

# Respecting Refugees...

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has helped approximately 50 million refugees to begin their lives afresh since it was established on 14 December, 1950.

To commemorate five decades of refugee work, but even more importantly as a mark of respect to refugees themselves—for the hardships they have endured and the resilience they have shown in rebuilding their shattered lives—a series of events has been scheduled worldwide.

The program will begin 14 December, 2000, the anniversary of the agency's founding, with a televised public performance in Geneva by prominent artists who were once themselves refugees, a news conference, a public awareness campaign stressing the positive impact refugees make to their communities and the launch of a Refugee Education Trust which, it is hoped, will become the permanent legacy of the commemoration.

The great majority of refugees are women and children, but in the chaos of war, flight and exile young people are often deprived, sometimes for years, of access to schooling. The fund will try to address this problem at the post-primary level.

There will be dozens of other exhibitions, festivals, the issue of special postage stamps, books, publications and a special website ([www.UNHCR-50.org](http://www.UNHCR-50.org)) has been established by the UNHCR-50 Foundation.

A Gallery of Prominent Refugees will be launched to underline the contributions refugees have made to society at large for the last several centuries, but most particularly in the last few decades.

The U.N. General Assembly is also expected to approve 20 June, 2001 as the first ever World Refugee Day. A month later July 28, 2001 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention when governments will be urged to respect their obligations towards asylum seekers and refugees.



Education is vitally important for millions of refugee children.

UNHCR / B. NEELEMAN

## 'We were there'

This 30-minute video looks back on 50 years of refugee work, tracing the evolution of UNHCR from its modest beginnings in Geneva and its temporary mandate to today's worldwide organization which operates in 120 countries and helps more than 22 million people. In addition to footage documenting the spread and increasing intensity of refugee crises, the video includes interviews with former Guatemalan refugee and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu and such leading humanitarian figures as Bernard Kouchner, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Olara Otunnu and High Commissioner Sadako Ogata.

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# REFUGEES

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**Faces of exile.**

Fifty years ago the world needed a new organization to help the remaining victims of World War II. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established with a limited three-year mandate to help these civilians and then, hopefully, go out of business.

That early, mainly European crisis, did not go away, but instead exploded into today's truly global

emergency.

This special issue of REFUGEES explores five decades of refugee life and UNHCR's role in text, pictures, cartoons, quotes and an interview with High Commissioner Sadako Ogata who leaves office at the end of the year 2000.

This refugee world has often been heartbreaking, sometimes rewarding and inspiring and always turbulent.

**COVER:** Original painting of refugees by **Yuroz**.

**HEADLINES:** From historical newspaper collection of **Josep Bosch** ([josep.bosch@itu.int](mailto:josep.bosch@itu.int)).



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**Refuge has a value beyo**



The ruins of Dresden, Germany, at the end of World War II.

**nd price.  
It is a matter of life itself.**

*-Anonymous.*

## ► Baggage:

Refugees often have time to collect only a few possessions before fleeing. Then, whether in Africa or Asia, they find a series of simple or ingenious ways to transport them.



UNHCR / L. TAYLOR



UNHCR / P. MOUNTZIS

by Ray Wilkinson

It was not an auspicious start for the new organization. “I found three empty rooms in the Palais des Nations and I had to start from scratch” with a staff of 33 people, no field offices and a miniscule annual budget of \$300,000, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart remembered. Money was so tight, a gold ingot which had been ‘inherited’ was sold for \$14,000 to help keep the agency afloat.

Governments, split between the western democracies and a Soviet-dominated communist bloc, had spent months haggling over the makeup and terms of reference for the fledgling organization, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. But both sides were determined on at least one common goal—to maintain a tight political and financial rein on the agency as Goedhart, the new refugee czar or High Commissioner, and his small team began their task of helping around one million mainly European civilians who were still homeless five years after the end of World War II.

No one expected the job to be a long one when UNHCR opened its doors for business on January 1, 1951. For a brief shining

moment in time the world was awash in idealism. The United Nations had been established five years earlier with a pledge to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.”

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed, followed a year later by the fourth of the Geneva Conventions on the protection of civilians caught up in conflict. They were harbingers of a virtual blizzard of other humanitarian conventions, laws and proclamations including the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. In such a heady atmosphere, UNHCR was given a three-year mandate to complete its work and then dissolve itself, the global refugee crisis, it was hoped, resolved.

The diplomatic optimists, however, had apparently forgotten history in the search

for a quick fix. People have been persecuted and expelled from the moment they came together to form communities. Encouragingly, the tradition of offering sanctuary began at almost the same time. Ancient religious texts refer repeatedly to asylum—a word of Greek origin meaning “without capture, without violation, without devastation.” Theseus, King of Athens, counseled Oedipus, the King of Thebes: “Like you, I well remember that I grew up in the house of others and in a foreign land



UNHCR / L. TAYLOR



UNHCR / B. PRESS

I faced deadly dangers. So that, whoever asks my hospitality as you do now, I would not know how to turn away.”

When individual nations began to develop an international conscience in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tradition of helping uprooted people also went global and a succession of agencies was created. In 1921, the League of Nations, forerunner of the United Nations, appointed Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen as its High Commissioner to help 800,000 mainly Russian refugees. During the chaos and aftermath of World War II, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) assisted seven million people, both refugees and other groups, to ‘repatriate’ to their homes.

A third group, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was created in 1946, but took a different direction to its UNRRA predecessor. Instead of repatriating the majority of civilians, the IRO resettled more than one million refugees in new countries around the world. The emphasis on either ‘resettlement’ or ‘repatriation’ would fluctuate in the following decades, depending on the particular crisis and the political profile of the refugees themselves.

By the end of the century traditional host nations had taken fright as the number of uprooted people climbed inexorably, and ‘voluntary repatriation’ rather than resettlement became the preferred solution in the great majority of cases.

UNHCR’s first ‘crisis’ was not over refugees but money. Fridtjof Nansen had harangued the League of Nations over its parsimony: “Let us have no hypocrisy,” he said. “Governments cannot rake up that sum (needed to help the Russian refugees) which is merely half of what it costs to build one battleship.” Three decades later, UNHCR’s Goedhart, a former journalist and Dutch anti-Nazi resistance fighter, echoed Nansen’s frustration as he lobbied for a small emergency fund: “What does protection mean for a man who dies of hunger?” he asked. “Passports are necessary, but hunger can’t be stilled with them.” He worried that because of the lack of money he would simply end up ‘administering misery.’

**UNHCR received a contribution from an anonymous donor in Marseille. The amount—four stamps of 25 centimes or one French franc. An enclosed letter**

**read: “Sir, forgive the small gift, I cannot do more. I am very old (89) without family and without help.”**

*—Help often came from the most unlikely, and touching, of sources.*

In the event, the private Ford Foundation gave UNHCR its first major cash injection of \$3.1 million, helping it to weather that crisis. It set the stage for a 50-year odyssey during which the organization and the entire refugee world changed beyond recognition.

The refugee contagion spread from Europe to Africa in the 1960s, as colonial empires crumbled. A decade later, Asia was engulfed. Superpower cold war maneuverings spawned their own refugee crises in the 1980s. By the end of the century the trail of misery had come full circle, back through Africa and to Europe where it had all begun and where the Balkans exploded into flames and violence in the 1990s.

The number of uprooted people climbed steadily during the century’s middle decades, from the original one million ‘of concern’ to UNHCR, to eight million by

## ►► Transport:

Most refugees flee to safety on foot. Others take tractors, cars, trucks, planes and in one famous case in Tanzania, they used the vessel *Liemba*, a former World War I German gunboat, which later played a starring role in the Hollywood classic movie “*African Queen*” starring Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn.



UNHCR / P. MOUMTZIS



UNHCR / M. KOBAYASHI

the start of the 1980s and then to a peak of more than 27 million in 1995. By that time the disenfranchised included not only refugees but other categories of people not directly covered by the organization's mandate—persons displaced within their own country, later to be tagged with the clumsy bureaucratic term of internally displaced persons (IDPs), ‘returnees’ going home and asylum seekers.

People fled wars and persecution in a variety of ways—on foot, by canoe, car, truck or aircraft—alone, with families, or increasingly as part of a mass exodus. Ten million civilians escaped to India in 1971 from the death throes of East Pakistan (which subsequently became Bangladesh) in the largest single human displacement in modern history.

Three million mainly ‘boat people’ left Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Viet Nam war and six million Afghans fled their homeland. More than one million Rwandans crossed into Zaire in only three days in 1994. In the early and mid-1990s, UNHCR cared for more than four million people in the Balkan region. A single refugee camp could house hundreds of thousands of people, sometimes becoming the largest ‘city’ in a particular country.

**In 1981, when 452 boats arrived in Thailand carrying 15,479 refugees, UNHCR's statistics were a study of horror: 349 boats had been attacked an average of three times each; 578 women were raped, 228 women were abducted, and 881 people were dead or missing.**

—A report detailing the type of regular abuse Indochinese boat people endured trying to escape.

UNHCR's first budget of \$300,000 swelled to a record \$1.4 billion in 1996 as it grappled with the global crisis. The original group of 34 staff members climbed to more than 5,000 operating in 120 countries. They included not only lawyers helping protect the legal rights of refugees but, as operations became more complex, logistic experts, water and building engineers, psychologists, nutritionists, de-mining specialists, academics, environmentalists, journalists, mapping and satellite imagery experts, air traffic controllers and others. The number of humanitarian agencies, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also proliferated. In the 1990s it became a common sight to see literally hundreds of groups ranging from

religious fundamentalists to specialist organizations of neurosurgeons setting up shop in some of the remotest spots on earth.

Communication and transportation revolutionized the ‘refugee business.’ In the 1960s one African sent a message for help to the High Commissioner in a most unorthodox way, writing “I think you will be pleased to hear me talking to you through this piece of (tree) leaf.” The leaf reached Geneva by regular mail. By the late 1990s, Kosovar refugees were using free satellite phones to call relatives.

If the means of flight were chaotic and primitive throughout the five decades, operations to help refugees became sophisticated, high-tech affairs. In 1973 UNHCR began what has been described as the largest airlift of civilians ever organized, carrying tens of thousands of victims of the war in Pakistan back to their homes via an air bridge which crisscrossed the Indian subcontinent.

If that was the ‘largest’ humanitarian airlift, another UNHCR operation to feed the people of the besieged Bosnian capital of Sarajevo through four harsh winters, became the ‘longest’ humanitarian air bridge in history, lasting 1,279 days.



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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) even launched the first, and to date, only 'humanitarian' air war in history with a 78-day blitzkrieg against Serbian forces in the spring of 1999 to try to protect ethnic Albanians in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

**We were forced to lie down in the snow with our hands behind our heads and we were beaten. We were then ordered up a hillside and when we panicked and started running the police opened fire. Some were shot down, others were executed where they lay.**  
*—A survivor of one atrocity in Kosovo.*

In all of its operations, UNHCR helped roughly 50 million people to restart their lives, either by assisting them to return to their original homes or resettling them in new countries. In 1954, the organization won the first of two Nobel Peace Prizes by trying to create what High Commissioner Goedhart at the time described as a global environment "in which no people of any country, in fact no group of people of any



kind, live in fear and need." That hope was not realized. Twenty-five years later, UNHCR was honored with a second Peace Prize which then High Commissioner Poul Hartling called a "statement to the world's refugees that you are not forgotten."

In all this turbulence and change, a few fundamentals did remain the same—especially the appalling suffering and hardship of the people forced to flee their homes, and also their fortitude and resilience in forging new lives all over again.

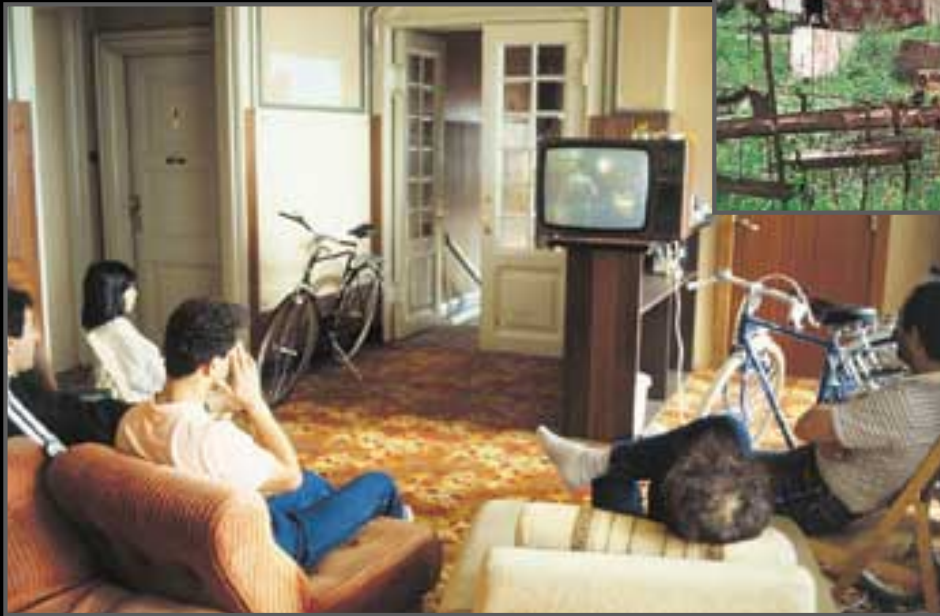
Unknown numbers of women were raped and entire boatloads of people were murdered in the worst act of sustained piracy in modern times during the exodus from Southeast Asia. After as many as one

million persons were massacred in Rwanda's genocide in 1994, tens of thousands of other Rwandan refugees perished from cholera and other diseases, often in front of live television cameras, in the camps of Kivu in central Africa. More than seven thousand men and boys were executed in the U.N. 'safe haven' of Srebrenica in 1995 in the worst massacre of its kind in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Virtually any refugee, anywhere, could relate a personal horror story.



► **Housing:**

*Accommodation can be one of extremes. Asylum seekers in Denmark enjoy the luxury of apartments and television and in Tbilisi, Georgia, have taken over a downtown hotel. Elsewhere, people have lived in converted containers, tent cities and pipes.*



UNHCR / FRANCIS J. DEAN



**Uccisi a colpi di machete due francesi dell'ONU nel Congo**

*Stavano visitando un campo di profughi a Kalongo, nella provincia del Kivu, quando sono stati aggrediti e assassinati - Tachamba chiede aiuto al Congo...*



**François Preziosi.**

Millions of people did successfully rebuild their lives, often quietly and without fanfare. Famous people became refugees. Others became famous after they had fled. The list of luminaries is long: Frederic Chopin, Lenin, Marlene Dietrich, Madeleine Albright, Henry Kissinger. In the 1930s as his works were being burned in public squares, Sigmund Freud commented acidly, "What progress. In the Middle

ages they would have burnt me. Today, they only burn my books."

Years later, Albert Einstein, who fled Nazi Germany to settle at Princeton University in the United States wrote: "I am almost ashamed to be living in such peace while all the rest struggle and suffer. But after all, it is still the best to concern oneself with eternal, for from them alone flows the spirit that can restore peace and serenity to the world of humans."

The UNHCR statute, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December, 1950, described the new organization as one 'of an entirely non-political character.' It struggled to maintain this neutrality and 'humanitarian and social' character for the next 50 years, but of course the very core of its work was highly political. The great majority of refugees were created by political decisions and miscalculations which often led to war and mass exodus. The agency's very birth came after harsh debate on a vote of 36-5 with 11

abstentions, split clearly between the western-led democracies and the Soviet-dominated countries. After that, communist nations simply ignored the organization for years.

States tried to influence UNHCR's operational decisions, either overtly or covertly, by bluntly wielding the most powerful weapon of all, money, as an extension of foreign policy. At the height of the Afghan exodus, Iran sheltered 3.2 million refugees, becoming the world's most generous refugee host. Pro-western Pakistan looked after 2.9 million people. In a reflection of big power realities, the West spent vast sums of assistance in the latter country and virtually nothing in Iran. In 1999, there was outrage in many humanitarian groups at the huge sums lavished on the Kosovar refugees, who after all were in Europe, compared with far smaller budgets for Africa where conditions had been extremely harsh for refugees and increasingly difficult for the people trying to help them.

**People were hiding in the bushes; they were armed with submachine guns, machetes and Molotov cocktails. Preziosi's and Plicque's car**



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN



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**was stopped and encircled by a crowd of Congolese with automatic guns and Tutsi refugees with spears and machetes. Two searched Plicque and Preziosi. The crowd started hitting them with all kinds of arms, in particular with machetes. Plicque shouted, “The only reason we are here is to help you.”**

*—A UNHCR cable describing the murder of staff member François Preziosi and a U.N. colleague in the Congo in 1963, the first UNHCR official killed while on duty.*

Two million people were uprooted during the 1980s in Central America in a series of wars which pitted American-backed right-wing governments against left-wing insurgents. The fate of individual refugees was determined, ironically, by the political leaning of the governments they were fleeing from. Honduras welcomed Nicaraguans escaping a newly installed leftist government in Managua and actively encouraged Contra guerrilla operations from the safety of refugee camps against that regime. Salvadorans escaping a right-wing clique received a much frostier reception. Power politics dominated the

humanitarian agenda, and not for the first or last time advocates criticized UNHCR for its seeming inability to protect all of the people in a given situation.

Sadrudin Aga Khan was the longest serving High Commissioner (1966-77) and in a recent interview recalled his constant battle to ‘de-politicize’ UNHCR by broadening the makeup of its workforce, improving still frosty relations with east-bloc countries and keeping partisan NGOs in line.

“When I took over, UNHCR was a western club with mostly western personnel. Some people wanted to keep the organization as their private preserve,” he said. “I began recruiting new people but everybody said ‘Oh you’re going to have a lot of infiltration. The KGB will be working in Geneva.’ I said: Who cares? The office is an open book. We’ve got nothing to hide. I’m delighted if some KGB fellow sends reports back to Moscow on what UNHCR is doing. That’s the best way to show them we are non-political.”



Some non-governmental organizations were also operating in a ‘cold war mode’ with their own very specific agendas, according to Sadrudin Aga Khan and he added: “I was absolutely intransigent on one point. We could not operate with partners who could be distributing food on the one hand and the Bible on the other. This was simply unacceptable.”



UNHCR / E. DABNING



UNHCR / S. FOA

► **Food:** *How do millions of refugees worldwide get their food? In the Balkans, items were shipped to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo in a huge airlift or in heavily defended road convoys. In Afghanistan, it sometimes reached refugees on small rafts. But whether in Kosovo or Mozambique, supplies were welcomed.*



UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES

It was always a difficult struggle and became more so in the waning years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as politics, war and saving lives became more closely entwined than ever and capitals increasingly sheltered behind relief work as a substitute for taking difficult political or military decisions.

Some positive developments did emerge from this quagmire and refugee work occasionally encouraged political breakthroughs. In the aftermath of the war in Viet Nam, the Americans and Vietnamese secretly held some of their first substantive discussions under the umbrella of international talks on the fate of Southeast Asia's boat people.

More often, however, the impact of politics on humanitarian work was deeply negative. Mrs. Sadako Ogata, UNHCR High Commissioner throughout the last decade, described many of the agency's operations in the former Yugoslavia as a 'fig leaf' for international inaction. At the same time in the mid 1990s, a continent away in Africa's Great Lakes region, she decried the deadly mix of war, politics and refugees: "Never before has my office found its humanitarian concerns in the midst of such a lethal quagmire of political and security interests," she said.

'Passing the buck' was not new. It was also a charge made at the time of UNHCR's first major emergency. In many ways, Hungary was a textbook refugee crisis, replete with easily identified 'good guys' and 'bad guys' and a relatively happy ending for many of the victims and the agencies which participated.

**They gathered the last of their money, the last of their courage and bought directions from a hunchbacked smuggler who spoke of secret byways the Russians had not yet discovered. Soldiers marched by, dogs barked, flares lit the night. Then a voice cried out, the words paralyzing him with fear. 'Who is there?' Now at the limits of his courage, the boy finally answered. 'Where are we?' 'Austria' came the reply.**  
*—An account of the escape of one youth from Hungary. He*

*later became Andrew Grove, head of Intel, one of the world's most influential corporations.*

When Russian tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution in 1956, 180,000 people fled to Austria and another 20,000 to Yugoslavia. An appalled western world made hasty arrangements to help the Hungarians either on the immediate borders or by welcoming them to their own countries. The United States mobilized an air and naval task force within weeks to move thousands of people to North America.

This 'feel good' fac-





UNHCR / R. COLVILLE



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

tor played nicely in newspaper headlines and undoubtedly helped tens of thousands of people to begin new lives. But critics also said it masked the West's refusal to make hard political or military choices to confront Moscow.

Hungary was a defining moment for UNHCR. Many states were unconvinced until then about its long-term usefulness, but the agency acquitted itself well and cemented its international credentials in both western and eastern capitals. Over the objections of some of its own staff who were wary of extending assistance to a communist country, UNHCR worked closely with Yugoslavia during the emergency in helping the Hungarians who arrived there. This opened doors to other communist capitals for the first time, facilitated later family reunions and the return of people who wanted to go home. A new and more flexible emergency fund was also established, easing the agency's constant financial headache.

The 1951 Refugee Convention was narrow in scope. It allowed states to limit their obligations to European refugees, but significantly did not cover people uprooted from their homes after 1 January, 1951. This may have excluded the Hungarians. But

Auguste R. Lindt, the new High Commissioner, remembered asking his chief counsel, Dr. Paul Weis, "What is the legal position on a given refugee problem?" Dr. Weis responded: "There are (always) two positions which are legally defensible. I hope you will adopt the position which gives more rights to refugees." Lindt used a U.N. General Assembly resolution on Hungary and a degree of flexibility to intervene.

'Flexibility' was also used in 1984 when hundreds of thousands of people flooded into Sudan from Ethiopia to escape one of the worst famines in modern history. UNHCR classified them as bona fide refugees, reasoning they had fled as a result of political policies and actions of the Ethiopian government, rather than being merely victims of a natural disaster.

Years later, High Commissioner Sadako Ogata described such dilemmas in a slightly different way. On occasion, starting with the Kurdish crisis in the aftermath of the Gulf war, she said she had made 'common sense' decisions which did not strictly follow legal definitions. Of course this could be highly contentious and there would always be critics ready to accuse UNHCR of breaking, expanding or misinterpreting its role and mandate. To which Ogata

replied: "The bottom line should always be the welfare and safety of a refugee."

**There were surreal and unbelievable moments. I was visiting transit camps in Italy for Asians who had been kicked out of Uganda by Idi Amin and I met some Africans who had been airlifted out by mistake and didn't even know where they were. One told me 'I was in Entebbe when the airlift started and all of a sudden I was put on a plane and all of a sudden here I am in Italy and all I want to do is go home.' We arranged for them to fly back.**

—Sadruddin Aga Khan, former High Commissioner.

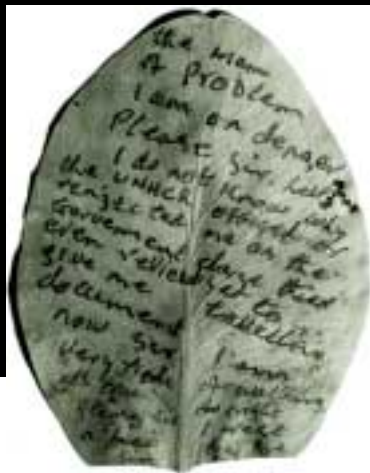
The Hungarian crisis and the following years was a honeymoon period between refugees and the countries which protected them, though politics remained of supreme importance. Thirty-five countries opened their doors to the Hungarians. Any person subsequently fleeing the oppression of eastern Europe was generally welcomed in the West, though it was clear refugees were also being used as pawns in the cold war chess game.

## ► Communication

has changed dramatically in 50 years. One African refugee wrote to the High Commissioner on the leaf of a tree. Today, displaced persons use satellite phones to talk to the outside world and take advantage of global tracing services to try to re-establish contact with family members.



UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES



UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES

In Africa, countries gaining their independence from retreating European colonial powers opened their borders to floods of other Africans still under foreign domination. In one of his last interviews before he died in 1999, the late President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania described to REFUGEES magazine the mood of the continent at the time as “one of optimism and innocence” towards refugees, one in which there was clearly no anticipation of impending chaos. “We never expected that after colonial rule we would have flights of refugees from independent states tearing themselves apart”, Nyerere said. “We never saw that. We expected most of them to go home eventually.”

African states, among the poorest in the world, were also among the most generous. Tanzania and other countries offered refugees citizenship and land. The first early arrivals often settled in local communities and this is still encouraged in some states like Uganda.

But the advent of regular mass exodus resulted in the establishment of huge camps not only in Africa, but in Pakistan, Iran, Thailand and latterly, the Balkans. They were all supposed to be temporary, but many stood for years with all their

growing problems of crime, environmental degradation, festering security risks and difficulties in maintaining multi-million dollar food, water and medical supply chains.

In 1969, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) institutionalized its home-grown generosity when it approved the continent’s own liberal refugee convention. For the first time, a legal document extended refugee recognition to people fleeing in large groups and escaping such things as external aggression, occupation or foreign domination. It included the now universally accepted principle of ‘voluntary’ repatriation. Two years earlier the original 1951 Geneva Convention had been fortified with a 1967 Protocol extending protection to refugees anywhere in the world, whatever the date they were forced to leave their homes.

UNHCR’s modus operandi developed piecemeal during its five decades life span as the agency faced new challenges and the political and military environment in which it worked became more complex. The 1951 Convention remained the foundation of its protection work, but that was bolstered by the Protocol, the OAU Convention, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration

signed by Latin American countries and other legal documents.

On the ground, the agency became involved in so-called post-conflict situations—helping former refugees once they returned home—as early as the 1960s in the aftermath of the war in Algeria. “The fate of repatriated ex-refugees can no longer be disassociated from that of the Algerian population as a whole without seriously endangering the country’s social stability,” then High Commissioner Felix Schnyder wrote. It is a theme the international humanitarian community returned to repeatedly in future operations, but the record of successful and sustained intervention has been spotty.

**The press gang method is used for reluctant persons. A small green truck known as the salad basket circulates in the streets of Ojuda City and young men were suddenly knocked on the head and popped into the bus.**

—A 1961 UNHCR cable describing a scene in Morocco in which Algerian male refugees were press ganged into guerrilla service.

*The issue of alleged civilian refugee*



►► **Protection**  
 is UNHCR's core mandate. It may vary between signing an agreement with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to monitoring the return of boat people in Viet Nam and checking on the well-being of displaced persons in Eritrea.



*camps hiding armed gunmen repeatedly hindered relief efforts in coming decades.*

Throughout its early years, according to Sadruddin Aga Khan, UNHCR “worked on only one side of a border, welcoming refugees. There was no great enthusiasm to make contacts with refugee-originating countries or for voluntary repatriation,” he said. “The basic mood was that refugees who wanted to go back could somehow risk it, but we didn’t want to get mixed up with it. This had to change.”

It did so in dramatic fashion in the 1971 Pakistan emergency where it was quite clear that the only vi-

able long-term solution for millions of people who had fled the chaos was to return to their old homes. In that same crisis UNHCR was asked for the first time to become coordinator for all U.N. assistance, a role it would subsequently play in many other humanitarian programs.

When Cambodian refugees streamed into Thailand to escape the horrors of the Khmer Rouge, UNHCR plunged into the construction and maintenance of large refugee camps for the first time. In Central America, it developed the concept of quick impact projects (QIPs), helping to rebuild schools, clinics, wells and other infrastructure as a way of bridging the gap between emergency relief and longer-term development.

To escape the wrath of Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf war, two million Iraqi Kurds fled to Iran and northern Iraq, an area which allied governments subsequently declared a safe

haven. While western troops provided security, UNHCR and other agencies were called in to help the Kurds. Never before had relief officials worked so closely with the military. The debate over the advisability and worth of such intimate cooperation, which was repeated in Bosnia, Kosovo and Timor, has continued ever since.

The Kurds in northern Iraq remained in their own country and were classed as internally displaced persons rather than refugees. As people who have crossed an international frontier and reached safety in a second country, refugees fall under the legal protection of UNHCR’s mandate, but IDPs generally can turn only to their own governments, who often consider them enemies in a civil conflict, for assistance.

As the number of internally displaced increased dramatically in recent years—there are now an estimated 20–25 million IDPs compared with 11.7 million refugees—there has been growing international pressure to replace the current slipshod and haphazard approach to this problem by creating a comprehensive protection blueprint similar to the one for refugees.

The debate shaped up to be one of the most explosive issues on the humanitarian agenda and battle lines have already been





UNHCR / R. BURROWS

► **UNHCR** has supported many types of special projects ranging from financing anti-piracy patrols during the exodus of the boat people in Southeast Asia, to de-mining operations in Bosnia, awareness campaigns in Ethiopia on female genital mutilation, inter-ethnic bus services in the Balkans and small-scale business activities in Burundi.



UNHCR / C. SHIRLEY



drawn. Liberal western nations insisted that the protection of human rights now transcended both sovereignty and the sanctity of national borders—the very foundations of the modern nation-state. Other countries such as China believed just as strongly that sovereignty and non-interference in a nation's internal affairs was the cornerstone of international relations.

The 20-year saga of the Indochinese refugees was another major refugee watershed. The flight of an estimated three million people almost overwhelmed the global asylum system, produced various innovations to meet the challenge and became both the high point and the eventual end of the West's 'honeymoon' with refugee resettlement. UNHCR's budgetary needs also soared—rising from \$80 million at the start of the emergency in 1975 to more than \$500 million five years later.

When the exodus of the boat people began not a single regional country had acceded to the 1951 Convention or its Protocol. Singapore flatly refused to disembark any refugee who did not have a guaranteed welcome in another country. The international system which had worked relatively well for a quarter century had now "faltered and even failed, resulting in denial of

asylum" according to then High Commissioner Jean-Pierre Hocké.

**There was a patrol boat cruising the river. They had a flashlight and shined it on us and started shooting. My wife shouted to me, 'I think they've hit our son.' I turned around and felt for him in the dark. My fingers went into the whole of his head.**

—A Laotian refugee quoted in the book *Terms of Refuge*.

Diplomatic initiatives were necessary to break the impasse and rescue the very concept of international asylum. Hanoi agreed in 1979 to establish an orderly departure program to facilitate the official emigration of citizens who were accepted for resettlement in another country. It was the first time UNHCR was involved in negotiations to try to pre-empt a refugee crisis rather than simply dealing with its aftermath.

A decade later, with the humanitarian mission again rapidly foundering, all the parties involved signed the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), a highly complex package which committed everyone—the refugee-producing countries of Viet Nam,

Cambodia and Laos; regional states such as Thailand or the Philippines which received fleeing civilians; and countries like the United States and Australia which agreed to permanently resettle quotas of refugees—to specific roles in a carefully orchestrated, step by step program. The failure of just one link would have probably doomed the entire process in a domino effect.

A key element was the development of temporary asylum whereby regional states agreed to receive fleeing civilians, but with the proviso that they would leave again relatively quickly, either to a new country or returning to their old homes if they were rejected as bona fide refugees under a newly introduced screening process.

The innovation was used again years later at the height of the war in Bosnia, when European countries accepted 700,000 refugees for 'temporary protection.' Critics worried, however, that this development created groups of 'second class' refugees and that governments would increasingly try to substitute temporary protection for full asylum.

Southeast Asia also marked a turning point in another way. Although some 2.5 million people settled in new countries and a half million returned home with guar-



UNHCR / W. STONE



UNHCR / B. BIZOT



UNHCR / T. BÖLSTAD

THE TIMES FRIDAY MARCH 17 1995

# Aid cuts threaten starvation for Rwanda refugees

By EYE-ANN PRENTICE, DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

antees they would not face any type of state harassment, the West would never again be as receptive to resettling huge numbers of people fleeing for their very lives.

As the 1990s began, it appeared such largesse might soon be unnecessary anyway. It is true there was still a record 15 million uprooted persons of concern to UNHCR, and the agency itself was in a trough, beset by low staff morale, a financial squeeze and rising international criticism. But the cold war was ending, the Berlin Wall had collapsed and in world capitals there was brave talk of a new world order.

That hope was quickly crushed. If superpower rivalry had helped create conflicts, it also kept in check many simmering ethnic tensions. Stripped of any 'big brother' restraints, dozens of these crises

exploded across the globe. To refugee officials they were often more brutal, dangerous and complicated than situations in which they had been involved in the past.

**Ten of them burst in. Two men seized my husband and dragged him outside. Two men stayed. One wanted to rape me. I fought. The other man said, "Let her alone. It was the husband you wanted." He was furious. He pointed his gun at me then hit me in the mouth. I opened the door. Everything was quiet. Suddenly, I saw my husband's body, covered in blood. I went mad.**

*—An Ethiopian refugee in a Kenyan camp in 1983.*

Sadako Ogata, a Japanese diplomat and academic, was appointed High Commissioner in late 1990. She had heard of UNHCR's problems beforehand, felt personally that it was a "kind of pontificating or-

ganization that did not readily accept help or advice" but found the atmosphere 'helpful' when she came on board. Within a matter of days "we were in a swim or sink situation" she said in a recent interview, when around 400,000 Kurds became trapped in the mountains of northern Iraq. Turkey would not admit them for domestic reasons, thus denying the Kurds access to an asylum procedure. The British and Americans wanted to create a safe haven in-country, making the Kurds internally displaced persons rather than refugees and easy targets if hostilities broke out again.

For UNHCR to work under such constraints, in close liaison with military forces which had been involved in the war that had sparked the Kurdish exodus in the first place, violated all of UNHCR's normal operating rules. It was then that Ogata made the first of what she called a 'common sense' decision and agreed to help. "My deputy Gerald Walzer told me he thought this was one of the most important decisions I ever took," Ogata said.

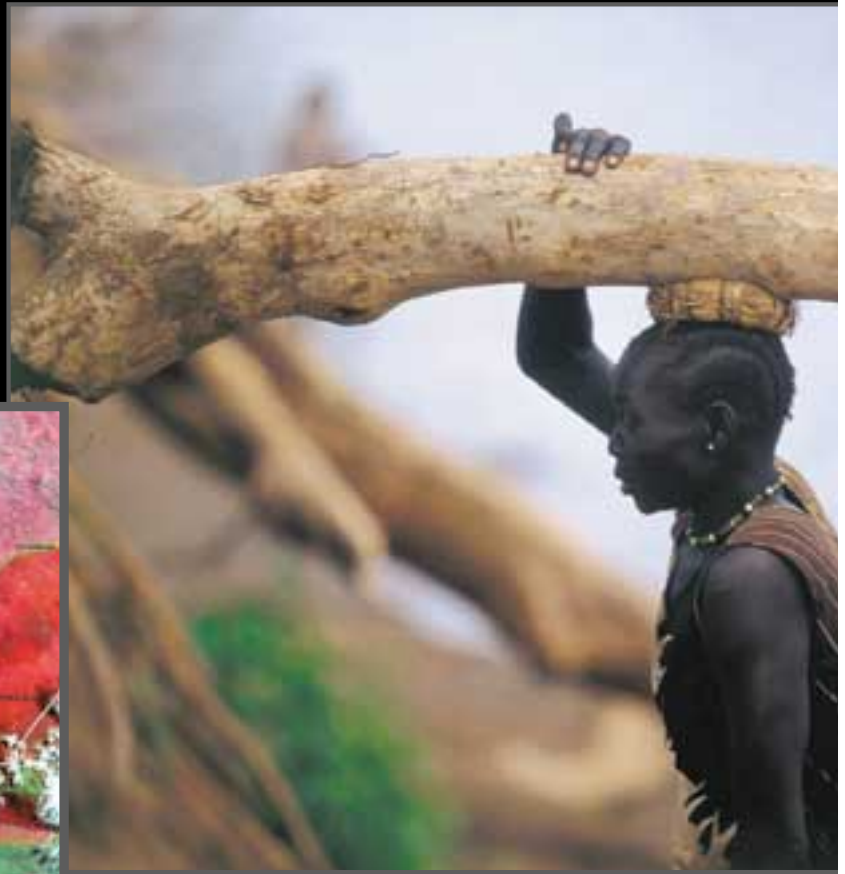
The 1990s was the most turbulent period in UNHCR's history. Mega crises broke out one after the other—Iraq, the Balkans, genocide in Rwanda and its after-



►► **Environment:** Satellite imaging is now used to track refugee concentrations. Camps can have a major impact on the local environment as civilians seek wood for their fires and then eventually evacuate the sites. Fuel efficient stoves such as those used in Central America have been introduced to lessen the impact on the environment.



© CNES / EURIMAGE



math, Kosovo, Timor, Chechnya—overshadowing dozens of other problems. The world, for instance, largely ignored the plight of millions of Afghans, though they continued to be the biggest single group of refugees in the world. Donor fatigue was setting in.

The term 'Fortress Europe' became synonymous with asylum doors clanging noisily shut. "The uncoordinated liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s has shifted to the harmonized restrictions of the 1980s and 1990s," D. Joly wrote in his book 'Haven or Hell: Asylum policies and refugees in Europe.' Africa and other developing regions threatened to emulate the policies of the industrialized world.

Aid officials generally had been able to maintain their 'neutral' status in the past. But as conflicts became nastier and relief personnel worked increasingly in areas so hostile that even western soldiers would not venture, open season was sometimes declared on them. In the appalling conditions in Africa's Great Lakes region in the mid-1990s, 36 UNHCR personnel were killed, died or went missing.

**In the series of dank, dark cellars he would call home for 10 months, he was always chained to his metal bed by handcuffs and a one meter long cable. That allowed him to walk exactly four steps. "I always dreamed of making that additional fifth step."**

—Vincent Cochetel, head of UNHCR's northern Caucasus operation, who was kidnapped and held for 317 days before being released.

During this time an important new ingredient was added to the volatile mix of refugee operations—the media. In the past journalists had fulfilled their neutral role of observing and reporting. In the last decade, they became major players, influencing the decisions of governments, humanitarian agencies, armies and rebels and refugees themselves by their pervasive presence.

The media could make or break operations. Their very presence would guarantee the free flow of aid dollars. In the first

weeks of the exodus of Rwandan refugees in 1994, for instance, the world spent \$2 billion helping them. The media's departure had the opposite effect. The world 'forgot' about those same Rwandan refugees when the cameras left—until violence exploded again in 1996 and the cameras returned.

Painful dilemmas were scrutinized by global audiences. In Bosnia UNHCR intervened on occasion to move people who might otherwise be killed. By doing so, it inadvertently helped ethnic cleansing. As one official said, the agency was "in the ironic and awkward position of trying to save lives by helping people become refugees." In central Africa, UNHCR helped pluck 185,000 Rwandan refugees

**Kosovo :**  
L'accord de Kumanovo donne onze jours  
à l'ONU pour y pénétrer • L'OTAN inter-

UNHCR / R. CHALASANI



UNHCR / B. PRESS



UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES



the first time I had done so in 10 years,” Filippo Grandi, the head of UNHCR operations in the Congo town of Kisangani recalled. “Conditions were so awful, I asked her whether we should just pull out. We brainstormed. We agreed to stay. We could make the big gesture by withdrawing. But our withdrawal would have doomed more people to die.”

Ogata now calls the Congo experience her worst nightmare. “At times we felt only one thing—helplessness. We were helpless, really really helpless. But we stuck it out.” She added: “Today, there are rarely any good decisions to make. Only less bad decisions.”

**Kisangani: it sucked us in, took our faith and energy and challenged our personal coping beyond imagination. It was like living an Indiana Jones adventure movie, but more scary and real, more smelly, stinking and dirty. It was hell.**  
—UNHCR field officer Kilian

*Kleinschmidt in Zaire in 1997 when even hardened aid officials almost surrendered to the horror.*

Kosovo, virtually the last major emergency in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, encapsulated many of the problems and dilemmas humanitarian workers faced in the last 50 years, the progress they had made in meeting the challenge of mass displacement and some of the new headaches they will have to tackle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The showdown between NATO and Serb forces in the spring of 1999 followed years of unrest in the province. UNHCR and other agencies had been helping hundreds of thousands of civilians inside Kosovo as the Belgrade government relentlessly increased political and military pressure against ethnic Albanians. But world governments watched only fitfully and again promoted humanitarian operations as a cloak to mask political inaction.

When political intervention did come, it was too late to save the region from another catastrophe. In the ensuing war, politics, military aims and humanitarian work became hopelessly entangled.

NATO found itself in the paradoxical position of waging a devastating air war

from the rain forest. In what passes as an ideal situation in refugee emergencies, they should have had the choice of repatriating voluntarily. In 1997 they had only two brutal choices: staying and almost certainly dying or being killed by guerrillas or returning to an uncertain future in Rwanda.

The Great Lakes almost overwhelmed even hardened aid workers in their resolve to continue to try to save lives. “I dialed the High Commissioner directly in Geneva,

## ▶▶ Starting again:

*No matter how arduous the conditions, most refugees eventually return home where they begin to rebuild their lives and homes.*

*People who can't go back for any reason often begin life afresh in an adopted country including Kosovar refugees newly arrived in Chile watching local dances.*



UNHCR / R. COLVILLE



UNHCR / A. HARPER

on Kosovo and providing humanitarian aid to many of its victims at the same time. Relief agencies were overwhelmed as nearly one million people fled or were forced into exile within a matter of weeks. Whether they liked it or not, they had to turn to the only organizations capable of providing the logistics to help so many people quickly—the military. Humanitarian programs were often shaped by crude political calculations—especially the impact on civilian audiences back home.

More than in any previous crisis, governments approved direct high-profile, show-the-flag 'bilateral' relief projects in the field, often bypassing more

traditional multilateral programs. UNHCR was heavily criticized for not fulfilling its traditional coordination role and not being involved in more operational programs by the very capitals which often bypassed the coordination process entirely and channeled funds directly to their own television-friendly bilateral programs.

Despite those setbacks, the humanitarian operation did work, underlining the fact that if financial and material resources were made available soon enough, in suffi-

cient quantity, the international community could handle even the largest and quickest exodus. There were undoubtedly hardships and atrocities inside Kosovo, but once civilians reached surrounding countries they received at least minimum protection and assistance and there were surprisingly few deaths compared with similar sized displacements in other parts of the world.

When Serb forces agreed to withdraw from Kosovo, the refugees followed the advance of allied troops back into the region almost as quickly as they had left only a few months before. In coping with this reverse exodus and its aftermath, UNHCR and other agencies encountered at least some of the problems which will dominate the humanitarian agenda in the new millennium, including the questions of how best to help internally displaced persons and how best to promote 'coexistence' among communities which may have spent years indulging in hatred and atrocities against their neighbors.

**More than 100 persons were killed in a one-hour massacre by marauding thugs, elderly, retarded and children alike. The youngest**

# The Jakarta Post

The Journal of Indonesia today

## SUNDAY

# East Timorese say 'no'





UNHCR / R. CHALASANI



UNHCR / P. GUTNISKY

**was a three-month-old baby burned alive in an oven. The oldest was 96-years-old. Nine persons were slaughtered in Amra's own home. Ahmici became one of the most infamous atrocities of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.**

—*The killing fields of Bosnia.*

Fostering coexistence, the first step toward long-term reconciliation, may in fact be the most crucial humanitarian task in the next century according to Mrs. Ogata, who retires as High Commissioner at the end of the year 2000. "It is the first and most vital building bloc in putting communities and countries back together again, whether in Kosovo, Timor or Rwanda," she said in a recent interview with REFUGEES. "We have not paid enough attention to this in the past."

UNHCR recently began a joint study with Harvard University to explore the feasibility of establishing a series of educational, business, health and other coexistence projects in shattered communities.

But this will be only one step in what Ogata sees as a series of sweeping changes in the years ahead in how the international community responds to refugee and oth-

er 'people' problems. "We are living in a world of revolutionary change," she said. "The traditional way of management, the traditional way of refugee protection... will not work in the future."

On any given day, in all parts of the world, there are untold numbers of people on the move in what has become a veritable global migration explosion. They include refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing the latest persecution somewhere, other groups returning to their homes after a period in exile, economic migrants searching for a better life or environmental victims escaping famine or hurricanes. Making sense of this huge movement, differentiating between the various groups and then making decisions based on the specific merits of each category will require flexible and imaginative new approaches by governments, specialized agencies such as UNHCR and other organizations.

The refugee agency will begin a series of "consultations" with governments and other interested organizations on international protection. While some critics argue the 1951 Convention, UNHCR's most basic protection tool, is no longer relevant to new conditions, the agency is seeking to

strengthen it in areas which it currently does not cover.

"These consultations will be the first time that UNHCR will promote discussions with the goal of creating something additional to the Convention—a protocol, a General Assembly declaration, or a combination of these to deal with changed displacement situations," according to Erika Feller, director of UNHCR's international protection department. Sadako Ogata said, "The Convention itself must remain sacrosanct, but perhaps we can resolve some outstanding issues and try to fill gaps."

On an earlier UNHCR birthday, then High Commissioner Poul Hartling said, "All we can say, after blowing out the 30 candles on our imaginary birthday cake, is that we hope the day will come when we shall be able to issue a last press release simply by saying that the last refugee has gone home or been resettled in a new country. I would be the happiest man on earth if world conditions permitted the disappearance of my organization." Twenty years later the wish remains the same, but the probability is as remote as ever. ■

# We are living in a world of re

**Mrs. Sadako Ogata** became High Commissioner in February, 1991. She will leave office at the end of 2000. Her tenure coincided with one of the most turbulent periods in UNHCR's history and included such major emergencies as the aftermath of the Gulf war, the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, the African Great Lakes crisis, Kosovo, Timor and dozens of other emergencies. In the following interview, she reviews the last decade and examines future humanitarian operations:

**REFUGEES: UNHCR appeared to be an agency in crisis when you took over: low morale, lack of confidence by the international community and lack of funds.**

SADAKO OGATA: There was an enormous financial shortfall, but the process of rebuilding the organization had already started, the mood was hopeful and there was a determination to make it work again. I had the image of UNHCR as a rather pontificating kind of organization that didn't really like to listen to advice. But perhaps being an outsider helped in the healing process. I came to listen, learn and follow a consultative approach.

**You didn't have much time to learn, did you?**

Almost within days we were embroiled with the Kurdish situation in northern Iraq. It was a matter of sink or swim. Turkey resisted allowing the Kurds to enter that country. The Allies wanted to bring them down from the mountains and establish a safe haven in northern Iraq. The Kurds may then have ended up unprotected in their own country. The whole situation was against the traditional doctrinal view of this office. Despite that, I made a 'common sense' decision to help these people. Gerald Walzer, who later became my deputy, said this was one of the most important decisions I ever took.

**UNHCR worked closely with the military, mainly the Americans and British, for the first time. Were there any problems?**

I met with President George Bush and asked him not to withdraw his soldiers so quickly because we were not sure we could guarantee the Kurds security. He replied: 'I cannot stay on and be criticized as being an



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

imperialist at the head of an imperialist power.' Although a 'no fly' zone remained in force, the soldiers were withdrawn leaving a very uncertain situation.

**How did UNHCR's role change in the 1990s?**

Human misery became one of the main issues of international politics. As a result we gained a new prominence on the world stage. Today, there are so many actors. The humanitarian space has become very crowded.

**There was a downside to this prominence?**

Certainly. Humanitarian action became a fig leaf for political and military inaction. In Bosnia, the international community eventually took punitive action against the Serbs, but it was very haphazard, an artificial war that only added to the human displacement. It was the same pattern in the early stages of the Kosovo emergency. The international response in the Great Lakes was even more tepid in comparison. The basic lesson to be drawn from this experience is that when emergencies are very close to the doors of the big powers they will do more. When they are far away they will pay some attention, but they're not going to lose any of their boys.

**What was your worst single moment in the last 10 years?**

When we saw more than one million Rwandan refugees crossing into Zaire in 1994. We felt helpless, really helpless.

**The Great Lakes called for many hard decisions and produced a lot of criticism.**

Remember when Médecins Sans Frontières withdrew from the camps because of the continued presence of the *génocidaires*, ex-military and militias? I said to them 'You are free to do whatever you want because you are a voluntary organization. I have a mandate to protect these people. And since more than half are women and children, I cannot abandon them.'

**Do you still think you were right?**

Yes. There was no real choice. We coordinate many activities and we do not have the luxury to say 'This is against my principles.' Principles are fine, but there's something even deeper than a principle and that is saving lives. Perhaps we should have been much louder politically in getting world powers to understand that unless they intervened immediately there would be further conflict. And that is what happened.

**Will your successor be more 'political'?**

I think so. You have to influence political decision-makers if you are responsible for humanitarian causes and operations.

**How does a U.N. agency become more political, especially working in a climate which encourages conformity?**

I don't like conformity per se. We are a field agency, we are expected to perform in emergencies which is why we are strengthening our emergency preparedness capacity. We are working to establish a strong responsibility-sharing system among all engaged organizations.

**Compare the last 50 years with the future.**

In those early days we helped people who generally were persecuted by their own governments. The international community received them because they came mostly from a particular kind of situation, fleeing communism or authoritarian regimes. Then we became involved in the decolonization process and in the 1970s and 1980s we helped protect victims of cold war conflicts. Internal conflicts increasingly have replaced inter-state wars in the last 10 years. The 'mix' of people on the move—refugees, economic migrants, internally displaced persons—and

# revolutionary change...

their motivations have become far more complex. The world will still need an organization for the world's most vulnerable and deprived peoples. But the traditional way we have interpreted our protection mandate is no longer adequate. We must expand our expertise into new areas and redefine our tools of protection.

## **You are talking about a revolution here.**

We are living in a world of revolutionary change. The traditional way of management, the traditional way of refugee protection, the traditional solutions will not work in the future.

## **How will all this change affect the 1951 Convention, which critics charge is outdated?**

I think there might have to be an updating of the overall Convention framework to incorporate changed circumstances. The Convention itself must remain sacrosanct, as the very inner core of our protection work. But we are beginning a series of consultations with governments and other interested parties to explore various ideas, clarifying divergent interpretations as well as incorporating areas that the Convention doesn't cover.

## **What about internally displaced persons?**

There are already more IDPs than refugees and if there are more internal wars there will be more internally displaced. Why do we now protect only some of the people (refugees) who flee a war and not others (IDPs)? That is an area where we'll probably have to move toward a more comprehensive approach to internal displacement and refugee protection.

## **What about the whole issue of migration?**

The globalization of information, money and trade has developed very rapidly. But no system has yet emerged to handle the globalization of human movement. The international community must produce a framework for migration management, in addition to a strengthened refugee protection system.

## **Will you open a Pandora's box by even discussing the Convention?**

You may have to take a chance if you want to remain useful. Of course we will be very prudent in examining our core mandate, but you prove your usefulness by serving humanity effectively.

## **International tribunals were established to bring to justice the guilty in Bosnia and Rwanda. Yet the 1998 Lome agreement effectively pardoned the guilty. How do you reconcile the two approaches?**

Tribunals are very important as a first step, to bring to justice people really violating humanitarian standards. But there has to be a follow through. Tribunals by themselves are not going to solve the real problem of reconciling people who have to live side by side. Just because a leader was hanged is not going to change my attitude toward his supporters, my neighbors, who killed my husband. People have to learn to live and work side by side, to coexist. Promoting coexistence as the first step toward total reconciliation could be the most crucial humanitarian challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **UNHCR and Harvard University are cooperating on a 'Imagine Coexistence' project. Where does that stand?**

Field teams are currently identifying pilot projects in Rwanda and Bosnia, two countries where millions of people need to learn to live together again. We already have experiences in 'reconciliation' programs in different parts of the world. The challenge is to bring field people and academics to jointly produce a theoretically sound and pragmatically relevant program. One of the end products will be a field guidebook for coexistence-based community building for all practitioners.

## **Another project is the Brookings Initiative.**

Yes. I had two objectives with this initiative: one was to get better funding to bridge the 'gap' between emergency assistance and longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. The other was to establish better institutional linkages; for instance we now have a consultative process with the World Bank and the U.N. Development Program. There has been a lot of advocacy and everyone now wants to participate; governments and NGOs, and that's not a bad thing. But there

is still a long way to go. We have the conceptual tools in place, but we are still working on concrete solutions, joint projects, where we go in and what we will do, how the Bank and developmental agencies will step in.

## **What is the driving force behind these new initiatives?**

Often it is sheer desperation. We need sustained support to bridge the gap between emergency assistance and long-term development. I raised this 'gap problem' last year out of desperation. The security of Rwandan refugees was the responsibility of governments, but when they failed to maintain law and order we stepped in—again out of desperation. The new emphasis on coexistence comes from a desperate need to bring communities back together again. Frustration that we lack the tools and resources to work effectively. Desperation has been a key driving force for innovative initiatives in the last 10 years.

## **The media appears to have become a very active player rather than a mere neutral observer in humanitarian crises.**

Today, the media is setting the pace, creating the agenda for states in any crisis, forcing them to deal with it or find a scapegoat. We should develop close contacts with the media, promoting our cause.

## **Has this last 10 years changed you personally?**

Of course, these were tremendous learning years about human strength and cruelty; about politics both domestic and international; about management of operations and organizations. I think I've got tougher. Before, I was much more relaxed, docile and maybe even a nicer person.

## **What are you going to do when you leave office?**

After a good rest, I plan to write a book, an analytical memoir of the last 10 years set against the backdrop of changes in the international political system.

## **What is your legacy?**

That we were there. That we stayed the course in emergencies. And we did make a difference in the lives of millions of people.

| QUOTE UNQUOTE |

**“The refugee is a product of our errors, his predicament an indictment of our conduct as peoples and nations. He exists for our education and as a warning.”**

*Sadrudin Aga Khan, former High Commissioner.*



**“During the day we walked over corpses. At night we sat near them.”**

*A refugee who escaped the horrors of Cambodia.*



**“You shall be forced to abandon everything that is the most dear to you. This is the first arrow from the bow of exile. You shall taste the bitterness of the bread of exile and learn how to walk the stairs of others.”**

*Dante’s Paradise.*



**“Humanitarian assistance has been used as a fig leaf,**

**hiding a lack of political will to address the root causes of conflict.”**

*UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.*



**“Refugees took their children and threw them**

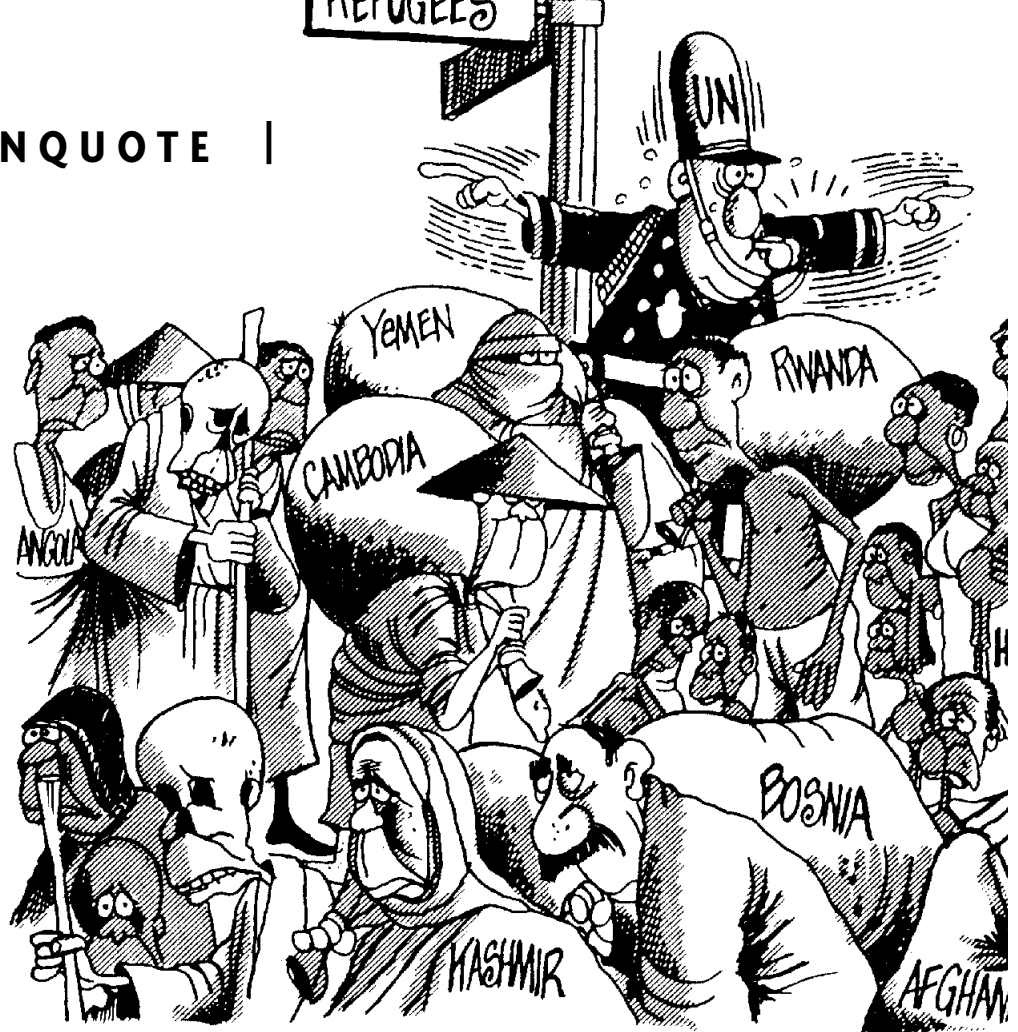
**off the bridge. People preferred to kill their families themselves, throwing them into the river or onto the rocks below the bridge, rather than see them killed by the soldiers.”**

*An eyewitness report from central Africa in 1997.*



**“After the fifth stroke of the machete on my hand I fainted. I only woke up after I heard my little daughter screaming. They were also chopping off her hand!”**

*A Sierra Leonean refugee describing an almost daily*





atrocities in that West African country in 1998.

◆◆◆  
 “The foreigner isolated from his fellow countrymen and his family should be the subject of

greater love on the part of men and of the Gods.”  
 Plato.

◆◆◆  
 “I am one more. Like the intellectual, the reporter, the human rights activist,

the displaced person, it's my turn to have to abandon my native soil, my life, my soul, my country.”

*The news editor of a Colombian journal on his decision to flee after receiving death threats.*



“If there is one thing that is worse than being a refugee, it is being a refugee without asylum.”

*Former High Commissioner Sadruddin Aga Khan.*



“What progress. In the Middle Ages they would have burnt me. Today they only burn my books.”

*Sigmund Freud in 1933 as his books were being burned in public squares.*



“A man without papers is only half a man.”

*UNHCR's first High Commissioner J.G. van Heuven Goedhart.*



“Those who go back first will sleep on cots Those who go back second will sleep on mats Those who go back third will sleep in the mud And those who go back last will sleep under the ground.”

*A Khmer Rouge warning to Cambodian refugees.*



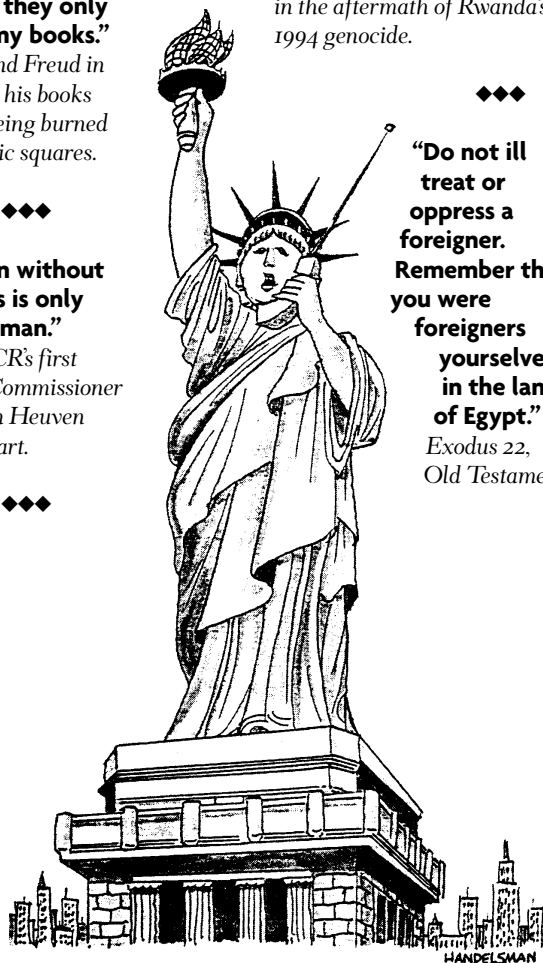
“Of all my aims, there is none to which I feel more deeply committed than that of enabling the United Nations never again to fail in protecting a civilian population from genocide and mass slaughter.”

*Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the aftermath of Rwanda's 1994 genocide.*



“Do not ill treat or oppress a foreigner. Remember that you were foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt.”

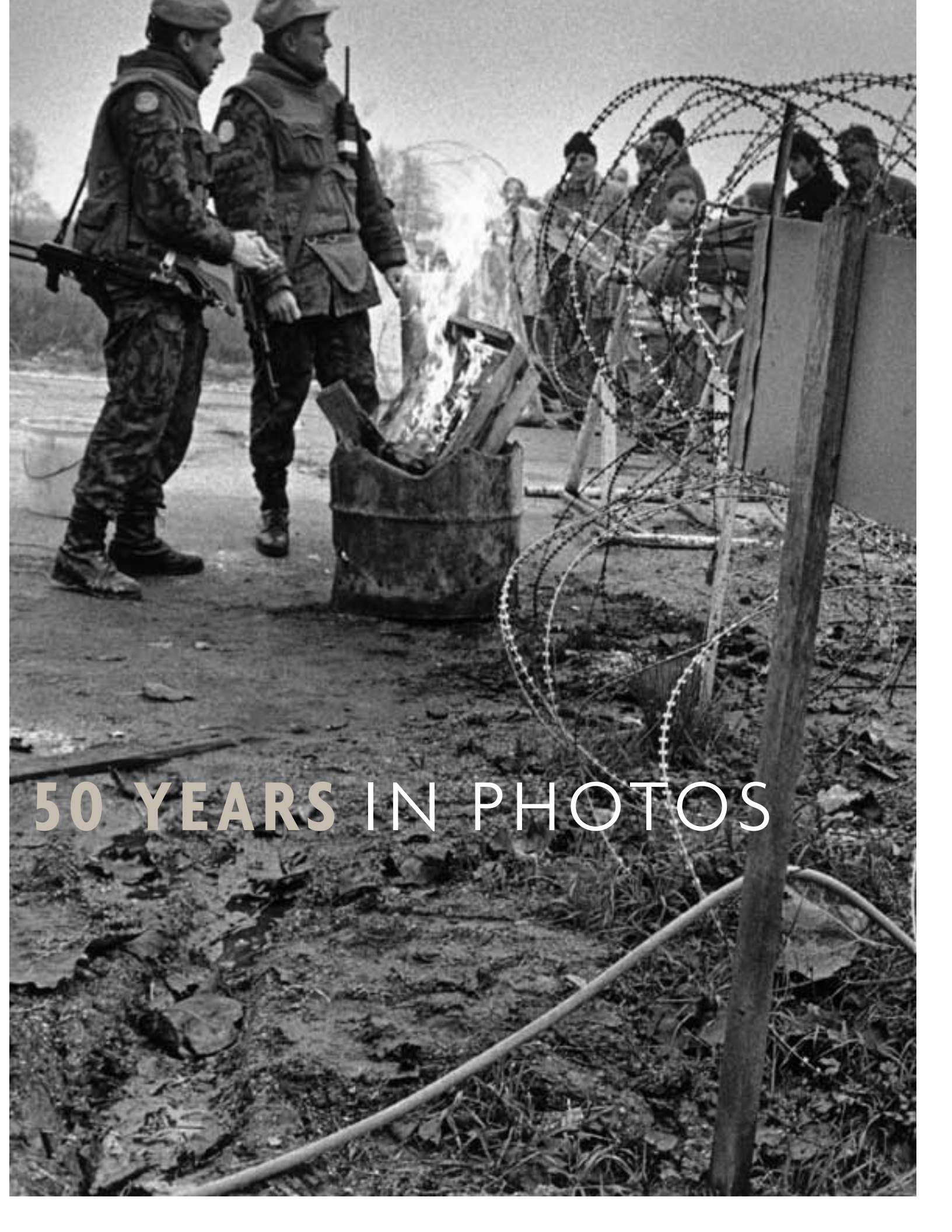
*Exodus 22, Old Testament.*



“Well, it all depends. Where are these huddled masses coming from?”







50 YEARS IN PHOTOS



Bosnians in the early 1990s in a scene which could have been repeated virtually anywhere at anytime in the last five decades.



J. CADOUX

With a small staff and a budget of \$300,000 UNHCR begins its work.



AP



UNHCR ARCHIVES

The refugee agency's first task was to help an estimated one million people still homeless in the wake of World War II.



The Hungarian revolution was a defining moment for UNHCR in the 1950s when an estimated 200,000 people fled to Austria and Yugoslavia.

The refugee agency's first intervention in Africa was to organize assistance for 200,000 people in Tunisia and Morocco who fled Algeria's war of independence against France.



UNHCR / S. WRIGHT



As colonialism crumbled, conflict erupted in many parts of Africa. In the early 1960s Rwandan refugees accounted for the greater part of UNHCR's activities on the continent, as they would do three decades later.



A successful program at this time was the rural integration of refugees in countries of asylum including Tanzania.





As many as 10 million people fled from East Pakistan to India in the early 1970s, the largest single human displacement in modern history.



More than six million Afghans left that country starting in the late 1970s and much of the country, including the capital, Kabul, was destroyed.





Starting in the mid-1970s, as many as three million people fled Indochina in the wake of the Viet Nam war. An estimated 2.5 million eventually found new homes.





During the 1980s a vicious cycle of repression began in Central America and two million people, including this Guatemalan refugee in Mexico, fled their homes.



UNHCR / M. VANAPPELGHEM

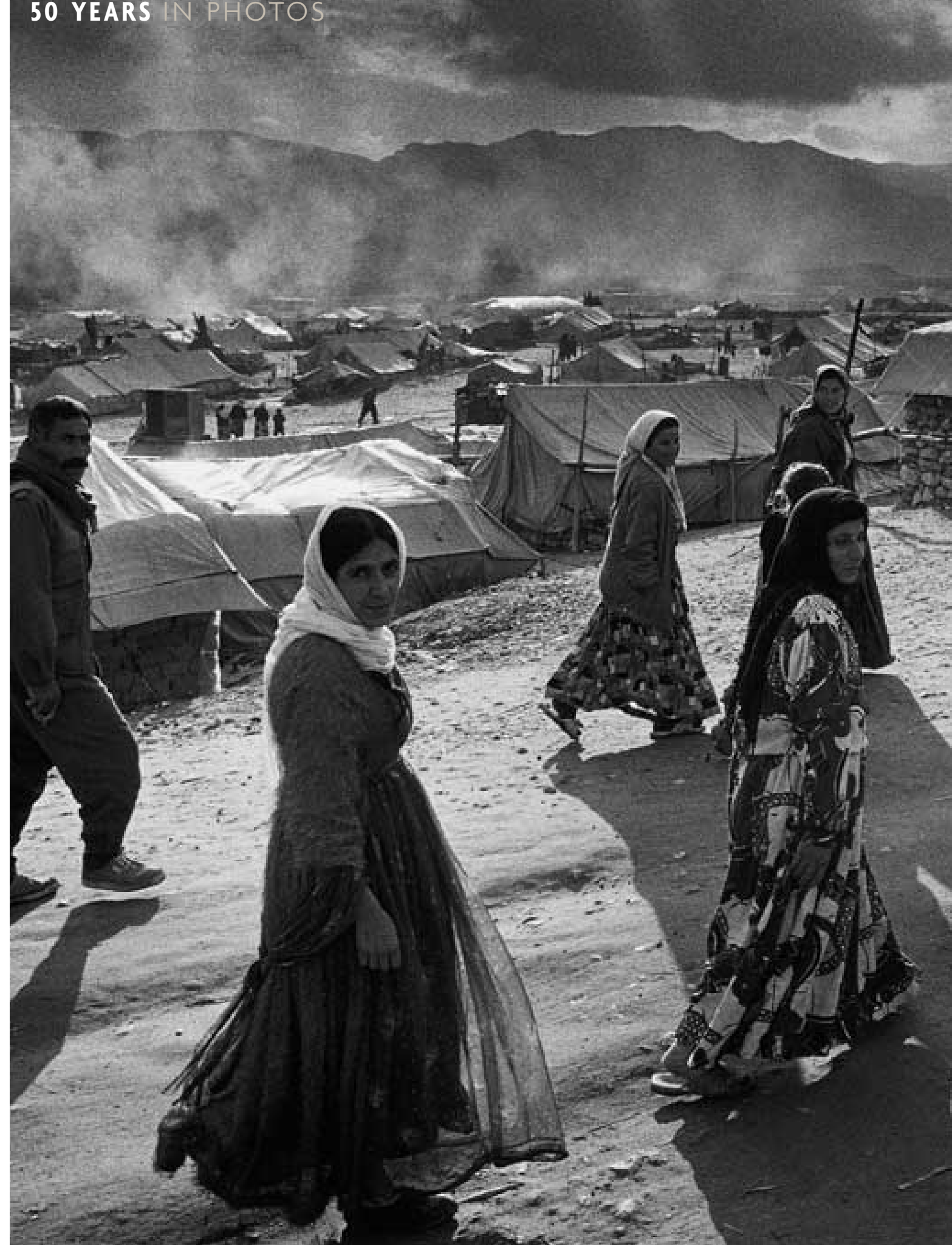


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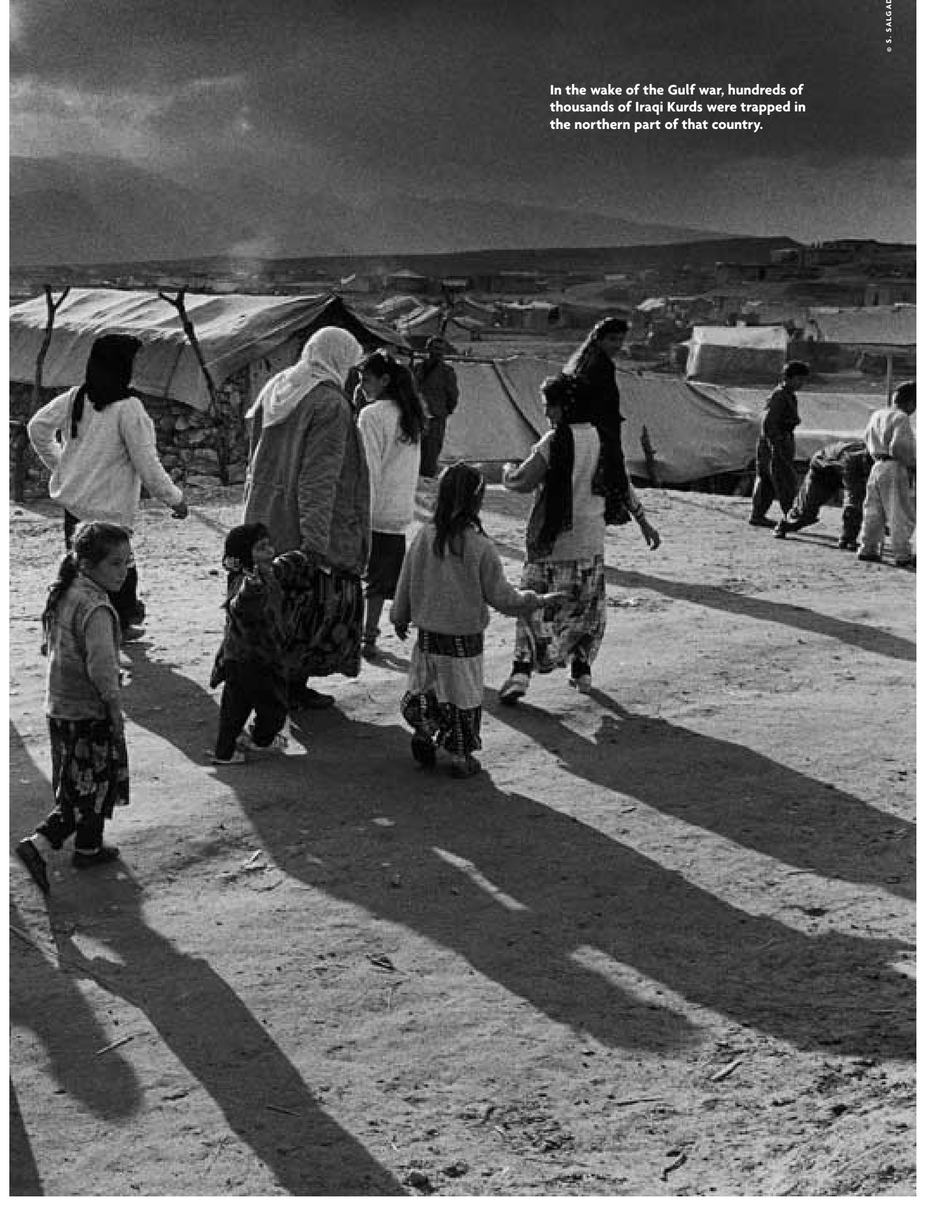


UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN

In the early 1980s half of the world's refugees were in Africa, including millions who fled the drought in the Horn of Africa and at the other end of the continent, Mozambican refugees at school in neighboring Malawi.



In the wake of the Gulf war, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds were trapped in the northern part of that country.





UNHCR / K. GOOD

After years in exile, Cambodians began returning home to a new life in 1992-93. But conditions remained uncertain for nearly 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Nepal.

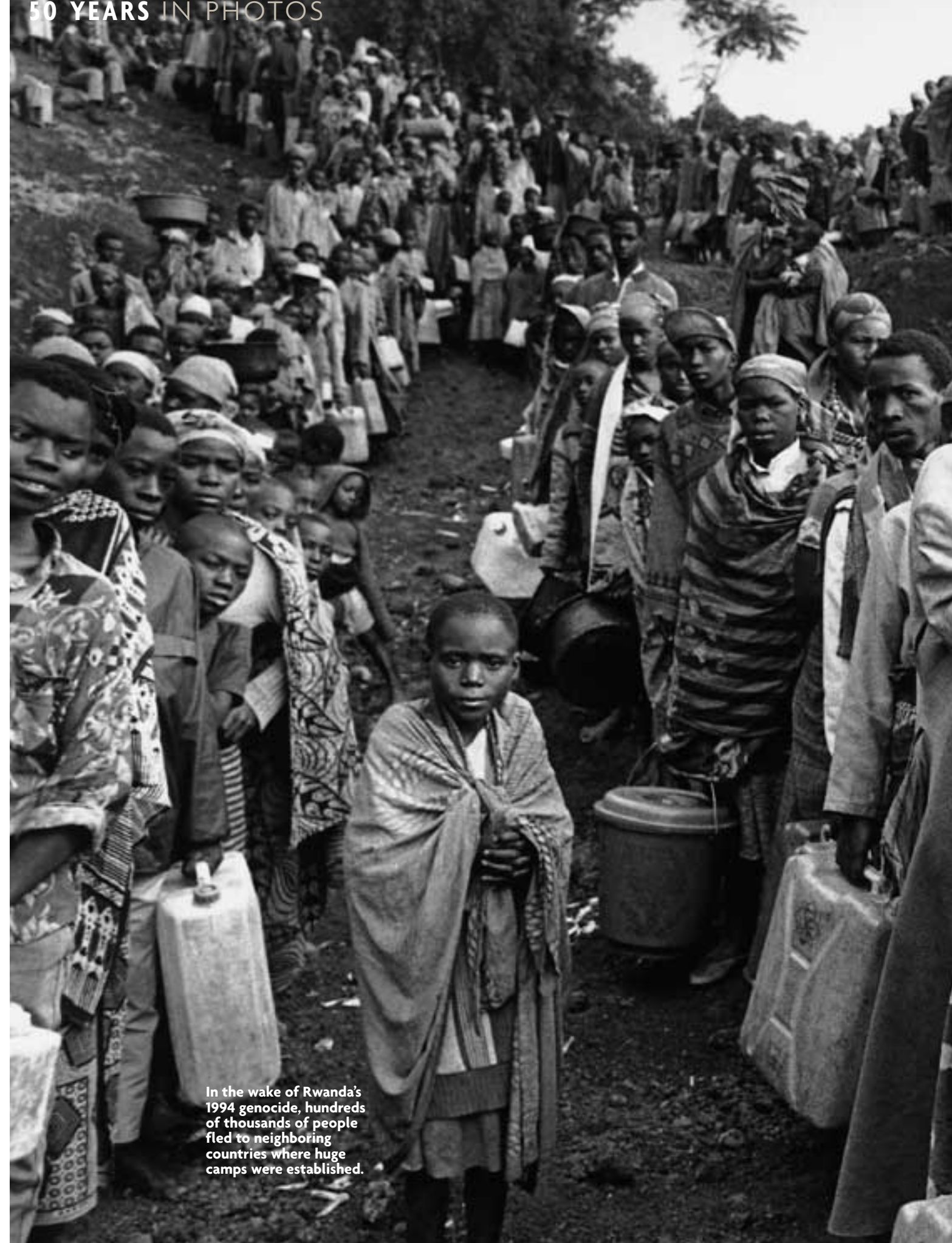


UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN



UNHCR / L. TAYLOR

West Africa was not spared. Nearly one million Liberians were uprooted in the early 1990s and then hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leonean refugees also fled that country. Clean drinking water was supplied wherever possible to prevent water-borne diseases.



In the wake of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, hundreds of thousands of people fled to neighboring countries where huge camps were established.







An estimated 700,000 people from the Balkans were given sanctuary in western Europe in the early 1990s. But as the number of people trying to reach the West, including this boatload of North Africans spotted off the Spanish coast, continued to rise, industrialized nations began tightening their asylum procedures.



UNHCR / A. HOLMANN

When civil war broke out in the Central Asian state of Tajikistan 20,000 refugees fled to Afghanistan, even though that country had been devastated by violence. Most people, including this doctor and patient, returned home by mid-1995 in an innovative UNHCR program.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, several of the newly created states were wracked by armed conflict and refugee movements. The north Caucasus republic of Ingushetia hosted many Ingush and Chechen displaced persons, including this group at a collective center in Plievo.



UNHCR / T. BOLSTAD



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Nearly one million people fled or were forcibly evicted from Kosovo in the spring of 1999.



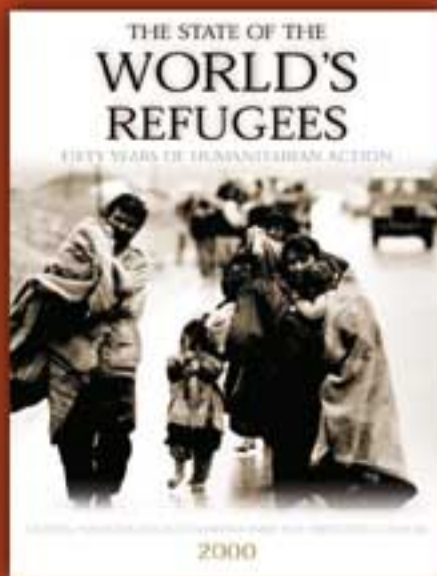
UNHCR / R. CHALASANI

When Kosovars returned to their homes after several months, they found widespread destruction.



UNHCR / M. KOBAYASHI

The end of the century was marked by a refugee exodus from East Timor. After an international force re-established order, many displaced persons went home.



UNHCR, the world's leading refugee organization, examines the major refugee crises of the last 50 years and the changing nature of international responses to the problem of forced displacement.

Refugees and other displaced people are the victims of events beyond their control: persecution, armed conflict and human rights violations. Increasingly, they are also recognized as an important factor affecting both national security and world politics. With more than one million people forced to flee their homes in Kosovo, East Timor and Chechnya in 1999 alone, it is clear that the problem of forced displacement will remain a major concern of the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This book describes the development of international refugee law and the establishment of institutions devoted to the protection of refugees and other displaced people. It traces the major crises in which

UNHCR has been involved since its establishment 50 years ago. Beginning with the mass displacement in Europe after the Second World War, the book addresses the flight of refugees from Hungary in 1956, crises associated with decolonization in Africa, the Bangladesh refugee emergency in 1971, the sustained exodus from Indochina which began in the 1970s, and the large outflows resulting from the protracted wars of the 1980s in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and Central America.

Looking at the challenges of the 1990s, the book examines the population shifts in the former Soviet region, the Kurdish exodus from northern Iraq following the Gulf war, the increasingly restrictive asylum policies in Europe and North America, and the recent crises in the Balkans, the Great Lakes region of Africa, East Timor and the Caucasus.

In this timely publication, UNHCR emphasizes the need to find lasting solutions to problems of forced displacement. Without human security, it argues, there can be no peace and stability.

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