



East Asia and the Pacific

Australia
Cambodia
China
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Indonesia
Japan
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Malaysia
Mongolia
Myanmar
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Republic of Korea
Singapore
South Pacific
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Viet Nam

Recent developments

In February 2004, the Government of Myanmar granted UNHCR access to areas of potential large-scale voluntary repatriation from Thailand, namely Kayin State, Mon State and Tanintharyi Division. Access to these border areas will permit UNHCR to help to create conditions conducive to the voluntary return of some 140,000 refugees living in camps in Thailand. The Government has also asked UNHCR to include IDPs in its planning activities so as to provide for the reintegration of both refugees and IDPs returning to the same areas, if and when conditions permit. UNHCR responded favourably to this request after the Secretary-General had endorsed the Office's involvement. However, UNHCR believes that the time is not ripe for repatriation and that an internationally acceptable agreement between the Myanmar authorities and armed ethnic groups is a prerequisite to returns in safety and dignity.

In Indonesia, UNHCR signed an agreement to "Support the Comprehensive Strategy to find Durable Solutions for Former Refugees in West Timor". The strategy aims to close the remaining camps in West Timor and to find durable solutions either through the acquisition of Indonesian citizenship and thus local integration, or through



voluntary repatriation to Timor-Leste. In another part of Indonesia, the ongoing conflict between Indonesian security forces and the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement) has continued to contribute to a steady flow of asylum-seekers to Malaysia, with over 6,000 asylum-seekers having registered with the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur in the first half of 2004. The vast majority of asylum-seekers approaching UNHCR are from the Indonesian province of Aceh, in addition to ethnic Chin and Muslims from Myanmar. In Australia, UNHCR welcomed the increase in the number of refugee resettlement places from 4,000 to 6,000 and the decision to allow temporary protection visa holders to apply for permanent visas.

The recent influx of some 300 asylum-seekers from the central highlands of Viet Nam and reports of others hiding along Cambodia's eastern border has required UNHCR to supplement its activities in Phnom Penh. While the Office welcomes the renewed dialogue with the Government and the recent authorization to undertake missions to border regions, UNHCR remains concerned about allegations of arrests and *refoulement* of asylum-seekers before any proper determination of their case. Recognizing that not all are automatically in need of international protection, UNHCR has begun to

discuss with the Viet Nam authorities the modalities of safe return for those who either wish to repatriate or appear not to be in need of international protection.

Strategic objectives

UNHCR will continue to urge governments to respect the fundamental protection principles of *non-refoulement* and asylum, and to facilitate the sub-regional dialogue on refugee issues with States and regional organizations. Although many States in the region have reinforced restrictive immigration and asylum laws, UNHCR will continue to encourage governments to accede to the international conventions on refugees and statelessness, and to act on the basic principles

enshrined in these instruments. The Office will also focus on the pursuit of durable solutions for refugees, mainly through sustainable reintegration in returnee areas and resettlement. In addition, as the region is characterized by a number of volatile situations that may result in refugee movements, UNHCR will continue to reinforce its emergency preparedness and response capacities.

The Office maintains its commitment to support the Asia-Pacific Consultations in 2005 and to increase the focus on regional cooperation based on the recommendations contained in the Agenda for Protection. Within the framework of this initiative, the Office will focus on assisting governments to develop their capacities to address asylum issues. Offices in the region will continue to implement activities designed to prevent SGBV as well as facilitate reporting mechanisms, so that where incidents do take place, appropriate follow-up and counselling is undertaken. In line with its commitment to results-based management, the Office will also continue to collect and review baseline data on the level of protection and assistance provided in the region, with this process feeding directly into planning activities.

Operations

The programme in **Thailand** is described in a separate chapter. The following paragraphs summarize UNHCR's objectives and activities in the other countries in the region.

The UNHCR Regional Office in **Australia** also covers New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. The main activities in these countries will include advice and advocacy on behalf of asylum-seekers on protection-related issues, promoting refugee law and providing advisory and technical support to the respective authorities, as well as processing an increased number of resettlement applications for Australia (further to the recent increase in its offshore refugee quota). With the continuing fall in numbers of asylum-seekers arriving or being detained in the country, the Office will focus on monitoring asylum, protection and legislative developments throughout the region, advocate a strong protection perspective in policy reviews and engage in active dialogue with concerned governments and other actors. UNHCR will continue its public information activities to ensure high levels of public awareness of refugee rights and related issues and support the national committee, Australia for UNHCR, in its private sector fund raising activities.

In **Cambodia**, UNHCR will conduct refugee status determination (RSD) for the recently arrived groups of asylum-seekers and any new arrivals. Those recognized to be in need of international protection will be submitted for resettlement. Two additional sites have been identified in Phnom Penh, where UNHCR will provide basic assistance, pending solutions. As the numbers have grown significantly, the Office will focus its attention on the most vulnerable, in particular women and children. UNHCR will also continue to strengthen asylum and RSD procedures and will support Government efforts to establish a functioning national asylum system through which it will meet its 1951 Refugee Convention obligations.

In **China**, UNHCR remains actively engaged in discussions with the Chinese authorities on the plight of North Koreans. The Office has requested access to these individuals as well as China's

adherence to the principle of *non-refoulement*. The Office will pursue practical approaches with the Government to provide protection and facilitate durable solutions for North Koreans of concern to UNHCR. With regard to Vietnamese refugees who sought asylum in China during the 1980s, UNHCR will continue to advocate access to naturalization. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), UNHCR will continue to conduct RSD and pursue durable solutions. The Office will further pursue accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention in **Mongolia** and the Hong Kong SAR. In Macao, UNHCR will focus on building the capacity of the local authorities to address asylum-related issues.

There will be four main priorities for the UNHCR office in **Indonesia**. Firstly, it will significantly contribute to the integration of some 16,000 former East Timorese refugees in West Timor, by supporting, *inter alia*, projects aimed at building or improving settlement sites; increasing the capacity of both the ex-refugees and the host community to combat food insecurity; and improving access to education and health. Secondly, the Office will ensure that asylum-seekers have access to a fair and efficient refugee status determination process, while durable solutions are found for recognized refugees. Thirdly, the Office will intensify its efforts to promote accession to the refugee instruments, capitalizing on the Indonesian National Plan of Action on Human Rights, adopted by Presidential Decree on 11 May 2004. The Plan lists the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol among the international treaties to which Indonesia aims to accede between 2004 and 2009. Finally, the Jakarta regional office will provide oversight and guidance to the UNHCR offices in Malaysia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste. It is anticipated that by the end of 2004 the separated children programme which UNHCR has been leading since late 1999 will be handed over to authorities and local NGOs in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. In mid-2004 the number of separated children cases stood at 151 (down from almost 4,400 in 1999).

In **Japan** and the **Republic of Korea** UNHCR will focus on supporting efforts to contribute to the strengthening of national asylum systems and provide technical support to improve protection of refugees as well as public outreach to broaden support and funding for UNHCR.



Myanmar: Classes on micro-credit for young ladies to help them become self-sufficient. UNHCR / C. Schwetz

The current refugee situation in **Malaysia** comprises important social, humanitarian and public health components, which require concerted action on the part of all stakeholders. The Office will continue to call for unhindered access to UNHCR for all asylum-seekers, and for protection of refugees pending durable solutions, particularly those in detention or facing deportation. The status quo, whereby UNHCR attempts to manage the refugee situation on its own without adequate resources or the necessary infrastructure, needs to be critically re-examined, with a view to wider participation from different elements of society. In line with the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women, particular attention will be paid to a reduction in the level of vulnerability of women, and links will be established with national women's NGOs. The Office's principal aim in Malaysia is therefore to identify and work out practical and solutions-oriented arrangements for all groups of concern to UNHCR in cooperation with the Malaysian Government and other stakeholders. In particular, UNHCR envisages group-based, temporary local solutions in respect of the Muslim population from Myanmar and persons of concern from the Indonesian Province of Aceh. Such arrangements would be required only until such a time as conditions in their respective countries of origin have improved sufficiently to enable safe and dignified return home on a voluntary basis. Resettlement solutions in third countries are foreseen for all other persons found to be in urgent need of international protection and who have no close links to Malaysia.

In **Myanmar**, UNHCR will continue the organized repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh in conjunction with other efforts to support durable solutions in the region, and will reinforce field monitoring activities for the most vulnerable groups among new returnees and the host population. The constructive dialogue established with the Myanmar authorities on issues of concern affecting the sustainable reintegration of returnees will be strengthened through high level discussions. Capacity-building initiatives launched in 2003 and 2004 will be expanded (such as workshops on human rights and refugee law for government officials). Assistance interventions will focus on Myanmar language training for adults, population registration efforts, income generating assistance and initiatives to empower women and girls. The objective of assistance activities will be to develop the self-help capacity of the most vulnerable individuals and promote basic social and economic rights. Community-based activities will be aimed at increasing communication and interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, which is essential for sustainable returnee reintegration. UNHCR will remain committed to facilitating the involvement of new agencies in returnee assistance and supporting the independent funding of these activities, to ensure the maintenance and consolidation of progress. This will also permit a continued reduction in UNHCR's funding needs.

In areas of origin of refugees on the Myanmar-Thailand border, UNHCR will further expand the roving presence initiated in 2004. Assessment visits will

continue to be undertaken to townships of potential return in Kayin State, Mon State and Tanintharyi Division. The Office will design and implement basic rehabilitation projects such as the upgrading of schools and rural health sub-centres, drilling of wells and repair of rural infrastructure (bridges, culverts, access paths) in the most remote and needy villages. These activities will help gradually to build the capacity of local communities to receive returnees, should conditions become conducive to the safe and dignified return of refugees and other displaced persons.

In **Papua New Guinea**, where UNHCR reopened its office in 2003, the focus will continue to be on ensuring that protection is provided to refugees from the Indonesian province of West Papua and from beyond the region. Capacity-building activities with the authorities will focus on reception of asylum-seekers and RSD. Following the successful registration and residency permit initiative in 2003, UNHCR will provide targeted assistance to the East Awin relocation site in the Western Province to facilitate the local integration of another 250 refugees transferred from Vanimo. The Office will maintain assistance to the Government to update contingency plans for potential refugee influxes and support the promulgation of domestic asylum legislation.

In the **Philippines**, UNHCR will continue to promote the passage of domestic legislation and regulations on standards for the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers, including procedural standards for the National Refugee Status Determination Unit and inter-agency guidelines relating to the assistance and protection of refugees. The attainment of durable solutions for refugees will be also pursued (primarily naturalization and permanent residence). UNHCR will enhance the network of institutions providing legal and psychosocial services to refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR will also advocate the incorporation of refugee law into the academic curriculum of law schools.

In **Singapore**, the main objective will be to ensure that asylum-seekers are not rejected at the border and that they enjoy basic human rights and have access to UNHCR, so that the Office can process their claims and seek durable solutions for those found to be refugees.

With the shift away from emergency operations in **Timor-Leste**, UNHCR has been able to give greater attention to capacity building relating to refugee recognition and durable solutions for the limited number of asylum-seekers arriving from beyond the sub-region. In 2005, UNHCR plans to further reduce resources devoted to supporting return of the residual caseload of former refugees in West Timor. However, it will maintain sufficient capacity to ensure that any remaining individuals who wish to return to their places of origin will have the support necessary to do so in safety and dignity. Of the thousands of children separated from their immediate relatives as a result of conflict, fewer than 100 will remain with solutions still pending in 2005. Finding solutions for children separated from their immediate relatives will remain a priority for the Office, which is assisting the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity to improve capacity to assume responsibility for the few remaining cases.

In **Viet Nam**, UNHCR will assist in the local integration of Cambodian refugees being granted Vietnamese citizenship, through micro-projects targeting the most vulnerable persons. The Office will also engage the Government in identifying solutions to the displacement of ethnic minorities to Cambodia.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Australia and New Zealand	1,097,911
Cambodia	808,006
China	4,427,459
Indonesia	2,829,528
Japan	2,805,358
Malaysia	2,573,930
Mongolia	121,353
Myanmar	4,181,974
Papua New Guinea	497,207
Philippines	204,873
Republic of Korea	496,592
Singapore	58,005
Thailand	6,761,354
Timor Leste	602,599
Viet Nam	458,283
Regional activities ¹	215,000
Total	28,139,433

¹Includes general protection activities, dissemination of refugee law, transport and repatriation activities of Indochinese and scholarships for refugee students in East Asia and the Pacific.