

Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa Executive Committee 2009

Part A: Major developments

- In 2009, UNHCR continued to drive forward and consolidate durable solutions for refugees, in those areas of the African continent where peace and stability prevailed. A number of voluntary repatriation operations, which had progressed at steady paces in previous years, have slowed down, such as those to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Southern Sudan, or come to an end (Liberia and Togo). Simultaneously, long-term local integration programmes have begun to bear fruit, with increasing numbers of refugees obtaining permanent residence permits and alternative legal status, notably Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in West Africa and Burundians in the United Republic of Tanzania.
- At the same time, UNHCR maintained its capacity to respond to new and continuing emergencies in several countries. Tensions remained high in the Central Africa Republic (CAR), Chad and Sudan's Darfur region. The prolonged military operations against rebels in the eastern DRC, escalating violence in Somalia as well as the resurfacing of strife in Southern Sudan resulted in large numbers of people being displaced internally, or becoming refugees in surrounding countries.
- In Chad, confrontations along the eastern border between government troops and rebels increased tension within the country and with neighbouring Sudan. Civilians were exposed to forced recruitment and violence perpetrated by armed groups; humanitarian workers have not been spared either. Although the presence of the UN peacekeeping force represented a deterrent, a political solution is critically needed.
- Following the agreement between the Governments of the DRC and Rwanda to dislodge the Rwandan rebels in the South and North Kivu Provinces, the conflict in eastern DRC escalated with dramatic consequences for civilians. Since the launch of the military campaigns in 2009, around 1.5 million people were repeatedly displaced in the two provinces. In addition, recent activities by the Lord's Resistance Army in Province Orientale forced at least 40,000 people to flee their villages and seek refuge in various districts of the Province, while some 20,000 fled across the border to Southern Sudan and Uganda.
- The situation in Somalia has continued to deteriorate. Attacks and threats against aid workers, including UN staff, further restricted humanitarian access to increasing numbers of people in need of basic assistance. Since fighting resumed in May 2009, around 260,000 Somalis have fled from the capital, many trying to find refuge in neighbouring countries. Kenya received 45,000 new arrivals, stretching capacities and resources for reception and assistance in the existing camps far beyond their limits. Negotiations with the Kenyan Government and host communities for the allocation of land to establish a new facility in Dadaab have proceeded in parallel with the relocation of some refugees from congested camps and the implementation of projects in support of host communities. UNHCR is also working with the Government to develop security measures that will address legitimate national security concerns while also upholding the institution of asylum.
- The Government of Sudan and the authorities of Southern Sudan accepted the ruling of the International Court of Justice on the boundaries in the disputed, oil-rich area of Abyei. This significantly eased tensions which, it had been feared, could have caused displacements. However, inter-communal disputes over scarce resources in Southern Sudan became violent, with the loss of more than 1,000 civilians and the displacement of thousands more. Limited

access to persons of concern due to extremely volatile security conditions affected operations in Sudan's Darfur region, where civilians, including humanitarian workers, continue to be exposed to violence and intimidation by various militias.

- Following the successful piloting of the Global Needs Assessment (GNA) in five countries in Africa in 2009, plans for 2010 for all operations in Africa have been prepared using *Focus*, the new results-based management software, on the basis of comprehensive needs assessments. Notwithstanding the technical challenges that emerged during the planning process with the use of *Focus*, this marks a major achievement in the change management process under way in UNHCR.

Part B: Progress on implementation of UNHCR's global strategic objectives

Redouble the search for durable solutions

- In recent times, voluntary repatriation has been the most accessible solution for refugees in Africa, and hundreds of thousands have gone home. After years during which repatriation brought home high numbers of refugees, movements have slowed down in 2009 for a number of different reasons, including concerns over stability and reintegration opportunities in countries of origin. Such is the case, for example, of Burundians who had returned from the United Republic of Tanzania in high numbers during 2008 (67,000 at the end of August of that year). In the same period in 2009, the rates decreased with only 23,000 refugees returning home, including 15,000 from the old Tanzanian settlements (the so-called "1972 caseload").
- Similarly, repatriation to Southern Sudan has dropped in 2009, with some 32,000 having returned by the end of August compared to 59,000 during the same period in 2008. The decline in return figures is due in part to the growing tensions in Southern Sudan, along with few reintegration opportunities and diminishing interest among Sudanese refugees, following years of steady, organized and spontaneous movements.
- In the DRC, repatriation from the United Republic of Tanzania to the eastern province of South Kivu stopped due to the continuous fighting between the army and Rwandan rebel groups. Meanwhile, as a result of the offensive against the FDLR (Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda) and other armed elements, around 9,000 Rwandan refugees have returned to their country. A renewed interest in return among Congolese refugees in Zambia saw the movement of nearly 8,700 persons to the southern province of Katanga in the second quarter of the year. By the end of 2009, the total number of returnees may possibly exceed last year's (9,700).
- More recently, modalities for the repatriation of Rwandan refugees from Kenya have been defined in the context of the second meeting of the Tripartite Commission including UNHCR and the Governments of Kenya and Rwanda. UNHCR is reviewing comprehensively the continuing need for protection among various groups of Rwandan refugees to ascertain whether the cessation clauses are or are not applicable. In the same vein, as peace is consolidated in Angola and Liberia and durable solutions are progressively achieved, UNHCR is considering the situation of refugees from these countries.
- Following a reinvigorated sensitization campaign among Liberian refugees, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone, some 700 people have returned by the end of August 2009. The organized voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees has virtually concluded, but UNHCR remains ready to assist on an individual basis those who may still express the intention to return to their country.

- Initiatives for local integration are moving ahead in 2009. Shelter, livelihood, income generation and community development programmes have been implemented in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the authorities, to facilitate the local integration of refugees. At the same time, UNHCR has assisted refugees to obtain alternative legal status and residency rights, including by contributing toward fees for documentation such as residence, work permits, and naturalization papers. UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Sierra Leone to facilitate the issuance of passports to Sierra Leonean nationals who opted for local integration in the various West African countries. Over 4,500 passports have so far been requested of which some 4,000 are ready to be distributed in the Gambia, Liberia, and Nigeria alone. In Guinea, authorities released land ownership papers to integrating refugees. In the United Republic of Tanzania, at the end of the naturalization process, a first group of 3,500 Burundians were granted Tanzanian citizenship.
- UNHCR has endeavoured to increase resettlement referrals from Africa as part of its durable solutions strategy. These efforts have resulted in a significant increase in the number of referrals, which totalled more than 13,700 at the end of July (nearly twice last year's level). As in previous years, the majority of referrals are from the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes sub-regions, particularly Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The DRC and Somalia are the countries of origin of the vast majority of the refugees referred for resettlement.

Establish effective partnerships and frameworks for action responding to the challenges of internal displacement, mixed-migration and the gap between relief and development

- New emphasis was placed on partnership with regional and sub-regional organizations in an effort to garner support for durable solutions strategies in Africa. In the second quarter of 2009, UNHCR entered into discussion with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) on projects related to the social and economic integration of refugees and the repatriation of Liberian refugees to be implemented under the ECOWAS Peace and Development Project (PADEP), a multifaceted, global peacebuilding programme related to conflict prevention. The programme is designed to supplement traditional sectoral interventions to facilitate sustainable recovery and reconstruction in post-conflict situations. It is funded by the Peace Fund, which is maintained by contributions from the AfDB.
- Through various UN peacebuilding initiatives in the region, in particular in Burundi, CAR, and Liberia, UNHCR has been able to strategically engage peace and security and development actors, including governments, in creating durable solutions for refugee and displacement situations. In Burundi, UNHCR continues to assist the Government to resolve land and property matters through the National Commission, which has received funding from the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). The Liberian Government has also recently requested UNHCR to implement three new projects, in addition to two projects which had already begun in 2008, designed to strengthen the rule of law, facilitate reconciliation and empower local communities. UNHCR also contributed to the preparation of the Integrated Strategic Peacebuilding Framework recently adopted in CAR. In DRC, a country which was recently declared eligible for support from the PBF, UNHCR is participating in the preparation of a Priority Plan, contributing insights into conflict analysis, close relationships with affected communities, and operational capacity, including the implementation of projects targeting conflict factors such as equality and representation.
- IDP programmes are being progressively mainstreamed into UNHCR operations in Africa. UNHCR is building upon existing coordination mechanisms to increase the humanitarian response capacity in situations where access is seriously threatened such as in CAR, eastern Chad, DRC, Somalia and the Darfur region of Sudan.

- UNHCR intensified cooperation with concerned agencies and governments to address the problems related to mixed migratory flows in the Gulf of Aden. A first meeting of Mixed Migration Task Forces from Djibouti, Somalia (*Puntland* and *Somaliland*), and Yemen was held in mid-July 2009 involving the International Organization for Migration, the Danish Refugee Council and representatives of the various Governments. The aim of the meeting was to share information on refugee protection and mixed migration in the Gulf of Aden and to develop strategies to address protection concerns. In parallel with this initiative, UNHCR has been stepping up efforts to enter into cooperation with the naval forces operating in the Gulf of Aden. Initial discussions with the European Union maritime operation (EU NAVFOR) have taken place and led to agreement that standard operating procedures for rescue-at-sea/interception operations would be worked out to ensure the safe disembarkation of persons seeking asylum and their access to the asylum procedure.

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