

**UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES  
IN MYANMAR  
COUNTRY OPERATION PLAN (External Version)  
2002**

**Part I: Executive Committee Summary**

**(a) Context and Beneficiary Population (s):**

***Returnees from Bangladesh***

UNHCR established its presence in Northern Rakhine State (NRS) in the Union of Myanmar in 1994 following signature of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Government (GOUM) to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of some 250,000 Myanmar Muslim refugees. The Muslim refugees had sought asylum in Bangladesh during 1991-92 due to a range of political, economic and social factors. By the end of 2000, UNHCR has provided assistance towards repatriation and reintegration to 231,919 persons from 46,159 families. This represents approximately 93% of the refugee population. The repatriation of the residual caseload of some 21,000 refugees in Bangladesh is continuing. The protection and assistance interventions of UNHCR are geared towards increasing the coping capacity of the returnees and the host Muslim population estimated at 834,000 marginalised persons living at the edge of subsistence who are in addition faced with a range of adverse public policies. UNHCR's programme objective is to secure the reintegration of returnees, stabilise the host population and ameliorate the factors, which could lead to a renewed population outflow.

NRS is remote, impoverished and has a higher density of population than the national average. In Maungdaw and Buthidaung - the main operational areas, the population density is 752 persons/square mile and 336 persons/square mile respectively, compared to the national average of 188 persons/square mile. A combination of factors such as the lack of resources and population density exerts a heavy pressure on the returnees and the host population. The Muslim population thus faces a multitude of challenges which are compounded by their uncertain legal status and compulsory labour practices, compulsory contributions, land reallocation, and restriction on freedom of movement. UNHCR's field monitoring has had a significant impact on some of these issues. Since UNHCR established its presence, the incidence of compulsory labour practices and compulsory contributions has shown a marked decline. This progress is however

uneven across different geographic areas and its sustainability remains uncertain. Restrictions on freedom of movement of the Muslim population remain difficult. There has also been little progress in the granting of citizenship to the Muslim population.

UNHCR's assistance has also had an important protection impact. Efforts to improve food production and promote income generation opportunities have increased the ability of the returnees and the host population to cope with the situation. The construction of rural infrastructure has reduced the demands for compulsory labour, compulsory contributions and increased freedom of movement. Education, health, sanitation, and community services have promoted a stabilisation of population movements.

- *Political Context:* There have recently been a number of initiatives by the international community to engage in a dialogue with the Government of Myanmar. The visit by the Special Representative of the Secretary General in October 2000 was followed by a second visit in January 2001. During this period, it was announced that the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) had initiated discussions with the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD). In January 2001, a high level delegation from the European Union visited Myanmar for discussions on a range of human rights issues. In April 2001, the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission also visited Myanmar for a similar dialogue. Discussions are currently underway between the Myanmar authorities and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on forced labour practices. These efforts are contributing to the creation of greater humanitarian space in the country. It is hoped that these developments will impact positively on UNHCR's humanitarian activities during 2002.
- *Security situation:* The whole country remains under phase one of the UN security plan. The overall security situation as regards conducting normal operation, safety of staff, and the beneficiaries is fragile. Communal clashes between the Rakhine and Muslim population took place in the State capital of NRS, Sittwe earlier this year. The authorities quickly took control of the situation. UNHCR has been closely monitoring the safety and security of the returnees. While there are clear indications of a growing confidence among the returnees and the host Muslim population, the activities of insurgent groups such as the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation and the Arakan Liberation Front, and the emergence of border tension between Bangladesh and Myanmar could quickly change the situation.
- *Protection issues (including reasons for flight, prospects for return and etc.):* UNHCR has identified issues of concern that contributed to the mass outflow of the Muslim population in the past which are also impediments to the population stabilisation efforts in Northern Rakhine State, namely, (i)

compulsory labour practices, (ii) compulsory contributions, (iii) land reallocation, (iv) lack of citizenship, and (v) restriction on freedom of movement. These issues (i) to (iii) are nation wide practices, (iv) and (v) are related to NRS specific to the Muslim population of concern.

- *UNHCR's role (protection, assistance, monitoring, coordination):* The nature and scope of UNHCR's protection and assistance interventions for the benefit of the Muslim population in Northern Rakhine State derive from the root causes for the flight of 250,000 refugees to Bangladesh. UNHCR's assistance and protection interventions, which are inter-linked and complementary, have thus been directed at the re-integration of individual returnees and the stabilisation of the larger Muslim population to prevent another outflow to Bangladesh. A broad range of community based projects implemented by UNHCR are intended to improve the economic and social situation of the Muslim population including the returnees, and to increase their ability to cope with their impoverished and marginalised existence and adverse human rights practices by the authorities such as forced labour and compulsory contributions. At the same time, field monitoring by UNHCR staff has provided an opportunity for a dialogue with the authorities on a range of human rights issues in an effort to eliminate or moderate these practices.

In 2002, UNHCR's monitoring role will be consolidated, while major longer-term assistance activities would be covered by a UNDP led Basic Needs Assistance Programme (BNAP). UNHCR will undertake core assistance activities targeting the most vulnerable, through functional literacy, enhancing communication skills in Myanmar language, vocational training and skills development. The objective of UNHCR's programme is to ensure their sustainable reintegration. An impact survey of both the ongoing functional literacy and vocational skill development training has been completed in March 2001 and the results will be used for programme development. These activities will not duplicate but complement the development activities under BNAP.

Monthly coordination meetings of all the partners operating in NRS will continue to be held at Maungdaw and Yangon levels respectively. In addition, sectoral thematic group meetings of the concerned agencies exist to foster linkage and complement/support each other's activities. At Yangon level, UNHCR, as part of the UN Country Team (UNCT), will continue to participate in the UNCT meetings and various UN Thematic Group meetings. UNHCR has been cooperating with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Myanmar in finalisation of the draft Basic Needs Assistance Programme (BNAP) NRS 2002-2004. This has been submitted for GOUM approval by UNDP in March 2001.

- *Overview of each beneficiary population (numbers, origin, demographic composition):* The primary beneficiaries will be the vulnerable groups among

some 235,000 returnees including some 1,000 planned to be repatriated during the year. Some 10% of the returnee families are estimated to fall under vulnerable category, 51% of the beneficiaries are female and 49% male. The local population, residing in the area of returnees, will benefit from the UNHCR's protection activities.

- *Policy issues:* UNHCR programme in Myanmar will implement the broader policy priorities on gender, women, children, refugees with special needs/elderly. In addition, UNHCR will support the establishment of BNAP, initiate transfer of activities to BNAP with a view to scaling down its assistance activities in NRS. Efforts will continue to negotiate access to returnee groups on the eastern border with Thailand.
- *Linkage to other countries within a defined "situation":* Close coordination between OCM Yangon and BO Dhaka in the repatriation of the Myanmar Muslims will continue. Monthly coordination meetings will be held between respective field/sub offices in Maungdaw and Cox Bazar.

Regarding the Myanmar refugees caseload in Thailand, frequent information sharing and consultations will continue to take place at Bangkok and Yangon level.

*Capacity and presence of Implementing partners:* In 2002, the number of UNHCR implementing agencies will be reduced from nine to seven viz., one UN agency (WFP), three INGOs (BAJ, CFSI and GRET), two national NGOs (MRCS and MMCWA) and one government agency (IND). All of these agencies have been assisting UNHCR in the NRS operation for several years and have fully demonstrated their understanding and capability to work with UNHCR's programme management system.

*Presence and role of other UN agencies and international organisations, and efforts made to coordinate activities for the implementation of protection and assistance activities for populations of concern:* UNHCR believes that the returnees in NRS have been, in most cases, successfully reintegrated through UNHCR's monitoring and assistance activities. Since 1999 UNHCR has taken the lead in actively facilitating the involvement of development oriented UN agencies such as FAO, UNOPS, UNICEF and UNESCO to ensure sustainability of the progress made and to provide a phasing down of UNHCR's assistance. A UNDP led Basic Needs Assistance Programme (BNAP) has been drawn up, replacing an earlier UN Integrated Programme (UN-IP) and submitted for the approval of GOUM in March 2001. UNHCR intends to convene a joint donor briefing with UNDP in mid-2001 to seek support for the establishment of BNAP by the end of 2001. UNHCR's presence in Northern Rakhine State has focussed on protection monitoring during the past three years with a significant reduction in assistance activities.

In 2002 the monitoring of the well being of the population of concern will be continued with some core assistance activities that aim at anchoring vulnerable sections of the population.

### ***Myanmar refugees in Thailand***

An estimated 120,000 refugees from Myanmar are currently located in camps along the border in Thailand. Conditions do not as yet exist for the mass repatriation of this group. However, some 10,500 persons have reportedly returned to Mon State in Myanmar. UNHCR will continue its effort to gain access to this group and monitor their situation.

### **(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives:**

#### **Caseload/theme #1**

<b>Number of Beneficiary Population/Theme:</b> 235,000 Muslim returnees from Bangladesh
<b>Main Goal(s):</b> Bring about the stabilisation of the Muslim population of Northern Rakhine State who faces political, social and economic hardships.

<b>Principal Objectives</b>	<b>Related Outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the repatriation satisfies the principles set forth by UNHCR and the international community.</li> <li>• Promote the reintegration and self-reliance of returnees and the host community in NRS with full respect of their basic human rights.</li> <li>• Enhance communication skills of the Muslim population in official Myanmar language.</li> <li>• Implement targeted skills training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to 1,000 returnees are assisted to repatriate voluntarily in safety and with dignity.</li> <li>• 235,000 persons fully absorbed into local communities.</li> <li>• Number of complaints of adverse public policy practices received, incidences of UNHCR interventions and remedial measures taken are reduced.</li> <li>• No large scale outflow of Muslim population.</li> <li>• Number of Muslim population who are literate and are able to conduct their routine day to day affairs with the officials.</li> <li>• Number of people trained and</li> </ul>

<p>programme for the vulnerable groups, and gender awareness among the NRS populace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a smooth transition from the UNHCR-led operation to the UNDP-led Basic Needs Assistance Programme (BNAP) in NRS</li> </ul>	<p>gainfully employed/self employment; increased women's participation in community activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A smoother scaling down of UNHCR operation.</li> <li>• GOUM approves the BNAP and resources mobilised to launch BNAP by start of the year.</li> </ul>

### Caseload/theme # 2

Name of Beneficiary Population: Myanmar returnees from border areas in Thailand	
Main Goal(s): Voluntary repatriation of Myanmar asylum seekers from border area in Thailand	
<b>Principal Objectives</b>	<b>Related Outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiate with the Government of Union of Myanmar to obtain access to the border areas in Mon State.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missions by UNHCR are facilitated by GOUM to the potential area of returns.</li> <li>• GOUM ensures the access and security to allow UNHCR's presence in Mon State</li> </ul>