



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: The Gambia

Planning Year: 2006

2006 COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN - THE GAMBIA

Part I: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

As noted in last year's Plan, The Gambia remains relatively politically stable despite the fact that it is located in the crisis-ridden West Africa sub-region. Economic difficulties caused by high inflation rates and the accompanying price rises on essential goods continue and are likely to remain during 2006. The treatment accorded to persons of concern is also humane. The political stability and peace, as well as the asylum climate, therefore make The Gambia an attractive country of asylum.

According to the US Department of State country Report on Human Rights observance in The Gambia, the Government generally respects the fundamental human rights of its citizenry. Problems however remain for the law enforcement authorities in effectively dealing with increased incidents of armed robberies. According to the UN Country Team Security Risk Management Report for 2004, certain attacks on media houses and journalists, thought to be politically motivated, as well as wide-spread arrests of public officials on corruption-related charges, pose a potential risk for political instability in the country. To address these concerns, the authorities have re-organised the Police command structure and deployed the Rapid Police Intervention Force in remote areas. One major problem the police face is the lack of logistics.

The latest peace Agreement over the Senegalese conflict must be viewed with some degree of skepticism, particularly from the perspective that it did not involve all the antagonists. The exclusionary nature of the latest peace Agreement means that it is susceptible to falter, just like the previous agreements. Beyond the bare Agreement, there is the pressing issue of de-mining in potential areas of return, itself seriously hampered by the absence of maps showing areas where the mines had been planted. Despite these hurdles, the Office will nonetheless install preparatory measures for the eventual return of Senegalese refugees. These measures include the conclusion of a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding for the Voluntary repatriation of the refugees; verification of the spontaneously settled refugee population in consultation with the Gambia Red Cross and Concern Universal; and if desired, the re-opening of the Transit Centre in Kwinella for use as a way station. The combined figure of the spontaneously settled and officially registered refugees is in the region of 6,700. If the peace deal lasts, then the Office projects that it would facilitate the return of at least 1,000 Senegalese refugees during the planning year (2006).

In respect of Liberian refugees, the Office would continue to facilitate their return, and hopefully, after the planned elections in October 2005, actively promote such returns during 2006.

Despite concerted information campaigns designed to encourage the majority of the Sierra Leonean refugees to return during 2004, the refugee response was extremely disappointing, with only 250 refugees opting to return by the end of 2004 leaving the majority of the refugees in The Gambia, who now number just over 6,000. Following the organisation-wide policy to cease all forms of material assistance in favour of

Sierra Leonean refugees effective 30 June 2004. It must however be noted that those still remaining in the country enjoy administrative and legal support from UNHCR, as well as exceptional humanitarian assistance in life-threatening situations. Sierra Leonean women refugees continue to be assisted with sanitary material.

In the camp, certain programmes will equally benefit needy host populations. This refers to health services and access to potable water as well as sensitisation programmes on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Government will be encouraged to adopt a municipal law on refugees as well as the establishment of the National Commission envisaged under the draft Bill. Similarly, Commission members would be trained in international refugee law and refugee management. Logistical support would also be extended to the Department of Immigration and the Commission.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

- Consistently with the Office's Global Strategic Objectives, the Office will continue with its efforts of building the capacity of the host authorities in the management of refugee affairs as well as encouraging the authorities to take full ownership of refugee matters. International protection goals will be supported and strengthened through advocacy for the adoption of a municipal law on refugees; provision of institutional support to the authorities; and training in international refugee law as well as management of refugee matters. These activities continue to be seen as critical because the receptive asylum policy suggests that when empowered, the host authorities can effectively manage refugee matters with little or no supervision from UNHCR, over time.
- In 2006 OCM Banjul will continue to work with the implementing partners in providing various opportunities towards durable solutions with a particular focus on voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Income-generating activities and vocational training will be strengthened to benefit more refugee women and girls and their families.
- Regarding the country's emergency preparedness, an emergency preparedness committee chaired by the Vice President's Office already exists. This is a broad-based committee with representation from various government departments and NGOs including UNHCR's implementing partner. The Office will assist in technical and logistical support where necessary to the national NGO implementing the Sub-project. Despite the various scenes of instability in the sub-region, it is thought that the probability of The Gambia becoming a major theatre of emergency operations (which would justify the institution of a UNHCR-specific contingency plan) is somewhat remote. This inference stems from the language barrier as well as the sheer distances involved particularly for refugees from the other English-speaking countries in the sub-region.
- Continuity in the implementation of the High Commissioner's commitments to refugee women in accessing identification cards, sanitary materials, inclusion in, and empowerment to, refugee leadership positions and training.

- Programmes designed to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through advocacy and sensitization of the refugees and implementing partners will be continued. This will be achieved through implementation of the national Protocol on SGBV as well as the Inter-Agency Task Force on Sexual Exploitation.
- In 2006 the Office will continue working with government, NGOs, UN Agencies and other development agents in the global approach for sound environmental protection and prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.