This process has given rise to the *Agenda for Protection*. The Agenda is a multi-year programme of action for States, UNHCR, NGOs, and other partners,



Since March 2002, more than 1.4 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan – a figure more than three times the number originally projected. Afghan refugees on the move from Takhta Baig Transit Centre, near Peshawar. UNHCR / P. Benatar

aimed at improving the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees worldwide.

In the context of furthering the Agenda, in 2002, the High Commissioner launched the “*Convention Plus*” initiative, a means of furnishing tools for protection, in the form of developing multilateral special agreements and arrangements to complement the 1951 Convention. These are meant to ensure improved burden-sharing to find durable solutions for refugees.

In the wake of allegations, in February 2002, of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in West Africa, the year saw a major drive within UNHCR to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. The High Commissioner announced a policy of “zero tolerance” of such acts and UNHCR adopted a Code of Conduct for its staff, as well as for staff of implementing partners.

The Office embarked on the implementation of the UNHCR HIV/AIDS strategic plan 2002-2004. It aims to put at the disposal of refugees in all countries where UNHCR operates the essential services to combat the pandemic.

During the year, the Supplementary Programme for Afghanistan, amounting to some USD 271 million, for a period of 15 months (the last quarter of 2001 and the whole of 2002), was fully funded. This was a great achievement that gave both encouraging support to UNHCR and due recognition to the crucial needs of the millions of returnees, IDPs and local populations in Afghanistan. However, it also resulted in a significant downward trend in the funding of the Annual Programme Budget. This meant that the Office, once again, had to manage a shortfall of more than USD 100 million in the Annual Programme Budget.

The time and energy spent to manage the financial fluctuations and chronic uncertainty about the organisation’s funding base are considerable. Surely, UNHCR could do more to improve the positive impact of its work if it did not have to spend so much effort and precious resources on managing budgetary shortfalls and on minimising the negative impact of the latter on those it strives to protect.

Top 10 repatriation movements in 2002 (by origin)
(in millions)

