

Steering Group. The meeting decided, however, to continue the process under the banner of "Follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues".

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

The perceived threat to regional security posed by insurgents and neighbouring conflicts has resulted in the hardening of attitudes of some Central Asian governments towards asylum-seekers and refugees, and these are sometimes regarded as a cause of the problems in the region, rather than a consequence. This poses a challenge for UNHCR in its negotiations with the Governments to maintain an adequate level of protection for these people. In 2000, the repatriation to Tajikistan encountered various setbacks: although the issue of transit through Uzbekistan was solved in May 2000, the Government of Tajikistan suspended its agreement to organised repatriation movements following security incidents in Shartuz between returnees and the local population. This issue was resolved in October.

UNHCR offices closely monitored security conditions in the region, and conducted regular exercises to update emergency contingency plans. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints in 2000 precluded stockpiling for possible emergencies.

PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

UNHCR successfully implemented projects for the local integration of some 25,000 refugees from Tajikistan with the same ethnicity as the local population. UNHCR's objective is that they will obtain Kyrgyz or Turkmen nationality. This will, however, require considerable support from UNHCR to develop appropriate and accessible legal procedures. UNHCR's target for the voluntary repatriation of 5,000 Tajik refugees in 2000 proved over-optimistic and only 1,500 returned to Tajikistan, for reasons outlined above. The reintegration component of the programme in Tajikistan is being decreased and UNHCR is actively encouraging development-oriented agencies to implement programmes in returnee-affected areas.

In the Central Asian countries, UNHCR assists some 10,000 registered Afghan refugees. A durable solution for these Afghans remains elusive, and assistance programmes continue to be the only option, apart from a limited number of persons who may qualify for resettlement.

As part of the follow-up to the CIS Conference, a number of working groups pursued specific issues related to migra-

tion and border control, asylum legislation and sustainable development of the NGO sector. An international NGO fielded a staff member to work on NGO co-ordination in the region, with a special emphasis on the role of NGOs in emergency preparedness.

OPERATIONS

By the end of 2000, an estimated 12,000 refugees from Chechnya had fled to **Kazakhstan** as a result of the continuing conflict. With an allocation from the Operational Reserve, UNHCR provided assistance (mainly medical and household support) to some 6,300 of the most vulnerable persons. At the end of the year, an early repatriation to their places of origin remained highly unlikely. UNHCR also continued to provide assistance to some 2,700 Afghan refugees, including medical care, education and vocational training for women. The institution of asylum in Kazakhstan remains fragile and lacks a clear legislative basis and implementation structures. UNHCR has been working closely with several government departments and key staff to draft national refugee law. An Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the Development and Implementation of Migration Policy was created in order to address problems facing refugees and asylum-seekers as well as matters relating to refugee law. Both UNHCR and IOM are represented in this working group. Training sessions and seminars for government officials and law students were regularly conducted to promote the culture of asylum. During 2000, 377 Tajik refugees returned voluntarily to Tajikistan. Five local NGOs were supported from donor contributions earmarked for NGO development in the CIS. As well as increasing the capacities of the NGOs concerned, the funds contributed to vocational training, such as hairdressing or sewing, for Afghan and Chechen refugee women.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the local integration programme for Tajik refugees focused on ways to increase the self-sufficiency of refugees and support for communities with large refugee populations, as well as efforts to promote the establishment of a simplified procedure for the acquisition of Kyrgyz citizenship. The local integration programme included the rehabilitation of ten primary schools, five water systems, three medical clinics and hospitals and six electrical transformers. These projects also assisted the local hosting communities, thus encouraging further integration. The introduction of a pilot education programme was successful in ten communities; 300 refugee children who had missed several years of schooling received intensive tuition to help them catch up with the regular school curriculum. Supplementary classes for 253 Tajik refugee children were also provided. Some 865 Tajiks were assisted to repatriate during 2000. In addition to medical assis-

tance, 50 Afghan refugee women received vocational training and 100 participated in literacy programmes, while 147 Afghan refugee children attended primary school. Emergency one-off assistance was given to 150 vulnerable refugee families. The draft Refugee Law progressed well, incorporating all the changes proposed by UNHCR. In 2000, the number of detention of refugees and asylum-seekers fell, as did the number of asylum applications rejected. The annual summer course on international law and human rights was a success, attended by more than 30 lawyers and law students from across Central Asia and the CIS. The Office continued its co-operation with an international NGO in support of four national NGOs working with persons of concern to UNHCR. Three other NGOs were also provided with financial assistance for various activities such as legal assistance, vocational training and a survey on refugee children. NGO support centres served to increase co-operation between refugee communities and local governments, as well as provide training and project support. The contributions earmarked for NGO development were utilised to support NGO related activities.

The protection situation in **Tajikistan** became more difficult. The Government drafted a revision to the refugee law, which did not meet international standards; decrees issued in July 2000 would, if implemented, place severe restrictions on the living conditions of some 4,500 recognised Afghan refugees in the country, and their access to asylum procedures. UNHCR is negotiating with the Government of Tajikistan on both issues. UNHCR and other agencies distributed food and non-food items to the vulnerable civilian population of some 10,000 Afghans encamped at the river Pyandj, an operation complicated by the presence of many armed combatants. This event underlined the possibility of larger numbers fleeing the conflict in northern Afghanistan which, fortunately, did not happen. UNHCR continued to assist recognised Afghan refugees in Tajikistan. Owing to the suspension of the voluntary repatriation operation until October, only 1,498 Tajik refugees returned. Funding for the reintegration pro-

gramme, reduced from USD 1 million in 1999 to USD 0.5 million in 2000 as part of the planned phase-down, was reduced further as a result of budgetary constraints. UNHCR assisted in crop production, which included the distribution of fertiliser and seeds to 600 households, the rehabilitation of 11 pumping stations for irrigation water and the cleaning of 123 km of irrigation canals. This increased food security for some 32,000 returnees. In addition, 11 flour mills and 11 rice mills were reconstructed and equipped, and carpet weaving and sewing workshops established. Six-hundred hand-pumps were installed to improve access to drinking water. Women, particularly women heads of household, were given priority for assistance. With funds earmarked for NGO development in the CIS, the Office assisted four civil society support centres, located in areas housing returnees, in Khatlon Oblast, Khorog, Gorno Badakhstan Oblast and Kulob. Interactive training and technical assistance on NGO management, tolerance education and NGO legislation was provided; 1,261 organisations benefited from the training and 19 NGOs received small grants.

For those Tajiks of Turkmen ethnicity wishing to remain in **Turkmenistan**, local settlement projects were carried out in the provinces of Lebap and Mary. Assistance was also provided to an Afghan settlement in Lebap. A water project providing clean water to some 1,200 Tajik refugees in Babadurmaz was successfully implemented in 2000. Other projects included the construction and equipping of a school, provision of electrical transformers, water pumps, and agricultural and medical equipments. These projects also benefited the local population, resulting in higher receptivity to refugees and thus hastening their complete integration. In rural areas, especially in Lebap province, special programmes were implemented for refugee children, including education and hygiene; the educational needs of Afghan girls; and language classes in Turkmen and their mother tongue. For Tajik refugee children, the Office supported the construction of a school, the repair of two others and a summer camp. The urban refugees were able to attend Turkmen schools free of charge. A UNHCR-sponsored Centre for International Refugee Law was inaugurated at the police academy in December, with the objective of training police officers on how to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees. Although the Government planned to establish a refugee office, this did not materialise during 2000. UNHCR conducted refugee status determination in an atmosphere of constructive co-operation with the Government. UNHCR continued to promote refugee issues through training and capacity-building and through local and regional initiatives. During 2000, a total of 403 refugees were assisted to repatriate, including 256 Tajiks, 120 Afghans, 14 Armenians and 13 Azeris. Earmarked funds for NGO



development in the CIS were utilised to provide technical assistance and information, to strengthen refugee representation and to consolidate co-operation between NGOs and government authorities. Small grants were also given to five local NGOs working on refugee integration, employment creation and health. Those activities were carried out in co-operation with Counterpart Consortium and NGO support centres.

Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian country not to have acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR's objective is to maintain a dialogue with the authorities with the aim of promoting Uzbekistan's accession and introducing effective refugee legislation. These efforts resulted in the creation – with government participation – of a working group to discuss the possibility of accession to the 1951 Convention. UNHCR's working relations with law enforcement bodies contributed to the general improvement of the protection situation in 2000 with a significant reduction in reported arrests or deportation of asylum-seekers or mandate refugees. The Office carried out refugee status determination of asylum-seekers and 120 refugees were accepted for resettlement. The number of recognised refugees at the end of the year stood at 1,350, mostly Afghans. Assistance was provided to the most vulnerable among them through an implementing partner. For the first time, refugee children had access to free

education in local schools. In co-operation with an international NGO, UNHCR provided technical support, training, management and access to information for NGOs and community-based partners through NGO resource centres in Tashkent, Bukhara, Kokand and Nukus. Two additional centres were opened in the Fergana Valley and Samarkand in 2000. UNHCR also supported a local NGO conducting research and seminars on citizenship, migration and human rights, and another organisation delivering a legal education programme and training for local teachers. The funds earmarked for NGO development in the CIS were utilised to support these activities.

FUNDING

The funding situation in 2000, especially during the latter half of the year, placed considerable constraints on all operations. The offices in Central Asia were obliged to prioritise heavily and to reduce assistance to refugees and returnees. Examples include: a reduction in the number of water pumps for returnees in Tajikistan; the cancellation of emergency preparedness activities in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; and a reduction in public information activities and kindergarten programmes in Kazakhstan. In addition, the implementation of local integration programmes in Turkmenistan was reduced.

Voluntary Contributions - Restricted (USD)			
Donor	Earmarking ¹	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Japan	Kazakhstan	70,000	70,000
	Kyrgyzstan	120,000	120,000
	Tajikistan	600,000	600,000
	Turkmenistan	80,000	80,000
	Uzbekistan	150,000	150,000
Netherlands	Tajikistan	39,251	39,251
Sweden	Central Asia	900,901	900,901
United Kingdom	Tajikistan	70,000	70,000
United States of America	Central Asia	1,800,000	1,800,000
Private Donors Italy	Turkmenistan	26,902	26,902
Total²		3,857,054	3,857,054

¹For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

²Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unearmarked voluntary contributions, broadly earmarked contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised Budget	Expenditure
	Annual Programme Budget	
Kazakhstan	880,983	870,412
Kyrgyzstan	1,523,059	1,435,599
Tajikistan	2,672,620	2,630,992
Turkmenistan	937,467	927,979
Uzbekistan	1,335,598	1,240,339
Bureau at Headquarters	243,340	262,938
Total	7,593,067	7,368,259