UNHCR

United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES

A Humanitarian Agenda

1. Safeguarding human security

Refugee movements and other forms of forced displacement provide a useful (if imprecise) barometer of human security and insecurity. As a rule, people do not abandon their homes and flee from their own country or community unless they are confronted with serious threats to their life or liberty. Flight is the ultimate survival strategy, the one employed when all other coping mechanisms have been exhausted.

For the citizens of many states, life has become more difficult and dangerous over the past decade. As a result, the problem of forced displacement has become larger, more complex and geographically more widespread. Refugee movements and other forms of population displacement have also assumed a new degree of political importance, largely because of their impact upon national and regional stability. The security of people and the security of states are in that sense intimately linked.

The international community's primary response to the problem of forced displacement has been to develop new forms of humanitarian action and to devote additional resources to emergency relief. This response has undoubtedly helped to reduce human suffering and has substituted in some measure for the inability or unwillingness of the states concerned to protect their own citizens. As this chapter explains, however, it has become increasingly clear that in situations of internal armed conflict, humanitarian action is limited in its impact and can have a number of unintended and even negative consequences.

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF SECURITY

During the past decade, the notions of international and state security have undergone a fundamental reassessment by scholars, politicians and other decision-makers. Prompted in large part by the end of the cold war, this new approach to the security question provides some valuable insights into the themes which run throughout this book: the growing scale and complexity of forced displacement; the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens; and the role of humanitarian action in situations where states are unable or unwilling to provide such protection.

The changing concept of security has been examined in some detail by a number of academic analysts, as well as organizations such as the Commission on Global Governance, the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).[1] Three broad conclusions can be drawn from this discussion.

First, the notion of security has in recent years assumed a broader and more holistic meaning. Traditionally, security analysts were preoccupied with a relatively narrow range of issues, most notably the military balance of power between different states and alliances, as well as the ability of such entities to defend their sovereignty. With the end of the era of superpower rivalry, however, and the growing number of armed conflicts taking place within states, the international community has become increasingly concerned with other sources of instability, including issues such as communal conflict and social violence, poverty and unemployment, organized crime and terrorism, as well as migratory movements and mass population displacements.[2]

Many commentators have also drawn attention to the close connections that exist between these new security concerns and the way in which they interact and reinforce each other. As the president of a leading US refugee organization has suggested, "terrorism, drug smuggling, illegal migration and environmental destruction are mightily stimulated when people are tossed about by civil war or ethnic violence and left without hope or legitimate occupation."[3]

Epitomizing this new and more integrated approach to the question of international security, in January 1992, the UN Security Council issued a declaration, formally recognizing that "the non-military sources of instability in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields have become threats to peace and security."[4] While the subsequent action taken by the permanent members of that body has in many situations been disappointingly limited, international priorities have clearly been reordered. Humanitarian issues and ethical questions, which previously played a very limited role in the global security discourse, now enjoy a central place in that discussion.[5]

Second, recent years have witnessed a growing recognition of the intimate relationship that exists between the security of states and the welfare of the citizens who populate such political and territorial entities. On one hand, it has become clear that states which are militarily and strategically powerful are not necessarily strong or stable. The armed forces of the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe, for example, were enormously powerful by international standards. But those states or their governments collapsed very rapidly at the end of the 1980s, due in large part to their lack of socio-political cohesion and their failure to meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens.

On the other hand, as the World Bank has suggested, effective, responsive and inclusive states are required if people are to be properly protected, to lead healthier and happier lives, and, one might add, to avoid the trauma of displacement.[6] Historical experience has demonstrated that authoritarian and exploitative states are prone to treat their citizens as political and economic pawns, relocating them by force, imposing stringent controls upon their freedom of movement and expelling them from the territory if they are perceived to be disloyal.

Nevertheless, when state structures disintegrate and disappear, forced population displacements are also very likely to ensue. As one scholar has commented, "states constitute the primary nexus when it comes to security for individuals and groups."[7] As the recent cases of countries such as Afghanistan, Liberia and Somalia suggest, forced displacements of people are a clear indication that the web of rights and obligations which links the citizen to the state has broken down.

A third recent evolution in the notion of security is to be found in the growing focus on international cooperation, in contrast to the more traditional emphasis on competition and conflict. The principal threats to international, state and human security, it has been recognized, are transnational in nature, and cannot be effectively addressed by means of unilateral action. At the same time, the demise of communism in its established forms has removed one of the most important impediments to cooperation between states.

Of course, continuing ideological differences and competing national or regional interests continue to obstruct such cooperation, as witnessed in relation to a number of recent or contemporary crises involving refugees: the deployment of a multinational force in the Great Lakes region of Africa; the use of force by external powers and alliances during the war in former Yugoslavia; and the continuing differences of opinion expressed in relation to the Palestinian question, to give just three examples.

Nevertheless, there is substantial evidence to confirm the general trend towards multilateralism and international cooperation: the growing size and influence of regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Southern African Development Community, and the Association of South-East Asian Nations; the participation of states and other actors in a series of international conferences on global issues such as human rights, women, the environment, population and social development; and the new degree of consensus which has emerged in the UN Security Council, reflected in the declining use of the veto by that body's permanent members.

The growth of international cooperation can also be seen in the activities of non-state actors. Increasingly, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and the institutions of civil society are pooling their resources at the regional and international levels. Greatly facilitated by the introduction of new information and communications technologies, this development has also contributed to the weakening of principles such as national sovereignty and the inviolability of borders. In the era of the fax machine, satellite dish and internet, even the world's most authoritarian governments are finding it difficult to impose controls over the circulation of images, information and ideas.

THE SOURCES OF HUMAN INSECURITY

As suggested in the preceding section, the notion of security has in recent years been given a broader meaning and has assumed a more human and 'people-centred' aspect. UNDP's *Human Development Report* has played a particularly important role in the development of this new paradigm. As the 1994 edition of that publication explained, human security has two principal aspects: safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression, and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life. "The loss of human security," the report explains, "can be a slow, silent process or an abrupt, loud emergency. It can be human-made – due to wrong policy choices. It can stem from the forces of nature. Or it can be a combination of both."[8]

The balance sheet of human security suggests that many gains have been made in recent years. The global economy continues to expand, bringing tangible benefits to millions of people around the world. More people than ever before are living in democratic states, and therefore have an opportunity to participate in the governance of their country. And the longstanding threat of superpower confrontation and nuclear war has effectively been removed from the international environment. Unfortunately, however, a substantial proportion of the world's population has gained little or no benefit from these advances. Indeed, for the citizens of many states, life has become progressively more difficult and dangerous.

Polarization and poverty

Although aggregate global incomes have now reached unprecedented levels due to the forces of technological innovation and international trade, recent years have also witnessed a further widening in economic disparities, both within and between states.[9] During the past three decades,

the income differential between the richest and poorest fifth of the world's population has more than doubled, from 30:1 to 78:1. In the less-developed regions, no fewer than 89 countries now have lower *per capita* incomes than they had ten years ago. Nineteen of these states, including Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan and Venezuela, are poorer today than they were in 1960.

About a quarter of the world's 5.7 billion people now live below the World Bank's official poverty line, including more than 100 million people in the industrialized states. As this statistic indicates, the disparities are not simply restricted to the less-developed regions. In both Britain and Australia, for example, the richest 20 per cent of the population earn 10 times more than the poorest 20 per cent.

The growth of such striking inequities within the industrialized states has stimulated a greater awareness of the fact that economic growth alone does not automatically lead to an across-the-board improvement in living standards. Moreover, while international trade is clearly a powerful instrument of economic development, serving in many cases to strengthen the less dynamic economies, it may also marginalize those which are least able to adapt in the face of growing, and often unregulated, competition. To illustrate the disparities which have emerged, the poorest 20 per cent of the world's people enjoy only one per cent of global trade. The whole continent of Africa currently accounts for less than five per cent of global trading activity.

According to many analysts, the restructuring of the global economy and the penetration of market forces is leading to the emergence of a two-tier system of states quite different from the one suggested by the notion of a rich 'North' and a poor 'South'. Thus in recent years, the traditionally prosperous regions of North America and Western Europe have been joined by the dynamic economies of East and South-East Asia. In sharp contrast, many countries in Africa, the former Soviet Union, the Caribbean and South Asia have recorded much lower rates of growth and income (see Figure 1.1).

Many of the world's poorer nations are now locked into a vicious circle of economic stagnation, environmental degradation and impoverishment, reinforced in some cases by rapid rates of population growth. In order to meet their debt repayment obligations while maintaining standards of living at a minimum survival level, some countries have felt obliged to cannibalize their capital base and to exploit their natural resources in a completely unsustainable manner. It is particularly disturbing to note that a major share of the bilateral and multilateral aid provided to low-income countries is being used to service debts, instead of being used for its original purpose: human development and the alleviation of poverty.

Those countries which exhibit the greatest potential for growth often receive the highest level of external investment and aid, while the least dynamic and strategically unimportant countries have become increasingly dispensable. Since 1990, aid to the least developed countries has fallen by seven per cent while assistance to the states of Eastern Europe and Central Asia has more than doubled. This comes at a time when the richer countries are giving less in official development assistance: the $59 billion provided in 1995 represents the lowest ratio of aid to gross national product – just 0.27 percent – since the United Nations adopted a target of 0.7 percent in 1970.[10]

In this context, the primary response to crisis in the poorest economies has often been a tough prescription of economic reform or structural adjustment. While reform is certainly needed, experience has demonstrated that the type of economic policies demanded by the world's most affluent states and most influential financial institutions can carry a high human and social price: unemployment, declining wages, reduced public services and growing income differentials.

Poverty and economic polarization alone do not produce forced population displacements. In fact, there are a number of countries which, although very poor, have in recent years been largely unaffected by the persecution, conflict and human rights abuses which oblige people to abandon

their homes: Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia, to give four examples from Southern Africa. But such cases are the exceptions which prove the rule. In general, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that countries with low and declining standards of living are particularly prone to complex emergencies, refugee outflows and other forms of forced displacement. [11]

The process of economic polarization also has an obvious relevance to migratory movements of a more voluntary nature. Some of those people who are unable to satisfy their needs and aspirations at home will inevitably try to move to a country where their prospects appear to be better. And if they cannot achieve that goal by regular and legal means, they may be tempted to seek admission by submitting a claim for refugee status.

Social and political instability

As we move towards the end of the 20th century, more people than ever before are living in countries with relatively pluralistic political systems. According to one estimate, the number of states with civilian governments, appointed by means of competitive elections, has doubled since 1984.[12] Whole regions that were once under authoritarian rule – the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and South America, for example – have now made at least a partial transition to democracy. Nevertheless, the citizens of many countries continue to suffer from human rights abuses, social turmoil and political instability.

A good number of states, primarily but not exclusively in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, remain under authoritarian forms of government. In many instances, moreover, such states have come under relatively little pressure to reform, usually because the world's more prosperous countries have allowed their quest for trade and investment opportunities to override any commitment which they have to democracy and human rights. In the light of events in countries such as Haiti, Iraq, Myanmar and Zaire, it hardly needs to be said that states which lack a pluralistic political system and which disregard human and minority rights are particularly prone to refugee movements, mass expulsions and other forms of forced displacement.

Many of the countries which have in recent years established the formal structures of democracy are now affected by varying degrees of social and political instability. In the second half of the 1980s, a number of related phenomena prompted authoritarian governments in many parts of the world to introduce political reforms: the growth of pro-democracy movements and other forms of popular protest; the declining legitimacy of Soviet communism and the eventual demise of the USSR; and the mounting pressure for political and economic liberalization exercised by the more prosperous states and the international financial institutions.

It would be profoundly foolish to mourn the passing of regimes which were responsible for terrible violations of human rights. Nevertheless, it is now quite clear that a proportion of the states that introduced more pluralistic political structures and more liberal economic systems in the late 1980s and early 1990s lacked the socio-political cohesion and civic culture required to underpin such rapid and far-reaching reforms.

The resultant instability has been manifested in a particularly vivid manner in parts of the former Soviet Union. Sadly, for many people living in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the economic and political freedoms of the post-communist era have actually been associated with declining levels of physical, material and legal security, a situation which has given some legitimacy to calls by anti-reformists for a halt, or even a reversal, to the process of change (see Figure 1.2). Three manifestations of that insecurity are of particular relevance to this book: the spate of ethnically-based conflicts which have erupted in many of the newly-established CIS states; the displacement or involuntary migration of some nine million former Soviet citizens during the past six years; and the many problems related to statelessness and citizenship which have emerged with the dissolution of the USSR and its replacement by 15 different states.

While such problems have structural origins, they have undoubtedly been exacerbated (and in some cases even created) by people who have an interest in disrupting the democratization process: politicians, government officials, diaspora communities, arms dealers, mercenaries and criminal syndicates. As one expert from the region explains, "violent conflicts have now become a routine reality because a highly militarized society, with low civic morality amongst its members, was confronted with the sudden collapse of state control in many areas... permitting a large number of ambitious and corrupt persons and groups to exercise their activities in a social space which had lost many of its identity parameters and legal constraints."[13]

While the process of state formation is proving to be a turbulent one in many parts of the post-communist world, other parts of the globe are also witnessing the progressive weakening of established state structures and the emergence of new political entities (see Figure 1.3). In many parts of Africa, for example, governments have made a substantial retreat from their role in the provision of basic services such as health, education and social welfare, and have lost their ability to undertake the basic functions of the state: collecting taxes, paying its officials, maintaining law and order and defending the territorial integrity of the country.[14] As a result, the state has been stripped of its legitimacy and has lost its ability to act as a social and political mediator in the face of growing civil unrest.

In situations of declining prosperity and opportunity, people have tended to seek security in communal allegiances, a process which has reinforced the potential for social and political conflict. In order to maintain a semblance of stability and to protect their privileged position, ruling elites have in many instances become dependent on the repressive machinery of the state (and increasingly on private security companies) thereby reducing its legitimacy still further. In this context, calls for political liberalization have often been met by an authoritarian backlash, manifested in the repression – and sometimes the mass expulsion – of people who pose a threat to ruling regimes.

In the most extreme cases, exemplified by countries such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia, the political nexus between state and citizens – which was never very strong – has been definitively ruptured. The general pattern in such countries has been for the state to lose control over increasing amounts of territory as armed challenges to its power have mounted. With the progressive destruction of the public infrastructure, informal and illicit economic activity has become the main generator of wealth, further undermining the reach of the state and its ability to protect its citizens.

These extreme cases of state dissolution are both a cause and consequence of armed conflict, and have provided the background for many of the largest flows of displaced people during the past few years. Elsewhere, as in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the social nexus between different groups of citizens has broken down, leading to terrible forms of violence and massive population movements (see Box 1.1).

VIOLENCE AND WAR-BASED ECONOMIES

According to some criteria, the world is now a much safer place than it was in the recent past. The number of ongoing conflicts between sovereign states can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The period of nuclear proliferation is over, and many of the regional 'proxy conflicts' that were characteristic of the cold war era have also been brought to an end. Nevertheless, for millions of people around the globe, violent conflict remains the most direct threat to their life and liberty and their ability to remain peacefully in their own homes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, in countries ranging from Angola and Mozambique in Southern Africa to El Salvador and Nicaragua in Central America and to Cambodia in South-East Asia, the pattern of armed conflict was broadly similar. If the government of a third world state was backed by one of the superpowers, then the other superpower would attempt to unseat or at least undermine that regime by supporting a rebel movement, not infrequently, it must be acknowledged, under the guise of humanitarian and refugee assistance programmes. This rivalry fuelled the militarization of many low-income states, enabling regimes and ruling elites which lacked any popular support to remain in power, while underlying political and social conflicts remained unresolved.

The end of the cold war, it was widely expected, would lead to a general reduction of such armed conflicts. First, it was assumed that with the disappearance of the east-west ideological dispute, the underlying rationale for these wars would also vanish. Second, there was good reason to believe that the dramatic reduction of superpower support for states and rebel groups in developing countries would lead many conflicts to burn out, or at least to diminish in intensity.

Third, it had been expected by some commentators – somewhat naively perhaps – that a generous 'peace dividend' stemming from global disarmament might lead to higher flows of development assistance to the poorer countries, enabling them to address their social and economic problems.

These assumptions, it is now realized, greatly underestimated the strength of the internal forces driving some of these wars, as witnessed in the continuation and transformation of the conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan and Angola. At the same time, the optimistic outlook which characterized the end of the 1980s neglected the extent to which new conflicts would emerge in different parts of the world, many of them the manifestation of deep-rooted processes and problems that were ignored by the international community during the cold war.

This is not to suggest that the armed conflicts which have erupted during the past few years can simply be regarded as the product of 'tribal hatreds' or 'ancient animosities', phrases which are employed far too freely by journalists and believed far too readily by politicians and policymakers. Recent experience has demonstrated that hatred and animosity are political resources which can, if the circumstances are right, be mobilized (and even manufactured) by groups who are struggling for political power. Unable to gain external support for their cause by exploiting the rivalry of the superpowers, governments and other actors alike have resorted to 'playing the communal card', a process which has often culminated in social violence and armed conflict.[15]

The privatization of violence

Up to 35 civil wars and a much larger number of lower-intensity conflicts are currently being fought around the world (see Figure 1.5). The parties to these conflicts have in many cases flagrantly violated international humanitarian law by adopting tactics which rely upon the brutalization of civilian populations. As one commentator has written, these include "conspicuous atrocity, systematic rape, hostage-taking, forced starvation and siege, the destruction of religious and historic monuments, the use of shells and rockets against civilian targets (especially homes, hospitals and crowded places like markets or water sources) and the use of land-mines to make large areas uninhabitable."[16]

In many war-affected countries, the absence of adequate resources to pay or feed the combatants has forced soldiers and other fighters to fend for themselves, whether through the informal taxing of civilians at roadblocks, for example, or by the outright looting and pillaging of the population. While this crude process of 'privatising violence' has helped to address the problem of payment, it has also led to the growing fragmentation of armed groups and a loss of control over the combatants.

With formal military authority breaking down, combatants have tended to mobilize around loyalties and allegiances which have as much to do with personal survival and enrichment as with any political or ideological agenda. Such predatory tactics have undoubtedly been facilitated by the widening availability (and declining price) of light weapons, land-mines and other instruments of war.

Recent experience has also demonstrated that internal wars do not necessarily come to an end when foreign support has been withdrawn or reduced, nor do they necessarily finish when a large proportion of the civilian population has been displaced or impoverished. In fact, in countries such as Angola, Afghanistan and Sudan, where war has raged for many years, the intensity of violence has taken a number of periodic upturns since the beginning of the 1990s.

One of the reasons for this development is that in the absence of external support, governments, armed opposition movements and local warlords have all been able to establish sophisticated 'war-based economies' to sustain and even expand their activities. In Afghanistan, for example, poppy cultivation has more than doubled during the past decade and has become a vital resource in the country's armed conflict. Similarly, in countries such as Angola, Cambodia, Liberia, Myanmar and Sierra Leone, armed groups and state officials have supported and even enriched themselves through the systematic extraction of natural resources such as timber, rubber and precious stones.

In such situations, the function of violence has also changed. While the parties to these conflicts may continue to evoke a social, political or ideological rationale for their struggle, their activities are actually aimed at the illicit accumulation of wealth. The line between political action, social banditry and organized crime has become very difficult to draw in many parts of the world, not least in relatively developed conflict areas such as former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus.

The resource flows which sustain many of these war economies have in many senses been facilitated by the process of globalization. For example, a number of multinational companies have shown little reluctance to establish deals with the armed factions in Liberia, so that they can gain access to the valuable natural resources which that country has to offer. In return, the hard currency provided by those companies allows the armed factions to purchase additional weapons on the international arms market – a market which has been eager to find new customers.

At the same time, the impact of the globalization process can be seen in the activities of certain diaspora or transnational communities, channelling financial and human resources to conflicts in places such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, Turkey and former Yugoslavia. While information on this issue is not easy to collect, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the wars in these and other countries have been sustained in part by emigrant and exiled populations in Europe, North America and other parts of the world.[17]

War-based economies are thus both a cause and a consequence of the failed state syndrome. On one hand, they are symptomatic of a state's inability (or unwillingness) to protect its citizens, to regulate the economic activities which take place on its territory and to prevent the use of public resources for private gain. On the other hand, by systematically exploiting these conditions, armed groups, warlords and corrupt government officials deprive the state of revenue and legitimacy, thereby reinforcing its disintegration.

Such conditions, of course, provide very fertile ground for political instability, social violence and forced population displacements. They also provide a major obstacle to the repatriation and reintegration of displaced populations as well as the broader task of post-conflict reconstruction.

War-based economies will not disappear with the signing of formal peace agreements and the introduction of large-scale aid and development programmes. Nor will the process of

demobilization necessarily bring an end to social violence, rooted as it usually is in poverty, inequality and the absence of opportunity. The recruitment of child and adolescent soldiers, for example, which in many cases is voluntary, represents a crude form of social advancement for young people, providing them with an identity and status which has been denied to them in civilian society. Enabling such youngsters to survive without resorting to the use of violence constitutes a vital component of the peacebuilding process.

PATTERNS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

As the preceding sections of this chapter have shown, the security of many people is currently being threatened by a complex mixture of factors: by unbalanced development, economic decline and environmental degradation (see Box 1.2); by state collapse, state formation and the authoritarian exercise of state power; and by new forms of violence and warfare, which, although based in many instances on communal allegiances, also serve as a camouflage for personal or factional gain.

Given the difficulties involved in quantifying human security and insecurity, it is not easy to say whether such threats are more widespread and intense today than they were in the past. On one hand, there are many analysts who point to 'the new world disorder' and 'the coming anarchy'. Taking it as almost self-evident that life in the contemporary world is nastier and more brutish than it was in previous years, the representatives of such schools of thought tend to envisage a future which in certain parts of the world is characterized by mounting lawlessness, an irreversible process of social and political fragmentation, as well as growing conflict over scarce natural resources.[18]

On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that such pessimism is unwarranted and based upon a faulty reading of both historical and contemporary evidence. According to the editor of the journal *Foreign Policy*, "the cold war period was much more violent than is the current period. Of course, any unnecessary deaths are an outrage... But we have not seen the kind of sustained carnage in recent years that our grandparents and parents did..." "Today," he concludes, "despite increased surface turbulence, the international system is structurally sound because none of the great powers seeks a hegemonic role in the international system."[19]

While such comments are a useful corrective to some of the more apocalyptic descriptions of the contemporary world, they can appear more than a little sanguine when viewed in relation to recent events in different parts of the globe: the genocide in Rwanda; the use of rape as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia; the deliberate expulsion of minority groups throughout much of the Caucasus region; the deployment of child soldiers in countries such as Sierra Leone and Sudan; the brutal reign of the warlords in Liberia and Somalia; and the bombing of fleeing civilians in Chechnya, to give just a few examples. Nor is this more optimistic interpretation of the post-cold war era supported by the rising number of people affected by forced displacement and the growing level of humanitarian assistance needed to sustain such populations – the subjects which are addressed in the following sections of this chapter.

The scale and complexity of the problem

During the past few years, the global refugee problem has changed in a number of ways. First, the overall scale of forced displacement has increased. In 1987, for example, UNHCR was providing protection and assistance to some 12 million people around the world. Ten years later, that figure has increased to 22 million.

These figures do not tell the whole story, however, as UNHCR's statistics do not include many victims of forced displacement: a large proportion of the world's internally displaced people, Palestinian refugees, and people who have been uprooted by development projects, for example. Significantly, and for reasons that will be explored later in the chapter, a declining proportion of the world's displaced people are refugees in the conventional sense of the word, namely people who are living outside of their own country as a result of persecution or violence.

There is also some evidence to suggest that mass population movements are now assuming a larger scale and occurring within a shorter timeframe than in previous years. This trend has been witnessed most graphically in the flight of more than a million Iraqi Kurds after the war in the Persian Gulf, the internal and external displacement of up to four million people by the conflict in former Yugoslavia, the exodus of over a million Rwandese citizens after the 1994 genocide, as well as the movement of more than two million displaced people within and from Liberia. According to some estimates, almost the whole of Liberia's rural population has been displaced at one time or another since the beginning of the conflict in December 1989.[20]

A number of trends appear to have contributed to the growing scale and speed of forced displacement in these and other parts of the world: the emergence of new forms of warfare, entailing the destruction of whole social, economic and political systems; the spread of light weapons and land-mines, available at prices which enable whole populations – including their youngest members – to be armed; and, perhaps most significantly, the use of mass evictions and expulsions as a weapon of war and as a means of establishing culturally or ethnically homogenous societies.

A number of commentators have also suggested that the large scale of some population displacements and migratory movements can be attributed to a form of mass desperation, provoked by very rapid processes of social, political and economic change. The willingness of many Albanians to pay hundreds of dollars to leave their own country, despite the dangers of the journey across the Adriatic Sea and their limited chances for admission to Italy, provides a possible case in point.

While most commonly associated with Bosnia and other parts of former Yugoslavia, the horror of ethnic cleansing has also been witnessed in other parts of the world, not least in the former Soviet Union. As one analyst has written, "the Caucasus – which has always had a multiplicity of nationalities... is now more ethnically 'pure' than it has ever been. Many refugees, driven out of their homes by people of a different ethnicity, are unlikely ever to return."[21]

Commenting upon such developments, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has observed that "the forced displacement of minorities, including depopulation and repopulation tactics in support of territorial claims and self-determination, has become an abominable characteristic of the contemporary world."[22] One of the most difficult issues now confronting UNHCR is to find fair, appropriate and durable solutions for people in areas such as former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus who have been deliberately displaced ('ethnically cleansed') from their usual place of residence and who are unable to return safely to their homes .

Forced displacement in general, and rural depopulation in particular, have also become increasingly common weapons of war, even in armed conflicts where ethnic cleansing is not a specific objective of the parties involved. In some countries, such as Liberia or Somalia, the tactic of rural depopulation has been used to permit the theft of cattle, property and other assets, whereas in other situations, such as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, southern Sudan and eastern Myanmar, civilian populations have been forcibly dispersed or relocated for primarily political reasons, so as to deprive rebel movements of their natural supporters. While it was initially described in conventional terms, as a refugee movement, the massive exodus from Rwanda in 1994 can also be conceptualized as a strategic population withdrawal by the defeated regime,

which wished to retain its control over large numbers of people and to establish a hostile military force on the country's borders.

The geography of displacement

As well as increasing in scale, the geographical scope of forced displacement can also be said to have widened in recent years. But this trend is not a simple one. During the past decade, a number of conflicts and associated problems of forced displacement have been resolved, most notably in areas such as Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua), Southern Africa (Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa) and South-East Asia (Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam).

At the same time, however, new crises have exploded in regions which were previously unaffected by the problem of forced displacement or where involuntary population movements did not come to the attention of the international community. The crisis in former Yugoslavia, for example, created some four million refugees and displaced people, the largest population movement in Europe since the end of the second world war. And as indicated earlier, in the CIS region, some nine million people are thought to have been displaced from their homes in recent years.

Other regions with large numbers of forcibly displaced people have featured less prominently in the headlines. South Asia, for example, which is rarely recognized as a 'refugee-affected' region, has in recent years witnessed a succession of cross-border movements: from Bhutan and Tibet to Nepal; from Myanmar to Bangladesh and Thailand; and from Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Tibet to India (see Map B). According to one recent estimate, moreover, the 750,000 people in South Asia who are currently protected and assisted by UNHCR constitute less than half of all the displaced people in the sub-continent.[23]

In a number of locations around the world, whole 'neighbourhoods' of states have become affected by interlocking and mutually reinforcing patterns of armed conflict and forced displacement.[24] This phenomenon can be observed in the Caucasus, for example, a region which includes no fewer than six entities which have produced refugees and displaced people: Abkhazia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, North and South Ossetia. It can also be seen in Central Africa, where forced population displacements have recently taken place within and between nine contiguous states: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia. In Central and Eastern Africa, forced displacement is not simply a consequence of conflict and violence; it is also a primary cause of strife and instability.

As these examples suggest, forced population displacements are becoming increasingly complex. Movements of refugees and internally displaced people now often criss-cross each other, collecting and discarding people on the way. At the same time, there would appear to be a growing number of situations in which people are repeatedly uprooted, expelled or relocated within and across state borders, forcing them to live a desperately insecure and nomadic existence.

One of the better-known examples of this trend concerns the plight of 20,000 boys from southern Sudan, who, having initially been displaced within their own country, were subsequently forced into Ethiopia, then back to Sudan and eventually into Kenya.[25] Displaced people in the border areas between Myanmar and Thailand, between Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, and between Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania have experienced similarly repeated displacements.

During the past few years, a growing proportion of the people who have succeeded in escaping from their own country have found that their new situation is just as – if not more – insecure than the one they left behind. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, for example, refugees have been

forcibly expelled from three different countries of asylum. Rwandese refugees in Zaire have effectively been held as hostages by the political leaders and former soldiers responsible for the 1994 genocide, and their camps turned into military support bases. As a result, those settlements have in turn come under attack from forces opposed to the former regime.

Paradoxically, in an era when so many people have become the victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of mass expulsion, many others have found it impossible to escape from their own country and to find refuge elsewhere. In some cases, as in Bosnia or Sri Lanka, for example, their departure has been blocked by government or opposition forces who wish to maintain control over the civilian population. Elsewhere, such as the case of the Iraqi Kurds who fled towards Turkey, or the Haitian boat people heading for the United States, their flight has been obstructed by potential countries of asylum.

As the Haitian refugee problem (and the US response to it) also suggests, the problem of forced displacement has become increasingly enmeshed with the broader pattern of international migration. Rightly or wrongly, people wishing to move to the world's more affluent countries have increasingly sought entry to such states by submitting claims to refugee status. This trend is a result not only of the material insecurity of life in many parts of the world, but also the progressive closure of official immigration channels in the industrialized states and the penetration of the international media, communications and transportation networks into the remotest corners of the earth.

Diaspora communities, many of which are themselves the product of forced population displacements, have played an important part in maintaining the volume and determining the direction of such migratory movements. The Tamil who decides to leave Sri Lanka, for example, will almost invariably make use of information, resources and contacts provided by compatriots in Europe or North America in the bid to leave his or her homeland. And when that person arrives in a country such as Switzerland, the United Kingdom or the United States, he or she will depend upon the social network established by a previous generation of migrants and asylum seekers in order to find accommodation, work and, perhaps, to make a claim for refugee status.

The public profile of displacement

Finally, while the problem of forced displacement has certainly grown in scale and complexity during the past few years, it has also assumed a new degree of public and political importance. Not so long ago, the refugee question was primarily the preserve of relief agencies, development organizations and human rights bodies. Of course, this issue played an important part in both the ideology and the practice of the cold war; the western states were particularly adept at using exiled populations to discredit and in some cases to undermine those governments allied to the Soviet Union. But in recent years the problem of forced displacement – and humanitarian issues more generally – have been the subject of increasing discussion in political and military fora such as the UN Security Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

This development derives in part from the changing nature of the international security agenda, the central role of forced displacement in so many of the world's recent crises, and the fear that growing numbers of uprooted people might try to make their way to richer and more stable parts of the globe. But there is little doubt that the intensive media coverage given to the plight of displaced people has also forced governments and other actors to address the situation of uprooted people, even when they might have preferred to do nothing.

The role of the media is, however, highly selective in nature. When the first US marines landed on the shores of Somalia during the crisis of 1992, they were greeted by the lights and cameras of many television crews. But on the other side of the African continent, in Liberia and Sierra Leone,

the massive displacement of the civilian population and the activities of ECOMOG – the West African peacekeeping force – have attracted minimal international attention.

Concepts and categories

While the notion of 'forced displacement' is now an established feature of the humanitarian vocabulary, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration is not always an easy one to sustain. It is generally accepted that almost all migration involves some kind of compulsion; labour migration for example, while usually regarded as 'voluntary', is often prompted by poverty.

Equally, almost all migratory movements involve an element of choice. However terrible the circumstances, people frequently have some latitude to decide where to go and, indeed, whether to flee at all. It is a notable but neglected fact that even in the largest population displacements, some people will for one reason or the other decide to stay where they are, rather than to flee.

Looking at the issue in this way has some important implications for humanitarian organizations. Because flight often requires resources and social connections (especially if it involves long-distance, cross-border or intercontinental travel) those people who manage to escape from a situation of danger normally represent just a small minority of those whose lives and liberty are at risk. It is for this reason that the protection and assistance provided to refugees and asylum seekers must be combined with similar if not greater efforts on behalf of those people who are unable or unwilling to leave their own country.

The problem of distinguishing between movement by force and migration by choice is in many situations coupled with a related conceptual difficulty; that of differentiating between 'planned' and 'spontaneous' population movements. This is not simply an academic question, as it raises the whole question of individual and institutional responsibility for forced displacements – an increasingly important issue given the international community's current interest in the punishment of people who have committed war crimes. Interestingly, the International Law Commission has recently defined the practice of 'arbitrary deportation or forcible transfer of population' as a 'crime against the peace and security of mankind' in a draft code on this matter.

According to one expert on international migration, "most of the world's population flows since World War II did not merely happen; they were made to happen."[26] But the way in which they were made to happen, and the degree of intent and organization involved, clearly varies from case to case. Flight may be the unintended or incidental outcome of armed conflict or persecution. And yet, as recent events in former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus have demonstrated, refugee movements and internal population displacements may be the very purpose of the violence inflicted by one group of people on another.

The growing complexity of forced displacement, and the growing recognition that refugees represent just one category of uprooted and vulnerable people, has had some important implications for UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations. In the words of the High Commissioner for Refugees, "although my office is a refugee protection agency, it is increasingly having to deal with a wider range of civilian victims in refugee-like situations and whose flight must be addressed if we are to seek solutions to humanitarian crises... "[27]

In few places is this comment more clearly illustrated than in the former Soviet Union, a region which in recent years has experienced a bewildering variety of forced population displacements. According to the plan of action drawn up at a recent international conference on this problem, no fewer than eight different categories of displaced person or migrant can be found in the CIS region: 'refugees', 'persons in refugee-like situations', 'internally displaced people', 'involuntarily relocating persons', 'repatriants', 'formerly deported peoples', 'illegal migrants' and 'ecological migrants' (see Box 1.3).

Such typologies are always imperfect. A forcibly displaced person or population may straddle several categories simultaneously or over time; someone may initially be displaced within their own country, then become a refugee in a neighbouring state, then be displaced again within their country of asylum, before finally repatriating to their homeland.

Such categorizations are also of little relevance (and may even be the source of inequity and conflict) when different types of displaced person – not to mention the local population – are living alongside each other in equally difficult circumstances. It is for this reason that UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations often provide relief and rehabilitation assistance on a community-wide basis and to all needy people in a given geographical area, irrespective of whether they are refugees, returnees, internally displaced people or local residents.

At the same time, there has been a growing recognition of the need to respond to the problem of forced displacement on a regional basis, rather than establishing separate humanitarian programmes for individual countries. In the Great Lakes region of Africa, for example, the displacements which have taken place within and across national borders are so complex and interrelated as to make a regional approach the only viable means of resolving the problem.

Despite the definitional difficulties and operational dilemmas identified above, it would be misleading to suggest that the distinction between forced and involuntary migrants, and between different types of displaced person, no longer have any relevance. Indeed, some of the most pressing and problematic issues on the international humanitarian agenda derive from such distinctions.

As later chapters of this book will ask, what can be done to safeguard the security of internally displaced people, who, unlike refugees, remain in their own country? To what extent is it useful to distinguish the internally displaced from other populations who are affected by war and violence, but who remain in their own homes? What responsibility do UNHCR and other international organizations have towards returnees – people who were once in need of asylum and international protection, but who have now gone back to their homeland? And what methods can be used to determine whether an asylum seeker should be granted refugee status, or considered as an irregular migrant who can be returned to his or her own country?

HUMANITARIAN ACTION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

The world's response to the problem of forced displacement – and UNHCR's role in relation to that problem – has changed significantly during the past decade. Until the mid to late 1980s, the international community was primarily concerned with cross-border refugee movements, and devoted most of its efforts to providing refugee populations with protection and assistance in the countries of asylum to which they had fled.

During this period, there was a broad international consensus that UNHCR could only respect its humanitarian and non-political status by confining its activities to those countries of asylum and by responding to refugee movements once they had taken place. Any effort to address the problems of human insecurity and displacement within countries of origin, it was agreed, would have involved the organization in activities which fell beyond the scope of its mandate.

In recent years, a number of different factors have combined to bring about a fundamental reassessment of this traditional approach to the refugee problem.[28] These include, for example:

- the mounting concern of host and donor countries about the financial and other costs incurred in providing refugees with indefinite protection and assistance, and their growing unwillingness to admit large numbers of displaced people;

- a growing awareness that refugee movements can constitute a serious threat to national, regional and even international security;

- the changing military and strategic value of refugee populations in the post-cold war period;

- an initial willingness amongst some of the world's more powerful states to intervene in countries affected by acute political and humanitarian crisis, particularly when those states are weak or have some strategic significance;

- a recognition of the need to protect, assist and find solutions for groups of uprooted and vulnerable people other than refugees, especially those who are displaced within their own countries; and,

- a desire to consolidate peace and prevent the recurrence of violence in war-torn societies through measures designed to ensure the return and effective reintegration of displaced populations.

As a result of these and other developments, a new international consensus has emerged, recognizing the need to address humanitarian problems within countries of origin and to avert those situations in which people are obliged to abandon their homes in order to survive. Thus it has been proposed that the traditional right to asylum, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments, should be joined by another: the right to stay in one's own country and community, in conditions of physical, material, legal and psychological security.

While this right has not been formalized in international law, the UN Human Rights Commission has affirmed "the right of persons to remain at peace in their own homes, on their own lands and in their own countries." Similarly, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has asserted that "the right to live in one's native land is a very precious and fundamental right." Displacement and expulsion, he observes, "by its very nature deprives victims of the exercise of many other rights and is frequently accompanied by physical abuse and even by the ultimate violation of the right to life."[29]

The growth of humanitarian assistance

There was a widespread belief at the beginning of the 1990s that the international community would be able to uphold its commitment to maintain peace and security in the world's less stable regions, thereby addressing the problem of forced displacement in a more proactive manner and realizing the right of people to live safely in their own homes. The UN Secretary-General's 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, for example, evoked the establishment of a collective security system which would be capable of bringing stability to troubled regions by, if necessary, imposing peace upon the parties to armed conflicts.

Since that time, however, the mixed results of UN-mandated military operations in countries such as Somalia and former Yugoslavia have led to a very evident retreat from the more ambitious and interventionist approach of the early 1990s. This trend has been unambiguously demonstrated in the Great Lakes region: first, in the Security Council's decision to reduce the UN's military presence in Rwanda, even after the genocide had taken place in 1994; second, in the Secretary-General's subsequent inability to gain support for a UNHCR proposal later in the year, urging the

deployment of a force to separate Rwandese refugees and military elements in eastern Zaire; and again in the latter half of 1996, when states failed to deploy a multinational force in that area, despite the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis which had erupted there.

As these and other examples suggest, the world's more powerful states are becoming increasingly reluctant to take the decisive action that is sometimes required to avert political crises and bring an end to massive human rights abuses. As the International Institute for Strategic Studies has observed, such countries "are in no mood to sacrifice their well-being for supposed international advantage... Even the brief post-cold war sense of humanitarian obligation has begun to give way to colder realpolitik calculations of what can be done."[30]

The exceptions to this statement tend to prove the rule. It is now widely acknowledged, for example, that the eventual decision of the NATO states to intervene more actively in former Yugoslavia was prompted as much by the need to sustain the North Atlantic alliance as any humanitarian consideration. Similarly, there is little doubt that in the more recent case of Albania, the eagerness of certain states to lend military support to the delivery of humanitarian relief has derived primarily from a desire to stem an unwanted exodus of asylum seekers.[31] Significantly, at a Security Council debate on the protection of emergency assistance held in May 1997, the permanent members of that body effectively buried the concept of 'humanitarian intervention' which had achieved such prominence in the early 1990s. As the US government stressed, "the UN cannot send peacekeepers into each and every emergency."[32]

Nevertheless, and as the case of former Yugoslavia demonstrates again, it has proved impossible for the industrialized states simply to turn their back on complex emergencies taking place in other parts of the world. Prompted in many instances by public opinion and the international media, states have often responded to situations of armed conflict and forced displacement with humanitarian action, often on a massive scale.[33]

During the past decade, the resources devoted to humanitarian assistance have soared (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7). Among official aid agencies, spending on emergencies has increased five-fold over the last decade. The rise in the share of emergency assistance in the total bilateral aid spending of the industrialized countries is even more dramatic, increasing from 1.5 per cent in 1991 to 8.4 percent in 1994. Although the two trends may not be directly linked, it is significant that this increased spending on emergency aid has been matched by a steady decline in the level of official development assistance. Only in the last two years has the amount spent on emergency relief started to decline.

The expansion of the humanitarian sector has gone hand-in-hand with a decline in the role of state structures in the provision of basic public services in low-income states. Today, some 1,500 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are registered with the United Nations, many of whom act as competing subcontractors for UN agencies and donor states. Between 1990 and 1994, for example, the proportion of European Union relief funding channelled through NGOs increased from 45 to 67 per cent.

In countries such as Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia, such agencies have tried to plug the gap created by the disintegration of state structures, ensuring the provision of a whole range of services that would normally be considered the responsibility of government: food, shelter, health care, water supply, education, transport, commercial contracts and jobs. It is therefore not wholly accurate to suggest that the world's wealthier states are reluctant to intervene in complex emergencies. In many senses, that function has been devolved to humanitarian organizations.

The growth of the humanitarian sector has clearly been facilitated by the growing ability of humanitarian organizations to work in situations of ongoing violence. Because of the importance

attached to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference during the cold war years, the governments of war-torn countries often denied relief agencies access to areas controlled by rebel groups. Relief assistance therefore tended to be channelled through state structures, or simply dealt with the symptoms of war by means of refugee assistance programmes. The principal exceptions to this pattern were to be found in the cross-border relief operations established by international NGOs and indigenous agencies, such as those from eastern Sudan to Eritrea and from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

This situation has changed quite dramatically in recent years, facilitated to a large extent by a succession of Security Council resolutions, enabling UN and other agencies to mount emergency operations inside conflict-affected countries and to gain direct access to uprooted and besieged populations. Sometimes undertaken on the basis of negotiated agreements with governments and rebel groups, and sometimes backed by the deployment of UN-mandated forces, either in a logistical or more assertive capacity, these initiatives have established a new paradigm of humanitarian action and intervention.[34] And the emergence of this new paradigm has had some far-reaching implications for the way in which the international community tackles the problem of forced displacement.

The limitations of humanitarian action

Responding to the changing nature of the international environment, humanitarian organizations have in recent years been able to expand their operations geographically and extend their activities functionally. In the process, they have saved an unknown number of lives, reunited many families, educated large numbers of children and assisted massive numbers of people to return to their homes. In situations where the relationship between state and citizen has broken down, humanitarian action can help to compensate for the absence of national protection and provide affected populations with a degree of security which they would otherwise lack.

While few commentators would query such achievements, it has become increasingly clear that humanitarian action has some important constraints and limitations, and that it can also have a number of unintended and negative consequences. Although a full exploration of these complex issues goes beyond the scope of this chapter, a number of related points deserve to be underlined.

First, humanitarian action alone cannot resolve complex political emergencies and situations of forced displacement. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has stated, "while stressing the importance of humanitarian action we must also recognize its limitations. Agencies such as UNHCR can do a lot. Through their presence and interventions they can sometimes help to stabilize a tense situation and mitigate human rights abuses. But humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political action or decisions."[35]

Unfortunately, states have tended to use humanitarian action as a substitute for political action rather than as a complement to it. Security Council members and other governments have generally found it easier to reach agreement on humanitarian issues than on more controversial and risky strategies, especially those entailing the deployment of troops and the use of force. And by donating large amounts of money to highly-publicized relief operations, governments have to some extent been able to satisfy the demands of public opinion and the international media.

By placing primary emphasis on the role of humanitarian action, governments have been able to minimize their own responsibility for mistakes and failures. Thus when the safe areas in Bosnia are attacked, when thousands of refugees go missing in eastern Zaire, or when an international peacekeeping force is obliged to withdraw from Somalia, the fault lies with 'the United Nations' rather than the states which comprise and control that body. As one eminent scholar has observed, "a failure to develop serious policies regarding the security of humanitarian action, and

of affected peoples and areas, has been the principal cause of the setbacks of humanitarian action in the 1990s." While recognizing the inherent difficulties of developing such policies, he suggests that such issues "have been handled repeatedly in a short-term and half-hearted manner, often with elements of dishonesty and buck-passing."[36]

Second, as the preceding quotation suggests, it has become all too clear that humanitarian action can play only a very limited role in protecting human rights and safeguarding human security in situations of ongoing conflict. As the tragic events in Srebrenica and Zepa demonstrated in 1995, when the 'safe areas' established by the UN Security Council were overrun by Serb forces, more assertive forms of action are required to safeguard the physical security of vulnerable populations, especially when they are confronted by forces which flagrantly flout international opinion and humanitarian law.

Recognizing the limitations of conventional humanitarian action in such situations, many commentators have looked to the military – usually in the form of multinational forces – to provide the necessary protection to affected populations. But the many difficulties associated with such proposals will not easily be resolved. Does a right of international intervention exist, and if so, under what circumstances can it be invoked? Can humanitarian organizations and the military work together in the same location, especially if those troops are obliged to work in a non-consensual manner and to make use of their coercive capabilities? Should the military be used to apprehend and bring to justice those individuals who are responsible for crimes against humanity? And in view of the events in Srebrenica, where some 8,000 people are believed to have been killed, does the 'safe area' notion still have any potential as a means of protecting vulnerable populations within their own country? At the moment, it should be noted, there is very little consensus on any of these issues.

Third, there is a need both to acknowledge and address some of the unintended consequences of humanitarian action. Contrary to popular and journalistic opinion, most displaced people and other victims of violence do not rely upon external assistance in order to survive, but make use of their own coping mechanisms.

If it is carefully planned and targeted, and based upon an intimate knowledge of the beneficiary population, humanitarian assistance can play an important part in supporting those coping mechanisms. But when food and other aid is indiscriminately pumped and dumped into a crisis area, local markets and social security networks are liable to be undermined. At the same time, large-scale relief operations can easily create a harmful dependence – both physical and psychological – amongst the beneficiaries of external assistance.

International aid and the logic of war

There is perhaps an even more important need to recognize that humanitarian action can easily be drawn into the logic of an armed conflict, thereby prolonging or even intensifying it. Because of the need to negotiate with armed groups for access to displaced people and other conflict-affected populations, aid agencies often implicitly accept that a proportion of their relief will go to the very groups which are waging the war.

The precise ways in which armed groups exploit international assistance are complex, varying in accordance with their political objectives, their level of popular support and the social environment within which the conflict is taking place. Food aid can be used to feed soldiers or can be sold on local markets to finance the purchase of weapons. International assistance serves as an important source of political legitimacy for both governments and rebel groups, particularly where they can control and channel its distribution among the local population. Most cynically of all, international assistance can be used as a means of attracting displaced people into areas where they can be attacked and killed.

The parties to recent conflicts have shown themselves to be particularly adept at exploiting international concern for forcibly displaced populations. As the Liberian warlords have discovered, by deliberately creating conditions of acute impoverishment and displacement, and by using the victims of such tactics to attract relief assistance, armed groups can gain access to additional resources. As events in Bosnia demonstrated, when a civilian population is placed in grave danger, humanitarian organizations may have little alternative but to arrange an evacuation programme, thereby hastening (and even paying for) the process of ethnic cleansing. And as the Rwanda emergency demonstrated in 1994, by effectively manufacturing a highly-publicized refugee crisis, it is possible for a genocidal regime to protect itself against any retribution, to retain control over large numbers of civilians, and to maintain a large, threatening and destabilizing military force in exile.

Until quite recently it may have seemed irrelevant or even morally objectionable to examine the negative implications of humanitarian assistance, especially since its driving values are so evidently different from those responsible for the suffering which it seeks to address. However, as wars have become more intense and prolonged, and as relief organizations have become more centrally involved in such conflicts, the humanitarian space available to them has been progressively degraded, making it more difficult and dangerous for aid agency personnel to carry out their responsibilities.

In recent years, employees of relief organizations have been exposed to much greater psychological stress and physical danger, a trend epitomized by the recent murder of UN, NGO and Red Cross personnel in places such as Burundi, Chechnya and Rwanda. At the same time, aid agencies have been confronted with a range of dilemmas arising from the way in which humanitarian assistance can be abused and exploited by the parties to a conflict. As a result of these developments, humanitarian organizations have in recent years begun to examine the principles underlying their work more systematically and to articulate those principles in formal codes of conduct (see Box 1.4).

Containment or asylum?

Finally, there is little doubt that the international community's recent emphasis on notions such as 'humanitarian access' and 'in-country protection' has to a considerable extent been driven by the growing reluctance of states to admit large numbers of refugees. As suggested earlier, the political incentive to grant asylum has diminished. Refugee flows are increasingly seen as a political, economic and social threat to potential host countries. People fleeing from violence and human rights abuses at home are consequently confronted with rejection when they arrive in another country. According to some critics, the willingness of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations to operationalize these new approaches by working in countries of origin and assisting other groups of displaced people has legitimized the increasingly restrictive attitude of states towards refugees and asylum seekers.[37]

On a number of recent occasions, states have closed or attempted to close their borders to refugees from war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burundi, Liberia and Rwanda. In almost all of the industrialized states, there has been a flurry of official activity over the past decade to obstruct or deter the arrival of asylum seekers from other parts of the world. And on numerous occasions, refugees have been forced or induced to return to their countries of origin, even if conditions there continue to be insecure. The recent decline in the world's refugee population, and the simultaneous increase in the number of internally displaced people, is one obvious manifestation of these disturbing trends.

The international community's declining commitment to asylum and growing interest in policies of confinement and containment is a retrograde development which flies in the face of international refugee law, human rights principles and humanitarian norms. It is certainly true to say that the internal problems of unstable states cannot be resolved by means of refugee assistance

programmes. Of course it is better for people to remain safely in their homes, and, if they move, to do so out of choice rather than necessity. And there is an evident need to recognize the immense strains that refugee flows can place upon countries of asylum, especially when those countries are themselves economically weak, politically unstable and socially divided. But the problem of forced displacement cannot be resolved – and may even be exacerbated – by efforts to obstruct the departure or compel the premature repatriation of people from countries where the state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994; and A. Roberts, *Humanitarian Action in War*, Adelphi Paper no. 305, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1996.

2 Although this book employs the notion of 'international community' to denote the collective identity of states, the United Nations and other significant actors in international affairs, the severe limitations of this concept are acknowledged. The alternative proposed by some scholars – 'international society' – does not have a great deal of additional analytic value.

3 L. Rosenblatt, 'The challenges of humanitarian relief', *The Washington Times*, 30 December 1996. For an extended analysis of these issues and their interrelationship, see United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization*, Geneva, 1995.

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7 G. Sorensen, 'Individual security and national security: the state remains the principal problem', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1996.

8 *Human Development Report 1994*, *op cit*, p. 23.

9 The data in this section is drawn from ibid, and from the *1997 Report on the World Social Situation*, United Nations, New York, 1997.

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14 S. Ellis, 'Africa after the cold war: new patterns of government and politics', *Development and Change*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1996.

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18 The classic expression of this position is to be found in R. Kaplan, 'The coming anarchy', *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994.

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20 'Human rights and massive exoduses: report of the Secretary-General', UN Commission on Human Rights, document E/CN.4/1996/42, February 1996, on *Refworld* CD-Rom, UNHCR, Geneva, 1997.

21 F. Corley, 'Peoples on the move', *War Report*, no. 48, 1997, p. 22.

22 S. Ogata, 'Peace, security and humanitarian action', Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, April 1997.

23 D. Rajasingham, 'The human rights dimension of population transfer in South Asia', UN expert seminar on the human rights dimensions of population transfer, Geneva, February 1997, UN document HR/SEM.1/PT/ 1997/WP3. See also *Regional Consultation on Refugee and Migratory Movements*, UNHCR, Colombo, 1995.

24 See M. Weiner, *op cit*.

25 'The lost boys of the Sudan', in UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1996*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

26 M. Weiner, *The Global Migration Crisis: Challenge to States and to Human Rights*, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 29.

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28 For a more detailed examination of this issue, see Chapter One of *The State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solutions*, *op cit*.

29 J. Ayala Lasso, introductory statement at the UN Expert Seminar on the human rights dimensions of population transfer, Geneva, February 1997.

30 Quoted in E. Lederer, 'Report finds West less responsive to Third World crises', *The Washington Times*, 26 April 1997.

31 See E. Mortimer, 'Descent into chaos', The Financial Times, 9 April 1997; and 'The Albanian mess', *The Washington Post*, 21 May 1997.

32 Quoted in E. Penketh, 'Security Council cool to appeals for humanitarian enforcement', AFP despatch, 21 May 1997.

33 For a concise analysis of the issues raised by this trend, see A. Roberts, *op cit*.

34 The principal features of this paradigm are identified and examined in M. Duffield, 'Humanitarian intervention in Africa: adapting to separate development', *New Political Economy*, Summer 1997.

35 S. Ogata, 'Peace, security and humanitarian action', *op cit*.

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37 See, for example, B. Chimni, 'Solutions to the global refugee problem and the language of security: a disturbing trend', unpublished paper, 1997. For a case study which incorporates this critique, see M. Barutciski, 'The reinforcement of non-admission policies and the subversion of UNHCR: displacement and internal assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-94)', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, vol. 8, no. 1/2, 1996.

Box 1.1
Population displacements in the Great Lakes region of Africa

Forced population displacements have been a central characteristic of the political crisis which has gripped the Great Lakes region of Africa during the past three years. In many instances, moreover, such displacements have been deliberately provoked by the warring parties, employed as a means of securing or reinforcing their control of territory, resources and people.

While the crisis in the Great Lakes has a long and complex history, international attention began to focus on Rwanda in the second quarter of 1994, when at least 500,000 people, usually described as Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were killed in the space of six weeks. In fact, the question of ethnic and national identity in the region is far more subtle than these categorizations might suggest.

The genocide stopped only when the government was ousted by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel movement composed primarily of exiled Tutsis, whose repatriation from Uganda had for many years been blocked by the regime in Kigali. As the RPF drove south, the organizers of the genocide recognized their imminent defeat and organized a mass evacuation of the Hutu population. Around 1.75 million moved to the neighbouring countries of Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi, where they were accommodated in camps and provided with international assistance. As the Hutus were leaving, approximately 700,000 Tutsi refugees - including children who had been born in exile – returned to Rwanda, the largest number of them from Uganda.

Soon after the primarily Hutu camps were established in 1994, approximately 160,000 of the refugees returned voluntarily to Rwanda. But as members of the former Rwandese government, army and militia forces tightened their grip on the refugee population, the repatriation came to a halt. UNHCR's efforts to promote return had only a limited impact. In fact, the number of people repatriating was almost exactly matched by the number of babies born in the refugee camps. As a result, the total refugee population remained stable.

The size of the refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania, their proximity to the border, as well as their political and military character, posed a serious security threat to the new Rwandese government. UNHCR soon recognized the extent of the problem and repeatedly called upon the international community to separate the armed elements and intimidators from the civilian refugee population. The political will required for such action to be taken, however, was simply not in evidence.

Conflict in Burundi

Burundi, whose ethnic composition is almost identical to that of Rwanda, has been ravaged by internal armed conflict since 1993, when the democratically elected president Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated. His murder was followed by ethnically motivated killings of both Tutsis and Hutus, and a more general descent into chaos. As a result of the violence, some 160,000 Burundian refugees (mostly Hutus) fled to Tanzania and Zaire. Many thousands more were internally displaced. The camps for Burundian refugees, like those of their Rwandese counterparts, were also used as bases for Hutu rebels engaged in cross-border attacks on their country of origin.

The influx of 270,000 Rwandese (primarily Hutu) refugees into Burundi in 1994, came at a time when the situation in that country was already spinning out of control. As the crisis in Burundi deepened and the violence around the camps increased, the exiled Hutus came under growing pressure to repatriate from the country's Tutsi-dominated government. Eventually, in July 1996, up to 90,000 refugees were forced back into Rwanda while some 30,000 others fled to Tanzania.

Throughout the period described above, tension and violence were mounting in eastern Zaire. Hutu refugees who wished to return to Rwanda were intimidated or eliminated by armed elements in the camps. North Kivu became the scene of a three-way war between Hutu, Tutsi and local peoples such as the Hunde, entailing the killing and mass expulsion of many Tutsi. In South Kivu, people of Rwandese origin, primarily Tutsis known as the Banyamulenge, also started to be harassed and displaced by local Zaireans, supported from Kinshasa.

Having witnessed with great concern the fate of the Tutsis in North Kivu, the Banyamulenge, some of whom had assisted in the RPF victory in July 1994, began to resist. Well armed and highly motivated, they became a central component of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). Led by Laurent Kabila, a lifelong opponent of President Mobutu, the AFDL was supported in various ways by other states in the region who wished to see a change of government in Kinshasa: Angola, Eritrea, Rwanda and Uganda.

As the AFDL advanced, Rwandese refugees were scattered in all directions from the camps in eastern Zaire. Some 70,000 Burundian refugees, who were mostly living in camps around Uvira and Bukavu, returned to their country of origin. Half a million Rwandese refugees regrouped at Mugunga, near Goma, and were finally encircled by AFDL soldiers, who obliged them to repatriate. Most of these refugees crossed the border into Rwanda between 15 and 19 November 1996, with tens of thousands of stragglers returning in the following days.

By the end of the year, around 685,000 Rwandese refugees had returned from Zaire. At the same time, large numbers of Rwandese and Burundian refugees (more than 400,000 according to UNHCR estimates) fled into the Zairean interior, some of them under the influence of military and militia forces associated with the former regime. Large numbers of local Zaireans were also displaced by these events.

The unpaid and ill-disciplined Zairean army offered practically no resistance to the AFDL. In March 1997, the rebels took control of the second city of Kisangani as well as the important mining town of Lubumbashi. As the march on the capital began in earnest, President Mobutu fled the country. On 20 May 1997, the AFDL entered Kinshasa. Zaire was renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo and Laurent Kabila declared himself to be president.

Peace and prosperity?

The demise of the Mobutu regime, some commentators initially suggested, might usher in a new era of peace and prosperity right across Central Africa, from Eritrea in the east to Angola in the west. But such hopes were overshadowed – if not dashed – by growing evidence that the AFDL forces had committed atrocities against the Hutu refugees in eastern Zaire, in revenge for the 1994 genocide of Rwanda's Tutsi population. By June 1997, some 215,000 displaced refugees remained unaccounted for, either because they had been killed or because they were hiding in the dense Zairean forest. While UNHCR did not have access to many of the areas where the Rwandese had fled, by that date, the organization had been able to organize the return of more than 54,000 refugees by air and 180,000 by land.

By this time, the crisis in the region had spread well beyond the Great Lakes. While thousands of Rwandese and Burundian refugees had disappeared in eastern Zaire, others had walked hundreds of kilometres and crossed the border into Angola, Congo Brazzaville, the Central African Republic and Zambia, with smaller numbers arriving in Cameroon, Kenya and other nearby states. Refugees from Burundi were also continuing to move into Tanzania to escape from the conflict in their own country.

Return from Tanzania

By this time, the vast majority of Rwandese Hutus who had fled to Tanzania in 1994 had also returned to their homeland. Two weeks after the massive return of Rwandese refugees from eastern Zaire, on 5 December 1996, the Tanzanian government and UNHCR had issued a joint declaration, setting a deadline of 31 December 1996 for the return of all Rwandese refugees living on Tanzanian territory. The statement said that the government of Tanzania had decided "that all Rwandese refugees can now return to their country in safety."

On 12 December 1996, camp leaders in the Ngara area began to move the refugees away from the border and further into Tanzania, so as to maintain their control over the exiled population. In response, the Tanzanian army forced the refugees to turn round and redirected them towards Rwanda. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were taken to the Rwandese border during the next few days. Those who had managed to flee into the surrounding countryside, and those who had stayed in the camps, were rounded up over the next few weeks and trucked back to Rwanda under military escort. In total, an estimated 483,000 Rwandese refugees were returned from Tanzania.

Regardless of the nature of the Rwandese repatriation from Zaire (where the refugees returned as a result of violence and the AFDL advance), Tanzania (where the refugees were returned by the national army) and Burundi (where refoulement, murders and general insecurity prompted a mass return), few observers doubted the need for these refugees to go back to Rwanda. Without the return of the refugees, it seems clear, the Hutu militia and former Rwandese army would have continued to mount attacks on Rwanda from their bases outside the country, indefinitely obstructing any process of stabilization.

Even so, the months that followed the mass repatriation of refugees from Tanzania and Zaire witnessed a sharp increase in the level of violence within Rwanda, especially in the north-west of the country. There is little doubt that much of this violence was committed by Hutu militia who had been obliged to repatriate with the refugees. By prompting the authorities in Kigali to respond to this threat with the use of military force, supporters of the former and genocidal regime achieved their primary objective: to perpetuate the instability of Rwanda, and of the Great Lakes region as a whole.

: Displacement of Rwandese and Burundian refugees, 1996-97

Map A

Displacement of Rwandese and Burundian refugees, 1996-7
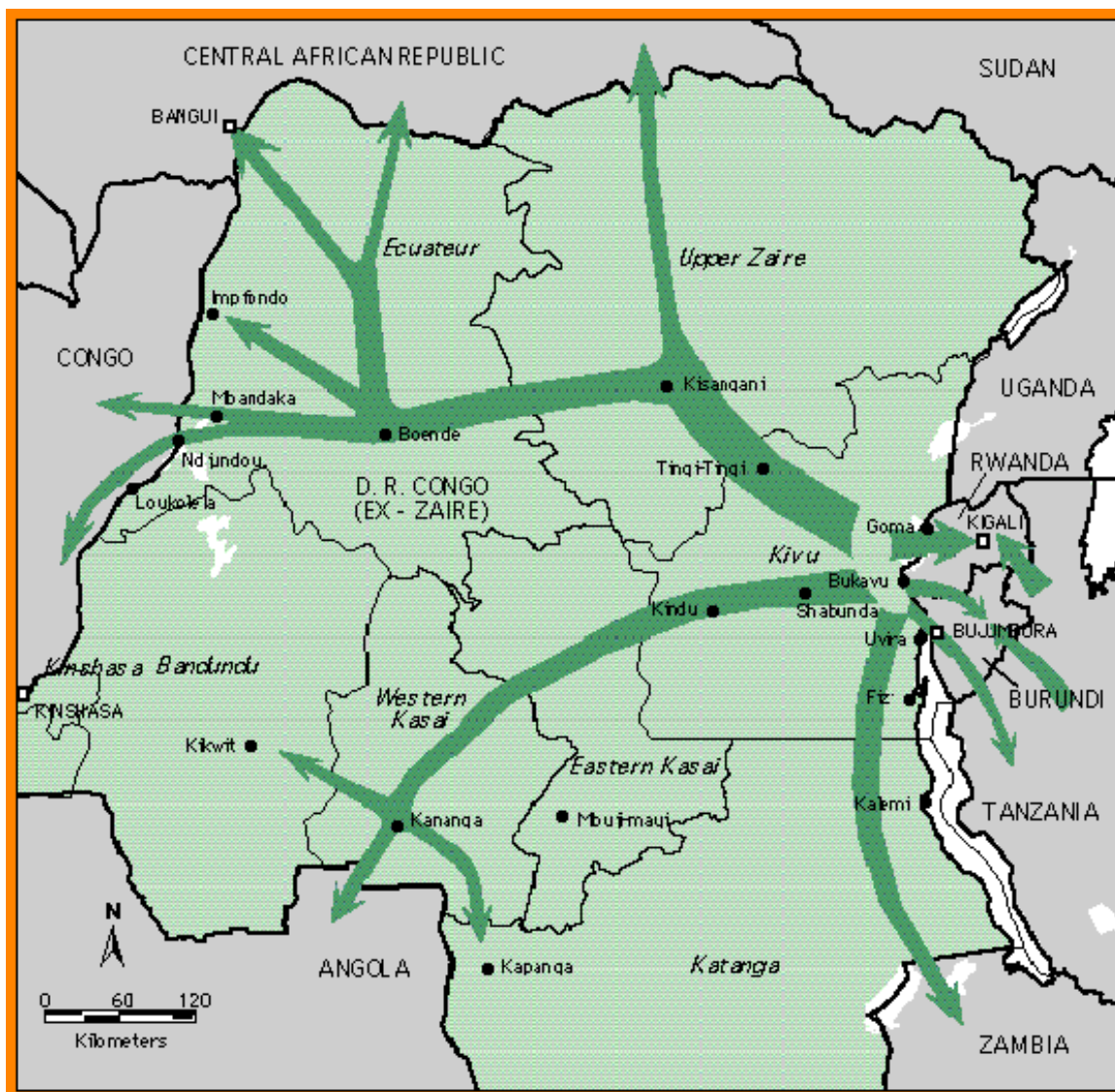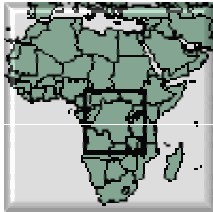
Box 1.2
Environment and migration: the case of Central Asia

Ecological and environmental change are a common cause of migration and human displacement. The forms which such changes take, however, are extremely varied. They can be sudden and unexpected, as is usually the case with disasters such as earthquakes or cyclones. Or they can be more gradual in nature, as is the case with long-term processes of desertification and land degradation.

People who have been displaced as a result of environmental change are not normally considered to be refugees, even if they have been obliged to cross an international border and move into another country. Refugees are distinguished by the fact that they lack the protection of their state and therefore look to the international community to provide them with security. Environmentally displaced people, on the other hand, can usually count upon the protection of their state, even if it is limited in its capacity to provide them with emergency relief or longer-term reconstruction assistance.

The exception to this rule is to be found in situations where acts of environmental destruction, such as the poisoning of water wells, the burning of crops or draining of marshlands are deliberately used to persecute, intimidate or displace a particular population. In such cases, the affected populations might legitimately be considered to be refugees if they leave their homeland and seek safety in another state.

Environmental degradation and the ensuing competition for scarce natural resources is often at the root of refugee-producing conflicts. The Zapatista rebellion in the Chiapas state of Mexico, for example, which led at one point to the displacement of up to 35,000 people, has been attributed in part to the growing grievances of peasants affected by the problems of deforestation, soil erosion and land scarcity. According to many commentators, the coming years may also witness a growing number of refugee-producing 'resource wars', in which states fight for control of rivers and other valuable environmental assets.

The Soviet legacy

Some of the clearest examples of environmentally induced migration and displacement are to be found in the former Soviet states of Central Asia. According to a recent UNHCR report, in the first half of the 1990s, around 270,000 people in the region were displaced for such reasons.

Much of Central Asia is affected by problems such as soil degradation and desertification, a situation created by decades of agricultural exploitation, industrial pollution and overgrazing. During the Soviet years, irrigation schemes were introduced throughout the region, so that cotton

could be cultivated on an intensive and continuous basis. Poorly designed and badly managed, these irrigation schemes led to the large-scale wastage of scarce water resources and the degradation of the land as a result of salinization.

Under the monocultural agricultural system practised by the Soviet authorities, massive amounts of chemicals were used to control the growth of weeds and to replace lost nutrients in the soil. The residues of those additives are now poisoning the region's land and water and contaminating the food chain, making it increasingly difficult for some populations to remain in their usual place of residence.

Although many parts of Central Asia suffer from such problems, the degradation of the environment has reached its worst proportions in and around the Aral Sea, a large lake situated between Kazakstan and Uzbekistan. As a result of Soviet efforts to maximize the area's cotton crop, most of the water flowing into the Aral Sea was siphoned off and used for irrigation; the annual flow was reduced from an average of 50 cubic kilometeres a year between 1930 and 1960 to less than five cubic kilometeres by the early 1980s. Since 1960, the surface area of the sea has been reduced by half, while its volume has dropped by around 65 per cent.

Dust from the dried-up bed of the Aral Sea, containing large quantities of agricultural and industrial chemicals, is now carried long distances by the wind, contributing further to the pollution, salinization and desertification of the land. The economic and social consequences of this phenomenon have been substantial. They include a sharp decline in agricultural production, an increase in the price of foodstuffs, the demise of a once significant fishing industry and declining health standards amongst the local population. Not surprisingly, a considerable number of people have chosen to move.

Since 1992, some 100,000 people are believed to have left the Aral Sea area as a result of these environmental problems. Ethnic Russians, Kazaks and Uzbeks have tended to be the first to move, leaving behind the members of poorer and less mobile groups who lack the social networks required to establish new homes elsewhere.

Disaster zones

Semipalatinsk in Kazakstan is another environmental disaster zone. Almost 500 nuclear bombs were exploded in the region between 1949 and 1989, 150 of them above ground. With the consequences of nuclear radiation becoming more widely known amongst the local population, around 160,000 people have decided to leave the area. Around half of this number have moved to other parts of Kazakstan, with the remainder migrating to Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet states.

Several other forms of environmental disaster and population displacement have also been witnessed in Central Asia. The mountainous states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, for example, have both been affected by serious earthquakes, as well as landslides, mudslides and avalanches. According to the Kyrgyz government, in 1994 alone, landslides caused the displacement of some 27,000 people. In the area of Lake Balkash in Kazakstan and in parts of the Ferghana Valley of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, many of the better educated and more affluent members of the population have moved away to escape from high levels of air, land and water pollution – a result of the poorly regulated agricultural, industrial and mining activities undertaken in those areas.

Tackling the issue of environmental degradation and displacement in Central Asia will not be an easy task. The problem is so deep-rooted and was kept hidden for so long under the Soviet authorities that it may in some instances be too late for effective remedial action to be taken.

Moreover, the political sensitivity of the issue is such that accurate information on the true dimensions of the problem is difficult to compile. Governments in the region are confronted with a host of other pressing issues and generally lack the capacity and resources to address the problem in a systematic manner.

At the international level, obstacles to effective action also exist. No single UN agency is responsible for the issues of environmental degradation and displacement. Without effective coordination, these problems are likely to be addressed in a fragmented manner. And while the international community has an evident interest in promoting stability and sustainable development in the region, the states of Central Asia, especially those which continue to be affected by political conflict and human rights violations, are not currently a high priority for many donor states.

Despite these constraints, some positive steps have been taken. The problem of environmental displacement was, for example, discussed at the recent conference on population movements in the Commonwealth of Independent States (see Box 1.4), an initiative which has helped to place the issue on the international agenda. As part of the follow-up process to the conference, in February 1997, organizations such as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration issued an appeal for funds, which will be used for the resettlement and integration of environmental migrants in the Central Asian states. Donor states and international organizations have also taken a particular interest in the Aral Sea basin, although the environmental problems in that area are so extreme that remedial and preventive activities will be required for many years to come.

While environmental problems can easily become a source of disagreement between states, there are some hopeful indications that the effort to resolve such difficulties in Central Asia could actually promote regional cooperation. There has, for example, been extensive coordination between the five countries of Central Asia in relation to the Aral Sea question, including the establishment of a number of international agreements on this matter. In a region which has a high potential for conflict and population displacement, such initiatives are clearly to be welcomed.

Box 1.3
The CIS conference: objectives and achievements

Like other international organizations, UNHCR was new to the problem of population displacement in the former Soviet Union when it began to assist with emergency operations in the Caucasus and Tajikistan in the early 1990s. It rapidly became evident that the problems emerging in the newly independent states were both complex and interrelated. The various tensions, conflicts and population displacements in the Caucasus and Transcaucasus regions, for example, were so intertwined that none of them could be dealt with in isolation. Similarly, it was impossible to ignore the fact that these states had for many years been part of the same political entity, and that issues such as citizenship and the return of peoples to their ancestral or ethnic homeland could only be tackled by means of an integrated regional approach.

While the predicted outflow of former Soviet citizens to the western states has not taken place on the scale once feared, the international community has continued to be concerned about the social and political impact of mass population movements in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS): first, because the citizens of those states have already suffered substantially as a result of the socio-economic and political dislocation created by the demise of the Soviet state; second, because large-scale movements of people might place excessive strain on the region's fragile economies and democratic institutions; and third, because large population outflows would have obvious ramifications for states outside the CIS, many of which are also poorly equipped to cope with refugee problems. Thus a combination of humanitarian and security concerns led the CIS countries themselves, other states and international organizations such as UNHCR to recognize the need for a concerted effort to resolve the problem of forced displacement in the former Soviet Union.

The scale of that problem is enormous. Around nine million people are believed to have been displaced in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a phenomenon which has resulted from many different factors: armed conflicts, human rights violations, environmental problems and economic stagnation or decline, as well as the desire of certain populations to return to countries which they consider to be their natural home.

In 1994, at the request of some CIS countries, UNHCR began to organize a regional conference on the problem of forced displacement, together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The objectives of this initiative were threefold: to provide a neutral and non-political forum for the CIS and neighbouring countries to discuss refugee and migration issues; to establish a better knowledge of the scale and scope of population displacements in the region; and to devise a comprehensive strategy at the national, regional and international levels to cope with this problem.

As the planning process for the conference revealed, these were not simple objectives to achieve, given the political sensitivities surrounding these issues, the difficulty of coordinating the actions of so many states and uncertainty over the commitment of governments to address the

problem of forced displacement in a practical manner. The last of these factors has been a particular concern, as the non-binding programme of action eventually adopted by conference participants in Geneva in May 1996 proved to be a very general statement of principles and objectives. Only now are the governments and organizations concerned trying to translate those principles into practical activities.

As a result of the conference, UNHCR has extended its activities in the CIS region to a broader range of displaced populations, including peoples such as the Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, who were deported en masse in the Stalinist era and who now wish to return to their previous place of residence. The organization is also helping to strengthen the capacity of CIS governments to deal with migratory problems, to establish independent judicial systems and to address the issues of citizenship and statelessness.

The programme of action adopted at the conference emphasized the need to strengthen civil society throughout the CIS. To fulfill this objective, UNHCR has been helping a number of non-governmental organizations to become involved in legal, assistance and research activities, to establish programmes that will be of assistance to the various groups of displaced people of concern to the conference, and encouraging them to establish better linkages with governments, international organizations and with each other.

UNHCR has also paid increasing attention to the issue of public awareness, providing information to Crimean Tatars who wish to go back to their place of origin and to prospective emigrants from Armenia. At the same time, educational projects have been established to inform the population about refugee issues and to promote ethnic tolerance, activities which will hopefully contribute to the prevention of social tension, political violence and population displacements. UNHCR and the IOM issued a joint appeal for funds in November 1996, which will be used for the implementation of national plans of action in 1997, drawn up by the two organizations in association with the respective governments of the region.

The New York-based Open Society Institute (OSI), which has closely monitored the CIS conference process, has expressed some disappointment about the progress which has been made in the region since the Geneva meeting was held. Describing the international community's response to the programme of action as "sluggish," the OSI states that most of the ideals expressed by the conference "remain unfulfilled in practice." More specifically, the Institute points to the failure of states to accept specific legal obligations in the programme of action, the poor response of donor countries to the UNHCR/IOM fund-raising appeal, the limited role which non-governmental organizations have been able to play in the conference follow-up process and the dearth of concrete implementation activities undertaken by mid-1997.

While these comments may not give due recognition to the wide range of initiatives that are being undertaken to address the problems of forced displacement and migration in the CIS, they provide a useful indication of the many difficulties encountered in the region. Internally, the states and societies of the former Soviet Union are still struggling to deal with the legacies of communism: distorted economies, ethnic cleavages, authoritarian political structures and the absence of a civil society. Externally, the response to the problem of forced displacement in the region has undoubtedly been weakened by the fact that so few people have sought safety outside of the CIS. As international migration expert Aristide Zolberg has written, "although the population displacements generated by the conflicts that accompanied the disintegration of the Soviet Union are of the same order of magnitude as those triggered by the destruction of Yugoslavia, the latter have occasioned much greater concern because they have spilled over into the world of affluent democracies."

Box 1.4
Humanitarian codes of conduct

The international community has placed increasing emphasis in recent years on its right to intervene in war-torn states to alleviate the suffering of people affected by conflict. But the rights of war-affected populations to receive effective and appropriate assistance remain largely unclarified and unformalized. Until quite recently, moreover, little had been done to establish a code of conduct or set of standards to guide the work of organizations providing relief to the victims of war.

That situation has now changed for a number of related reasons: the recent expansion of humanitarian activities around the world and the associated proliferation of aid agencies; the growing involvement of such organizations in areas where armed conflicts are taking place; the eagerness of donor states and UN agencies to channel their funds through non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and the mounting competition amongst NGOs for media exposure, public recognition and contracts.

Slipping standards?

As a result of these factors, there has been growing concern that relief organizations have in some situations lost sight of their true objectives, allowed standards to slip and have paid insufficient attention to the impact of their work. In the words of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, "the increasing scale, complexity, speed and cost of emergencies mean that humanitarian agencies must confront questions of the quality of their work and issues of success and failure, even whether what they are doing is right or wrong."

Such considerations have stimulated a new interest amongst NGOs in the question of standards and self-regulation. An initial step in this direction was taken in 1994, when more than 70 agencies from around the world established an NGO Code of Conduct. Since that time, an additional 30 agencies have adopted the code, which has also been welcomed by almost 150 states which are signatories to the Geneva Conventions, which set out the laws of war. UNHCR and other UN agencies are also considering how the code can be incorporated into the criteria which they use when selecting operational partners.

Under the terms of the NGO Code of Conduct, signatory organizations agree to abide by the ten principal points summarized below:

- the humanitarian imperative comes first;
- aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and on the basis of need alone;
- aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint;
- aid organizations will endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy;
- aid organizations will respect culture and custom;
- aid organizations will attempt to build disaster response on local capacities;
- ways will be found of involving programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid;
- relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs;
- aid organizations hold themselves accountable to those they assist and to those from whom they accept resources;
- aid organizations will recognize disaster victims as dignified humans, not as hopeless objects, in their information, publicity and advertising activities.

Physical protection

In addition to the NGO Code of Conduct, other efforts are under way to guide the work of organizations involved in emergency relief. A group of UK-based agencies known as People in Aid, for example, has established a 'code of best practice' for relief workers, focusing on issues such as employment and training policy as well as staff security. A 'beneficiaries charter' is also being developed, covering topics such as the minimum and relative entitlements of disaster victims, the delivery of assistance and the accountability of aid agencies.

While these initiatives represent an important attempt to regulate the work of aid organizations and to hold them accountable for their activities, they are not without their critics. According to a study by Oxford professor Adam Roberts, the new codes of conduct address humanitarian problems "in an abstract manner, far removed from the harsh realities resulting from war." In recent armed conflicts, the author notes, the key issue has not been the delivery of humanitarian assistance, but the physical protection of displaced and threatened populations, not to mention aid workers themselves.

Roberts also notes that there is currently little consensus on how to combine impartial relief work with the coercive measures which are sometimes required to bring wars to an end, to halt human rights violations and gain access to people in need. In the absence of such action, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of humanitarian agencies remains of secondary importance. As an international evaluation of the Rwanda emergency concluded, "humanitarian action cannot serve as a substitute for political, diplomatic and, where necessary, military action."
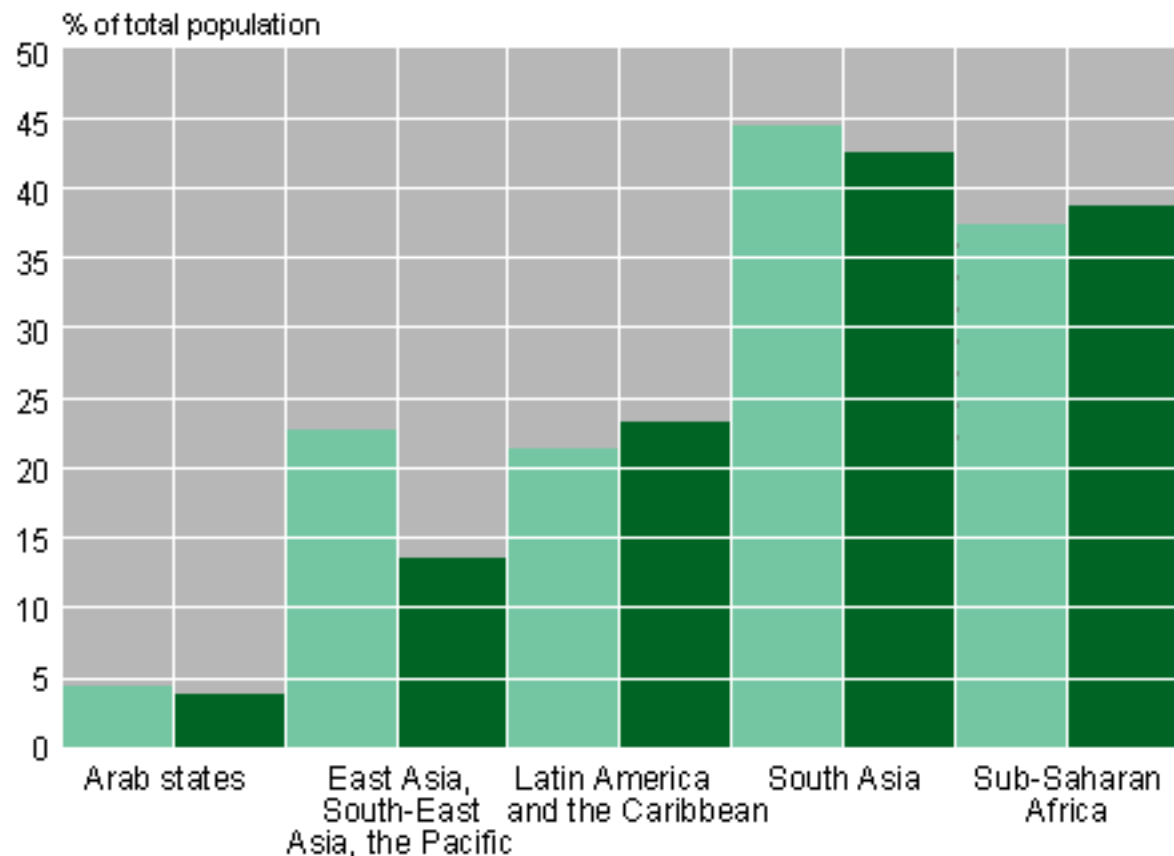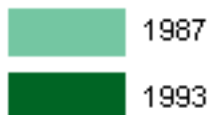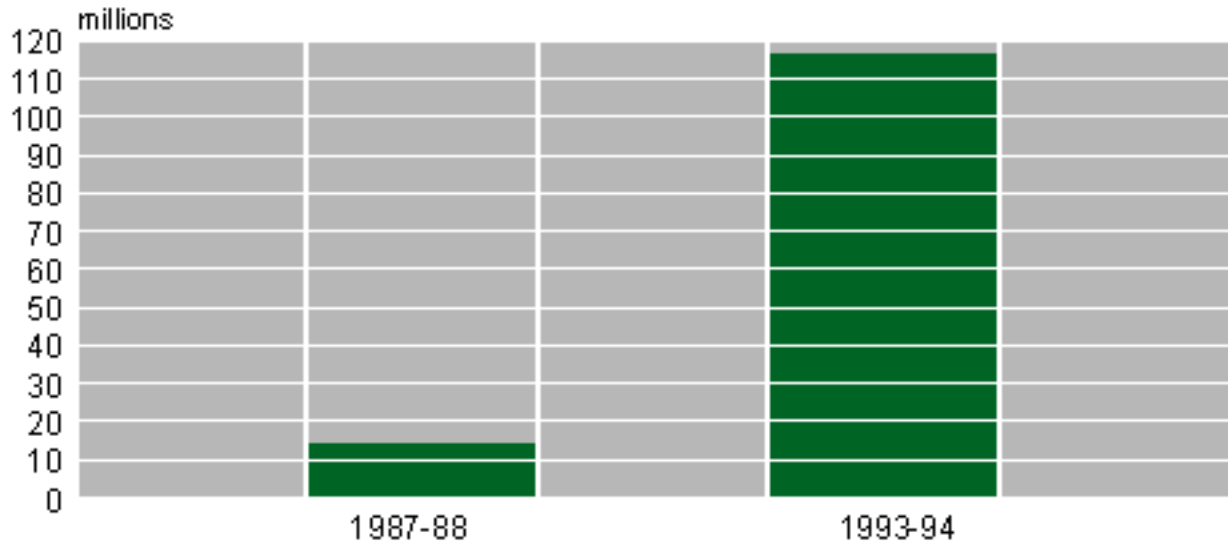
% of total population

Arab states

East Asia, South-East Asia, the Pacific

Latin America and the Caribbean

South Asia

Sub-Saharan Africa

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1997*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997; Figure defines poverty line as an income of less than $1 a day, $2 a day in the case of Latin America and Caribbean, based on 1985 purchasing power parity in $ (PPP $); East Asia excludes China.

Fig. 1.2

Poverty in former communist countries 1987-94

People living below the income poverty line ($4 a day)

millions

	1987-88	1993-94

		Fig. 1.3
Armenia	Lithuania	**New states, 1990-97**
Azerbaijan	Macedonia (FYR)	
Belarus	Moldova	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Russian Federation	
Croatia	Slovak Republic	
Czech Republic	Slovenia	
Eritrea	Tajikistan	
Estonia	Turkmenistan	
Georgia	Ukraine	
Kazakstan	Uzbekistan	
Kyrgyzstan	Yugoslavia (FR)	
Latvia		

Fig. 1.4

Displacement of Rwandese and Burundian refugees, 1996-97

Number of Rwandese refugees

Present in eastern Zaire (before Oct. 1996 conflict) 1,100,000	

Repatriations from eastern Zaire

Spontaneous returns (Nov.1996)	600,000
Organized returns by land (Dec. 1996-June 1997)	180,000
Organized returns by air (April-June 1997)	54,000
Total returns	**834,000**

Refugees who have moved from Zaire (July 1997)

Congo (Brazzaville)	20,000
Central African Republic	3,800
Angola	2,500
Total	26,300

Refugees remaining in Zaire (July 1997)	**26,300**
Total refugees location known	**52,600**
Total refugees location unknown	**213,400**

Number of Burundian refugees

Present in eastern Zaire (before Oct. 1996 conflict)	150,000

Repatriations from eastern Zaire

Spontaneous returns	77,000
Registered returns, (Nov. 1996 - June 1997)	23,000
Total returns	**100,000**

Refugees who have moved from Zaire (July 1997)

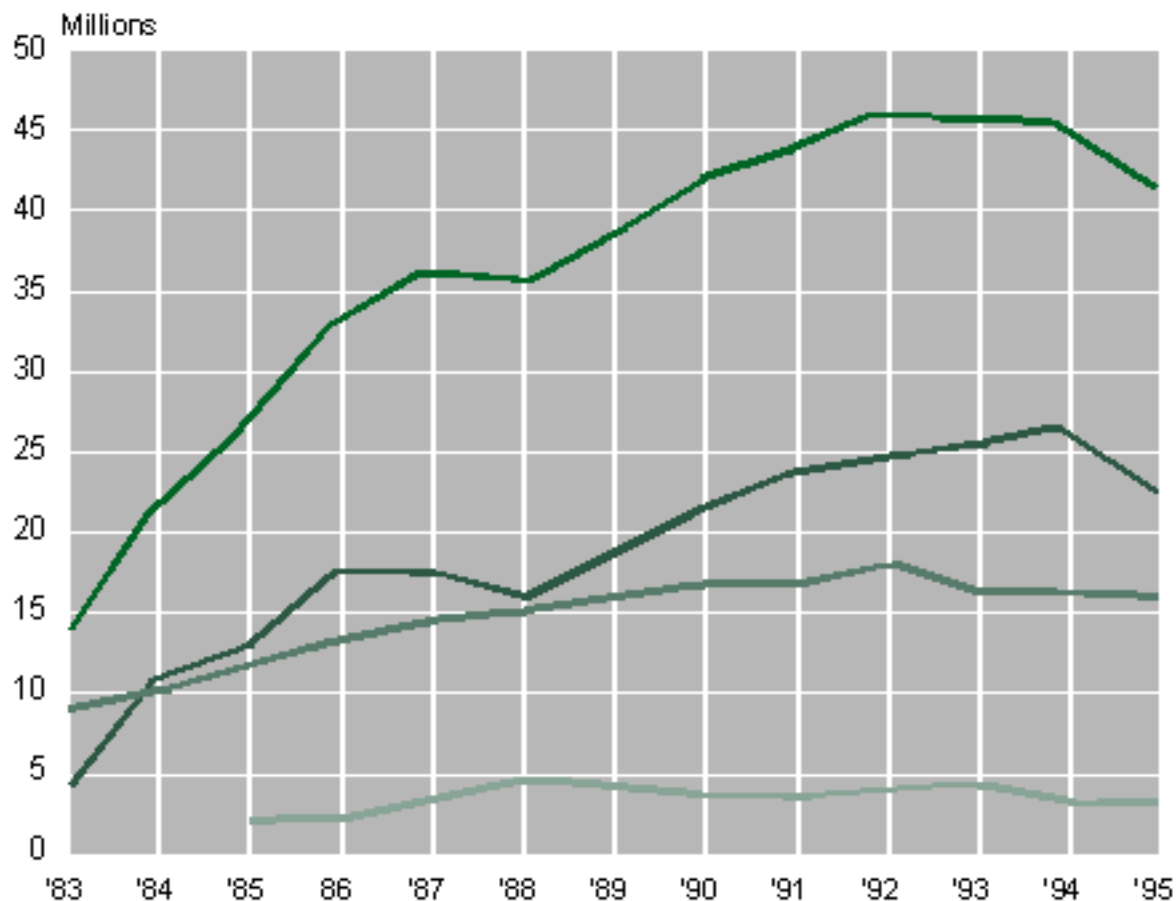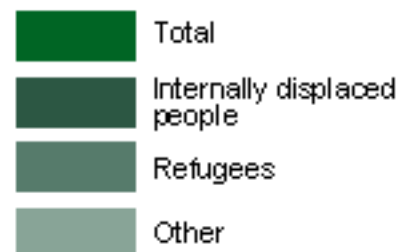|	
Tanzania	10,000
Total	**10,000**

Refugees remaining in Zaire (July 1997)	**4,500**
Total refugees located and repatriated	**14,500**
Total refugees location unknown	**35,500**

Estimated statistics at 2 July 1997

Fig. 1.5

Internal armed conflicts, 1990-95

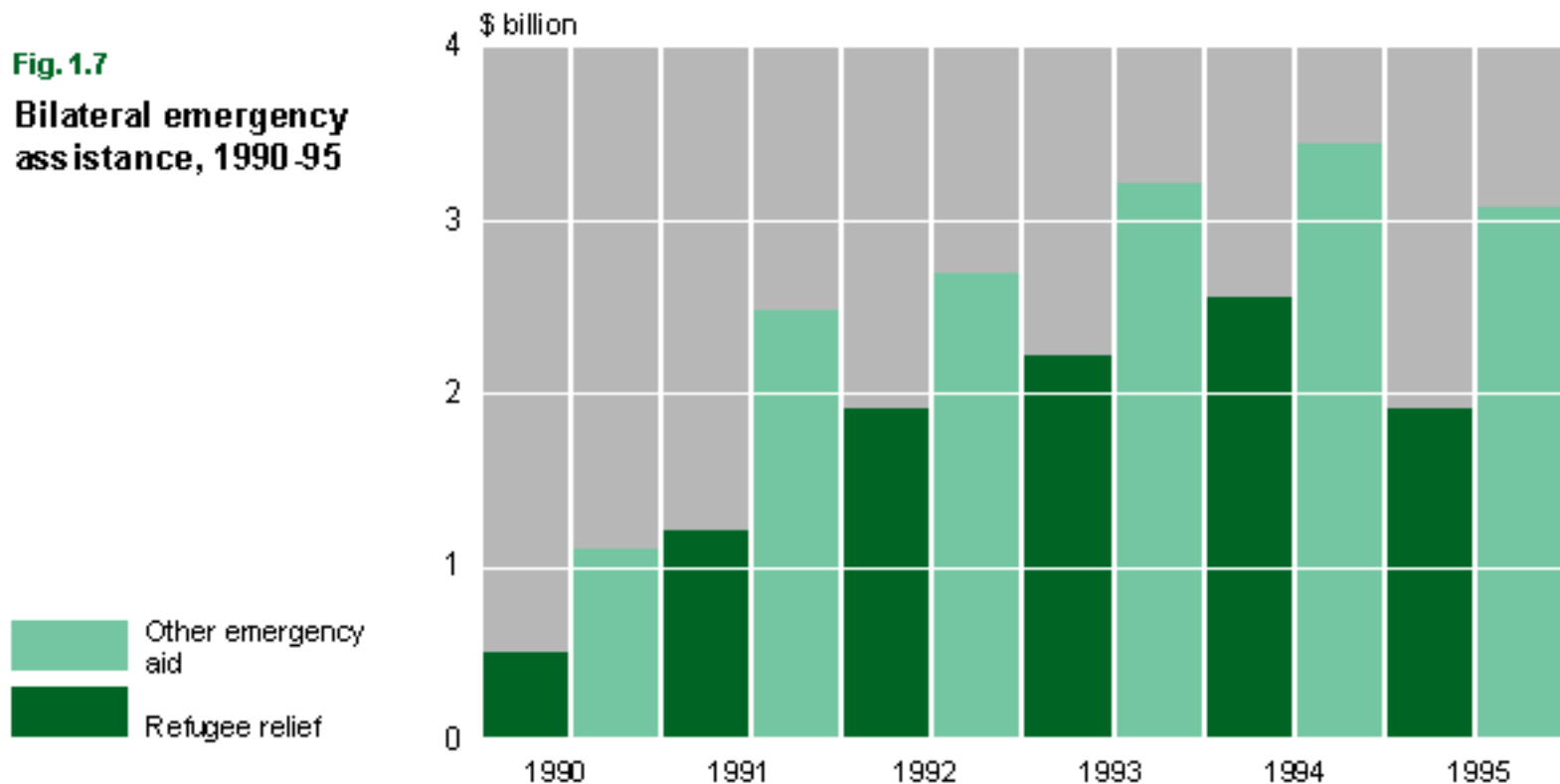| Country	War began	Site of war	Combat status at 31 December 1995
Algeria	1992	general	continuing 1995
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1992	general	suspended 1995
Croatia	1991	Slavonia/Krajina	suspended 1992
Croatia	1995	Western Slavonia/Krajina	suspended 1995
Djibouti	1991	Afar	continuing 1995
Egypt	1992	general	continuing 1995
Georgia	1991	western region	suspended 1993
Georgia	1991	South Ossetia	suspended 1992
Georgia	1992	Abkhazia	suspended 1993
Ghana	1994	northern regions	suspended 1995
Haiti	1991	general	suspended 1991
India	1990	Kashmir	continuing 1995
Iraq	1991	southern Shia regions	continuing 1995
Libya	1995	general	continuing 1995
Mali	1990	northern Tuareg regions	suspended 1995
Mexico	1994	Chiapas	suspended 1995
Moldova	1991	Dniestr Republic	suspended 1992
Myanmar	1991	general	suspended 1992
Myanmar	1992	Arakan	suspended 1994
Myanmar	1992	Kaya	continuing 1995
Niger	1991	northern Tuareg regions	continuing 1995
Niger	1994	eastern region	continuing 1995
Pakistan	1992	Karachi/Sind	continuing 1995
Russian Federation	1992	North Ossetia/Ingushetia	suspended 1992
Russian Federation	1993	Moscow	suspended 1993
Russian Federation	1994	Chechnya	continuing 1995
Rwanda	1990	general	suspended 1995
Senegal	1990	Casamance region	continuing 1995
Sierra Leone	1991	general	continuing 1995
Somalia	1991	general	suspended 1995
Sudan	1994	Beja	suspended 1995
Tajikistan	1992	general	continuing 1995
Togo	1991	general	suspended 1991
Trinidad and Tobago	1990	general	suspended 1990
Turkey	1991	western region	suspended 1992
Uganda	1994	central region	suspended 1995
Uganda	1994	south-eastern region	suspended 1995
Venezuela	1992	general	suspended 1992
Yemen	1994	general	suspended 1994

Source: Dan Smith (et al.) *The State of War and Peace Atlas*, Penguin, London, 1997
Figure shows only internal armed conflicts beginning in or after 1990. Not an official UN record.

Fig. 1.6

People in need of humanitarian assistance, 1983-95

Millions

Legend:
- Total
- Internally displaced people
- Refugees
- Other

Fig. 1.7

Bilateral emergency assistance, 1990-95

Legend:
- Other emergency aid
- Refugee relief

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Development Cooperation Report 1996*, OECD, Paris, 1997 Figure shows bilateral non-food emergency aid of Development Assistance Committee members.