United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S REFUGEES

A Humanitarian Agenda

4. Return and Reintegration

Since the beginning of the 1990s, armed conflicts have come to a formal end in several different parts of the world, bringing a new degree of security to the populations concerned and enabling large numbers of displaced people to return voluntarily to their homes. At the same time, growing numbers of refugees have been obliged to go back to their country of origin, either as a result of pressures exerted by the host government or as a consequence of deteriorating conditions in the areas where they have settled.

The circumstances confronting such returnees are often fraught with difficulty. Countries which have experienced armed conflict and communal violence are frequently characterized by deep social divisions, chronic political instability, widespread physical devastation and high levels of psychological trauma. As a result, they are precariously perched between the hope for continued peace and the danger of a return to war.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the return and reintegration of displaced people and the peacebuilding process. Unless uprooted populations can go back to their homes and enjoy a reasonable degree of security in their own community, the transition from war to peace may in some situations be delayed or even reversed.

As this chapter explains, however, the return and reintegration of displaced people can only be sustained if a variety of other tasks are carried out: the establishment of a representative government, the restoration of basic education and health services, the demobilization of soldiers and the revitalization of the national economy, to give just a few examples. One of the most important items on the humanitarian agenda is to ensure that these activities are undertaken in an effective and coordinated manner, thereby averting the threat of renewed violence and forced population displacements.

PATTERNS OF RETURN

Large numbers of people have been forced to abandon their homes and seek safety elsewhere in recent years. But large numbers of displaced people have also been able to go back to their own country and community. At the beginning of 1996, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees announced that no fewer than nine million refugees had gone home during the preceding five-year period – a substantial increase over the figure recorded for the years 1985-1990, when around 1.2 million refugees repatriated.

The growth in the scale of repatriation since the beginning of the 1990s has been due in large part to the resolution of several longstanding regional conflicts that originated in the cold war years: Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia and Nicaragua, to give some of the most prominent examples (see Map I). During this period, large numbers of refugees have also returned to Afghanistan, where the initial struggle against the Soviet invasion of 1979 has been transformed into a more complex conflict between a variety of different political, military and tribal groups, many of whom continue to receive substantial external support.

During the past two years, large numbers of refugees have continued to go back to their countries of origin, taking the total number of returnees in the 1990s to well over the ten million mark (see Figure 4.1). In the 12 months which followed the signing of the Dayton peace accord in December 1995, around 250,000 displaced Bosnians were able to return, if not to their previous homes, then at least to their former areas of residence. In the second half of 1996, around 720,000 Rwandese refugees repatriated from eastern Zaire, while some 485,000 returned from Tanzania. Elsewhere in Africa, in the first half of 1997, the repatriation of some 150,000 Malian Tuaregs from Mauritania and other neighbouring states was also proceeding.

By the beginning of 1997, UNHCR was providing some form of protection or assistance to just under three million returnees around the world. Given the hope that large-scale repatriation movements will soon be able to take place in countries such as Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia, this figure seems unlikely to diminish in the immediate future.

The statistics presented above provide a useful indication of the changing pattern of refugee repatriation over the past decade. It should be noted, however, that these figures usually refer only to refugees in the legal sense of the term. With the notable exception of Bosnia, they exclude the very large numbers of internally displaced people who have also been able to go back to their previous place of residence. In Mozambique, for example, around 1.7 million returning refugees were registered by UNHCR between 1992 and 1996. While precise statistics are not available, at least twice as many internally displaced Mozambicans are believed to have gone back to their homes during the same period. Given the declining number of refugees throughout the world and the rapidly growing scale of internal displacement, it seems likely that returning exiles will in future represent an even smaller proportion of the people wishing to make their way home at the end of an armed conflict.

Like refugee exoduses, repatriation movements take place in diverse political and socio-economic circumstances. They also vary substantially with regard to a range of other variables: the number of people involved; the speed of their return; the extent to which it takes place on a voluntary basis; the way in which the repatriation is organized; and the conditions which the returnees encounter on arrival in their area of origin. Despite their heterogeneous nature, it is possible to identify three dominant and interconnected characteristics of recent repatriation movements, each of which has important implications for the task of returnee reintegration and the broader peacebuilding process. These are discussed in the sections which follow.

Repatriation under duress

Despite a well-established international principle that refugee repatriation should take place on a "wholly voluntary basis" and in "conditions of safety and dignity," it is quite clear that a large proportion of the world's recent returnees have repatriated under some form of duress.[1] As Chapter Two explained, such duress has in many instances been deliberate, exercised by host governments, host communities and other actors, with the specific intention of forcing refugees to go back to their homeland. Sadly, the principle of non-refoulement, which prevents refugees from being returned to countries where their life or liberty would be at risk, has been flouted on a regular basis during the past few years.

In many other situations, refugee returns have been induced by a more general deterioration of conditions in the country of asylum, whether as a result of social and political violence, declining economic opportunities or reductions in international assistance. As a recent study of repatriation movements in North-East Africa suggests, many returnees are perhaps more accurately described as "refugees from refuge." "There has been little that is either voluntary or safe about the returns discussed in this book," the editors point out. "Most of them have been a consequence of a deteriorating situation in areas of exile, including, in some cases, military action against the displaced groups."[2]

Such circumstances have given rise to a phenomenon known as ‘repatriation emergencies’, in which large numbers of refugees abandon their country of asylum and return to their country of origin, often to areas which are ill-prepared to absorb such large numbers of new arrivals. The return of around 700,000 Rwandese refugees in little more than a week at the end of 1996, forced out of eastern Zaire by the advance of the rebel forces, provides a particularly dramatic example of this phenomenon.

Repatriation during conflict

Recent experience has demonstrated that refugees frequently go back to countries which are not fully at peace. As one expert on this issue has written, "most repatriations occur during conflict, without a decisive political event such as elections or a peace agreement and without a major change in the regime or the conditions that originally caused flight."[3]

In many cases, refugees return to situations of conflict and instability because they are repatriating under duress or because they feel that it is in their best interests to repatriate, even if conditions are not completely safe at home. Significant numbers of Nicaraguan refugees repatriated from Honduras before the *contra* war was over, for example, partly because of the growing insecurity which prevailed in their camps and partly because their material expectations of life in exile had not been met.[4] As this example suggests, repatriation movements often represent the outcome of a careful decision-making process, whereby individuals, households and communities weigh up the relative benefits of moving or staying put.

The considerations which influence the decision to repatriate may not always be immediately apparent to the external observer. Afghanistan, for example, has experienced an almost uninterrupted period of armed conflict since the Soviet withdrawal in 1988, and yet large numbers of refugees have continued to leave the security of Pakistan so that they can go back to their homes. For many of the Afghans, it would appear, the absence of a stable central government is not a major disincentive to repatriation, as long as they can go back to a part of the country controlled by a faction which can offer them some protection.

The decision to repatriate under conditions of conflict can also be influenced by more explicitly political considerations. The repatriation of Salvadoran refugees from Honduras, for example, was largely completed before peace had returned to their homeland and despite the overt hostility of the authorities towards the returnees. As a study of this repatriation movement has explained, the refugees’ decision to return en masse to a country where they were not wanted was in fact a carefully calculated gesture of resistance to the incumbent regime. "They went home because they believed that the moment had come when, as organized communities in El Salvador, they could contribute to the political struggle against the government and military," the study concludes.[5]

Self-organized returns

A third characteristic of many recent repatriation movements is to be found in the extent to which they are planned by refugees themselves, even amongst exiled populations which lack the highly structured and politicized leadership that was present in the case of El Salvador.

In recent years it has become common for refugee analysts and practitioners to refer to ‘organized’ and ‘spontaneous’ repatriations – the former referring to movements undertaken with international funding and the active involvement of UNHCR, and the latter referring to movements which take place in the absence of such support. It has become equally common for such observers to note that internationally organized repatriation movements, involving the use of UNHCR registration procedures, transport facilities and reception arrangements, have become something of a rarity.

In situations such as the one that UNHCR encountered in Cambodia, where funding was not a particular problem and where substantial numbers of people had to be repatriated very quickly in order to meet an electoral deadline, an organized repatriation may be both possible and desirable.[6] More frequently, however, the resources required for a movement of this type are not available. In addition, the refugees themselves may be unwilling to wait for a UNHCR repatriation programme to be established or may simply prefer to go home the way that they arrived: under their own steam. Thus in June 1996, a UNHCR report on Afghanistan observed that some three million refugees had returned to the country during the preceding three years. "This movement was achieved without the aid of an organized cross-border logistics operation, without comprehensive repatriation and reintegration assistance from UNHCR, and without the presence in areas of return of major rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts by UN development agencies."[7]

While there is substantial evidence to support the argument that internationally organized returns are a rarity (according to one estimate they represent only ten per cent of all refugee returns) the notion of ‘spontaneous repatriation’ is not particularly helpful.[8] It obscures the extent to which displaced people who have gone home independently may nevertheless benefit from some form of international reintegration assistance once they are back in their own community. In addition, the concept of spontaneous return obscures the extent to which displaced households and communities organize their own return and reintegration – a process that can start even before they have abandoned their homes. In Rwanda, for example, it is reported that many refugees buried tools in the ground and hid their supply of seeds when they left for Tanzania and Zaire, so that they would have access to some basic agricultural inputs if they were able to repatriate in the near future.

More typically, of course, displaced populations plan their return and reintegration once they have reached a place of safety. As observed in a recent UNHCR report on the Mozambique repatriation, "during their time in exile, the refugees made careful plans to minimize the difficulties they would encounter and the risks they would have to take when they finally returned to their homeland."[9]

As the conflict within their homeland subsided, refugees who were living in camps made extra efforts to accumulate some capital, whether by trade, casual labour or by saving and selling some of their rations. At the same time, certain family members – usually adult and adolescent males – went back home for short periods of time, in order to establish their claims to land, to make contact with friends and family members and to take construction materials across the border. In many instances, these temporary returnees would also begin to clear their farm land and to put up simple shelters where they could stay on their next cross-border visit.

In general, Mozambican refugee households preferred to repatriate in stages, the most vulnerable members moving last, so that they could make best use of the services available in their country of asylum and benefit from the preparations which had already been made for them in their homeland. Those who had managed to find some kind of employment in their asylum country also tended to delay their return, thereby maximizing the amount of cash they had at their disposal when they finally took up permanent residence in their own country.

Studies in countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad, Eritrea and Sudan tend to confirm the hypothesis that such strategies are not only a universal feature of the repatriation process, but that they – rather than the type of assistance provided by humanitarian organizations – play a primary role in facilitating the reintegration of displaced populations.[10] Unfortunately, much of the recent discussion on the issue of returnee reintegration has tended to ignore this important fact.

The studies mentioned above also indicate that international borders have far less significance for many refugees than they do for external observers. Indeed, in areas which have a long history of population displacement, in regions inhabited by nomads and pastoralists, and in areas where ethnic groups straddle an international border, concepts such as ‘country of origin’, ‘country of asylum’, ‘refugee’ and ‘returnee’ may have little meaning for the people concerned (see Box 4.1). [11]

PROBLEMS OF RETURN

Repatriation and reintegration are ostensibly the most positive aspects of the refugee problem. When compared with the trauma of flight and the uncertainty of exile, the journey back home can certainly be a joyful experience. At the same time, however, one should not be too sentimental about the circumstances of the returning refugee. For as one aid agency worker has observed, returnees "are displaced people of a special kind. They experience not one but two relocations; one when they flee and another when they return to their own country. Each relocation is accompanied with a loss of the means of livelihood, such as land, jobs, homes and livestock. And each relocation marks the start of a tough restoration process."[12]

A similar point is made in a study of returnees in Chad. "For the refugees who had received assistance in exile," it observes, "the return could be more difficult than the experience of exile itself. In place of the semblance of stability and physical security established in camps, where the major problems of survival were adequately met, a host of problems, uncertainties and dangers awaited the refugees on their return to their home country."[13]

What exactly are the problems, uncertainties and dangers which confront refugees and internally displaced people when they return to their own community? In order to answer this question in a structured manner, the definition of human security and insecurity presented in the first chapter of this book provides a useful analytical framework.

Physical insecurity

The most obvious and immediate problem confronting returnees is that of physical insecurity. During the past few years, it has become increasingly common for analysts to talk about ‘post-conflict societies’, referring to those situations in which the parties to an armed conflict have formally agreed to a cessation of hostilities. In reality, however, the transition from war to peace is often a long and difficult one, characterized by lingering tensions, sporadic and localized violence and the ever-present threat of a return to war.

It would be misleading to suggest that the dangers confronting returnees are completely different from those experienced by other citizens in a war-torn state. Like other members of society, returnees may have to survive in a situation where the rule of law hardly exists, where banditry and violent crime are rife, where demobilized soldiers prey on the civilian population and where light weapons are available to most of the population (see Box 4.2).

Nevertheless, recent experience in different parts of the world suggests that former refugees and displaced people may be exposed to particular risks when they go back to their homes. In Burundi, for example, Hutu returnees, coming back involuntarily from neighbouring Tanzania, have been attacked and killed by members of the Tutsi-dominated armed forces. In Myanmar, returnees arriving home with cash grants and assistance items provided by UNHCR have been singled out for theft and extortion. And in Cambodia, where there is a serious shortage of agricultural land, some returnees have found it necessary to settle on and farm those areas which are most heavily infested with land-mines.

In Bosnia, physical assaults have been targeted at former refugees and displaced people in a very systematic manner, and with the explicit purpose of preventing their return and reintegration. As a report by the Open Society Institute suggests, "despite a halt in the fighting, the struggle continues to establish ethnically homogenous entities. The main actors are now merely utilizing other means."[14] Those means include stoning and shooting returnees, attacking them with clubs and iron bars, setting fire to their homes, bombing the roads and bridges that lead to their villages and preventing them from exercising any freedom of movement. In October 1996 alone, the NATO-led Implementation Force confirmed 191 instances where the homes of actual or potential returnees had been wilfully destroyed, in direct contravention of the Dayton peace agreement.

Social and psychological security

Irrespective of the level of violence, returnee situations are frequently characterized by high levels of social tension and psychological insecurity. If they go home under duress, refugees will almost inevitably feel insecure about their future. If they repatriate voluntarily, they may have developed unrealistic expectations about the situation they will find when they get back to their place of origin. In countries where ethnic boundaries have shifted, where large numbers of land-mines have been laid, or where land-use patterns have changed, former refugees and displaced people may not even be able to return to the place which they consider to be their home.

Returnees often find it difficult to adapt to the way of life in their homeland, especially when they have lived in exile for many years and have adjusted to the semi-urban lifestyle of a large refugee camp. For young people who have been born and raised in a country of asylum, 'going home' may entail a particularly high degree of dislocation.

In some situations – Cambodia being a prime example – the initial settlement of returnees has been greatly facilitated by the support they have received from friends and relatives in the resident population. In other instances, however, rather than receiving a warm welcome from their compatriots, returnees have found that they are treated with suspicion or even contempt by people who did not become refugees. Moreover, in situations where large numbers of refugees and displaced people suddenly return to a devastated area, the new arrivals and the resident population may soon find themselves in competition for scarce resources such as land, water, wood, jobs and income-generating opportunities. In such difficult circumstances, returnees may also find that they are considered to enjoy an unfair advantage. In parts of Chad, for example, researchers found that "jealousies aroused by the material goods and money the returnees were perceived to have gained through exile disrupted the delicate balance of social relations."[15]

Such tensions have assumed a particularly acute form in Rwanda, which has recently experienced two distinct repatriation movements: the return of up to 800,000 Tutsi refugees from Uganda, following the victory of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994; and the return of over a million refugees from Zaire and Tanzania in 1996, predominantly Hutus who had left the country as a result of the RPF advance. Today, these two groups of returnees (not to mention those people who have remained in Rwanda throughout the turmoil of the past three years) find themselves living alongside each other, and in many instances laying claim to the same houses and land.

Legal security

A less evident but equally important form of insecurity experienced by returnees arises from their legal status and access to judicial procedures. Three issues are of particular importance in this respect: citizenship, documentation and property rights.

As Chapter Six explains, citizenship is an essential component of human security. Without an effective nationality, individuals and groups of people have no state to provide them with protection. It is therefore a matter of concern that some returnees may not even be recognized as fully-fledged

citizens of the country to which they repatriate. In Myanmar, for example, this situation has arisen because the returning refugees – members of a Moslem minority group commonly known as the Rohingyas – are simply not recognized as citizens by the country's authorities. Significantly, the flight of around 250,000 Rohingyas to Bangladesh in 1991-92 was preceded by a very similar exodus in 1978-79, demonstrating the chronic insecurity of a community which lacks the rights of citizenship.

A more widespread problem experienced by returnees is a lack of official documentation such as identity cards and birth certificates. In an industrialized state, the loss of such documents may represent a temporary inconvenience rather than a long-term source of insecurity. But in a country such as El Salvador or Guatemala, where political tensions still exist and where the country's archives have been destroyed, a lack of documentation may place a person at risk of arrest or harassment and prevent them from voting, finding a job, gaining access to credit and moving freely around their own country.

Finally, there has in recent years been a growing recognition of the need for returnees to have secure title to the property which they left behind and the land on which they depend for their livelihood. In a number of countries which have experienced recent repatriation movements – Cambodia, Eritrea, Guatemala, Mozambique and Rwanda, for example – the question of land has become a source of increasing controversy. In some cases, this is because the land has been commercialized, allowing indigenous elites and foreign investors to gain control of the potentially most lucrative areas. In other cases, the land issue has come to the fore as a result of demographic growth, the degradation of the soil, declining agricultural productivity and the settlement of the land by other groups of people.

Whatever the origins of the problem, it is evident that returnees can find themselves in a particularly disadvantaged position when it comes to the distribution of land and the registration of land titles. Female-headed households tend to experience particular difficulties in this respect, partly because they are often socially and economically marginalized, and partly because the land tenure laws in many countries do not even recognize the right of women to enjoy secure access to land.

Material insecurity

Although different in many ways, some basic similarities can be found in the situation of war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia and Mozambique. In all of these cases, thousands of refugees and displaced people have gone back to areas which have been laid waste by armed conflict. Most of the houses, shops and warehouses there have been systematically looted or destroyed. Agricultural land, irrigation systems and other elements of the infrastructure have fallen into disuse. Marketing, banking and credit systems have all broken down. Local production and commercial activity has collapsed, depriving the population of jobs and income-generating opportunities. To the extent that entrepreneurial activities are taking place, they may be illegal in nature. Sadly, it would appear, smuggling, illicit timber and mineral extraction, drug production and prostitution are the route to easy money in a war-torn state.

Despite their resourcefulness and the reintegration strategies which they invariably devise, the people who return to such circumstances are often hard pressed to survive. While the problem of the 'dependency syndrome' has almost certainly been exaggerated in much of the literature on refugees, there is little doubt that some of the people who have become accustomed to the services provided in organized camps find it difficult to adjust to the realities of life without international assistance.

Those difficulties can assume numerous different forms. When refugees repatriate under duress, they may arrive in their homeland at a point in the agricultural cycle which makes it impossible for them to plant crops in time for the next harvest. As suggested earlier, returnees may find it difficult to establish a claim to the land or property which they left behind when they fled. And if they are offered

some land to establish a new settlement, it is likely to be in the least attractive areas, where the soil is poor in quality, where markets are inaccessible and where public services are non-existent.

Finally, it should be noted that returnee populations often include a disproportionate number of people, such as widows and members of female-headed households, who are poorly placed to establish new livelihoods when they return to their country of origin. Studies undertaken in Cambodia three years after the completion of the repatriation from Thailand, for example, suggested that up to 40 per cent of the returnees were living a precarious, hand-to-mouth existence. Prominent amongst this number were those who had no access to land and those in households with a high ratio of dependants to economically active members.[16] For returnees such as these, the process of reintegration is likely to be a long and arduous process (see Box 4.3).

REPATRIATION AND THE PEACE- BUILDING PROCESS

The concepts of returnee reintegration and peacebuilding are frequently used but rarely defined. For the purposes of this analysis, reintegration can be regarded as a process which enables formerly displaced people and other members of their community to enjoy a progressively greater degree of physical, social, legal and material security. In addition, reintegration entails the erosion – and ultimately the disappearance – of any observable distinctions which set returnees apart from their compatriots, particularly in terms of their socio-economic and legal status. Peacebuilding, on the other hand, refers to the process whereby national protection and the rule of law are re-established. More specifically, it entails an absence of social and political violence, the establishment of effective judicial procedures, the introduction of pluralistic forms of government, and the equitable distribution of resources.

The question of returnee reintegration has in recent years become one of the most important items on the international humanitarian agenda, attracting the attention not only of relief, development and human rights organizations, but also senior political and military decision-makers.[17] One of the first manifestations of this trend came in 1987, when the leaders of the Central American countries came together in an attempt to resolve the armed conflicts which had devastated the region during the previous decade. Calling for an integrated and regional approach to the problem, the declaration issued at that summit meeting explicitly acknowledged that "there can be no lasting peace without initiatives to resolve the problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons."[18] Significantly, since that declaration was drafted, almost every major peace agreement concluded around the world, whether in Bosnia, Cambodia, Mozambique or Namibia, has included specific provisions relating to the return of displaced populations.

How exactly can repatriation and reintegration contribute to the peacebuilding process in war-torn societies? This question can be answered with reference to a number of interlocking issues.

First, in the words of a recent World Bank discussion paper, "as long as significant portions of a society's population are displaced, the conflict has not ended. There can be no hope of normalcy until the majority of those displaced are able to reintegrate themselves into their societies."[19] As this statement suggests, refugee movements and other forms of forced displacement are an aberration. They are symptomatic of a situation in which the state is unable to protect its citizens and in which different groups of citizens are unable to live in peace alongside each other. The voluntary repatriation and reintegration of people who have been uprooted by violence is thus an important manifestation of the process whereby national protection is restored and human security reinforced.

Because it represents a very tangible form of progress, the voluntary return of displaced people can have an important impact on public confidence in the peacebuilding process. As UNHCR has

observed in a previous publication, "experience in several conflict-affected countries has demonstrated that for ordinary men and women, the safe return of friends and relatives who have been living in exile for many years is often a more meaningful and moving experience than any number of formal peace agreements and UN resolutions."[20]

Conversely, the transition from war to peace may be disrupted, and public confidence in the peacebuilding process undermined, if formerly displaced people are unable to reintegrate successfully into their own society. When returnees find it impossible to establish new livelihoods and are obliged to depend on humanitarian assistance; when they are unable to gain access to agricultural land and have to move into an urban squatter settlement in order to eke out a living; when they experience harassment from the authorities and discrimination from their compatriots; and when they resort to violent protest in order to make their voice heard, then the prospects for a sustainable peace are inevitably weakened.

Second, repatriation plays an important part in validating the post-conflict political order. When they choose voluntarily to go back to their homeland, refugees are, quite literally, voting with their feet and expressing confidence in the future of their country. More specifically, as demonstrated by the experience of countries such as Cambodia, Mozambique and Namibia, pre-election repatriation programmes can bring an important degree of credibility to internationally supervised elections.

Providing refugees with the opportunity to go home and to express their political preference is inherent in the concept of a free, fair and democratic election. It also legitimizes the outcome of the ballot. If, in the cases mentioned above, large numbers of citizens had been excluded from the ballot because they were living in exile, then the results of those elections might easily have been rejected by one or more of the parties involved, leading to renewed political chaos.

Third, the return and reintegration of an exiled population may be a precondition for peace in situations where refugees are politically and militarily active. No government can realistically be expected to sign a peace agreement with an opposition movement which insists on keeping a large and hostile force outside the borders of the country. Thus while the Khmer Rouge and other Cambodian factions maintained their camps on the Thai border; while SWAPO (the Namibian liberation movement) kept its army and supporters exiled in Angola; while the Nicaraguan contras continued to operate from bases in Honduras and Costa Rica; and while the former Rwandese army and militia forces maintained their bases in eastern Zaire, the peacebuilding process could make little progress. In each of these cases, the return of the refugees and their separation from the military represented an important step in the transition from war to peace.

Fourth and finally, the return of displaced populations can make an important contribution to the economic recovery of war-torn states. Indeed, repatriation may even be a prerequisite for that objective to be achieved. As one analyst suggests, "in many conflict countries, the displaced represent a high enough percentage of the total population to undermine any attempt at development... When 10 to 15 per cent of the population is not where they belong and their future residence is unpredictable, the design of social services, agricultural extension systems and other basic programmes is problematic at best."[21]

There is, of course, a less positive side to the coin, in the sense that a large and sudden influx of returnees can impose a substantial burden on the area where they settle, leading to increased competition for scarce resources and the threat of social conflict. This is particularly the case in situations where refugees have been forced to leave their country of asylum and have consequently been unable to make adequate preparations for their return and reintegration. Even so, there is also considerable evidence to suggest that when former refugees and displaced people go back to their homes, they frequently contribute to the peacebuilding process by revitalizing the local economy.

The Horn of Africa provides three good examples of the positive impact which returnees can have upon the areas where they settle. In the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, one observer reports, "the returnees act as a catalyst for development. In the rural areas it is the returnees who are spearheading ideas for change." "This new willingness and confidence to change," he continues, "is not confined to men. Returnee women have been in the forefront of opening new businesses and play a leading role in the long-distance trade in goods from Somaliland and Djibouti."[22]

According to another report, the Eritrean town of Alebu has been transformed by an influx of returnees from neighbouring Sudan. "Alebu has changed with remarkable speed from a barren place to a thriving town with around 6,000 inhabitants, numerous shops, hotels, grinding mills, a school, a clinic and hundreds of trees, shooting up between the houses."[23] Similar findings are reported from north-east Somalia, where an influx of former refugees and displaced people is said to have "contributed positively to the initial recovery process in the region. In many places the newcomers have become a dynamic force for recovery, constructing new dwellings and contributing to the local economy as they adjust to their new circumstances."[24]

As these examples suggest, returnees in the world’s poorer countries may not bring a great deal of financial or physical capital with them when they arrive in their country and area of origin. But they often possess a considerable amount of human and social capital: skills, experience and survival strategies which they have acquired in exile; family, clan and community networks which can be activated once they have returned; and a collective determination to rebuild their livelihoods and communities.

If their impact is to be maximized and sustained, however, the efforts made by returnees to re-establish their livelihoods must take place within a conducive environment. To quote again from the World Bank’s discussion paper, "reintegrating refugees into their home communities is a matter of highest priority in any reconstruction programme... The simple movement of groups of displaced people from one area to another without long-term plans to support their sustainable reintegration risks destabilizing the peace."[25] The next section examines the changing way in which UNHCR has attempted to provide such support.

RETURNEE REINTEGRATION: UNHCR’S CHANGING ROLE

The role of UNHCR in the return and reintegration of displaced populations has changed significantly since the organization was established in 1951. For the first 30 years of its existence, the question of repatriation played a relatively small part in the organization’s activities, due in large part to the fact that most of the world’s refugees came from communist states. Consequently, it was considered both inconceivable and undesirable by the western powers (UNHCR’s principal donors) that those refugees should choose to go back to their homes.

This situation began to change somewhat in the 1960s and 1970s, when the focus of the global refugee problem began to shift from Europe to Africa, Asia and other low-income areas. Even so, repatriation remained a relatively low-profile issue, for at this time, most of the states which received large numbers of refugees were still willing to grant them asylum on an open-ended basis.

When refugees did go back to their homes in large numbers, as they did in the case of countries such as Algeria, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, it was generally in the context of successful anti-colonial struggles or after a fundamental change in the political situation in the country of origin. In such circumstances, returnees were considered to be the responsibility of the government of the country of origin, supported where necessary by development organizations rather than a refugee agency such as UNHCR.

These considerations led UNHCR to play a clearly circumscribed role in the repatriation and reintegration process. As far as protection was concerned, the agency's primary function was to verify that refugees were returning to their own country on a voluntary basis, and to encourage countries of origin to establish and respect amnesties for returning refugees. With regard to assistance, UNHCR regularly provided refugees with transport to their homeland, as well as a repatriation assistance package consisting of items such as foodstuffs, blankets, cooking equipment and tools.

In general, however, the organization did not seek (nor was it encouraged to pursue) a more extensive part in the task of returnee reintegration, let alone the broader peacebuilding process. Thus even as recently as 1990, a UNHCR policy paper stated that the organization's post-repatriation protection and assistance activities "should not be envisaged as extending beyond three to six months."[26]

Over the past decade, the effectiveness of this approach to the return of displaced populations has been called into question by a number of factors. First, as indicated earlier in the chapter, the scale and geographical scope of the reintegration problem has expanded substantially since the beginning of the 1990s. With so many refugees returning to their homes, the difficulties which they encounter, and the problems associated with their presence, have become increasingly visible (see Figure 4.2).

Second, while those difficulties are not entirely new, they have certainly increased in intensity. Rather than returning voluntarily to countries where there has been a fundamental change of political circumstances, many refugee populations have in recent years gone home under duress and to countries which remain socially, economically and politically fragile, even if the fighting has formally come to an end. In such circumstances, it has been recognized, the limited forms and amount of assistance traditionally provided by UNHCR may not be sufficient to ensure the effective reintegration of returnees.

Third, it has become increasingly clear that in the aftermath of an armed conflict, the needs of returning refugees may not be any greater (and in some cases may even be less) than those of people who have been internally displaced or otherwise affected by the war. In such circumstances, assistance which is specifically targeted at former refugees and which brings no benefits to the population at large may well become a source of social tension and conflict.

Fourth, the earlier assumption that government bodies and development organizations would cater for the broader rehabilitation needs of returnee-populated areas has generally proven to be unfounded. The authorities of most war-torn countries (if such authorities exist at all) usually lack the financial, logistical and administrative capacity required to undertake such activities. And even if they do have access to resources, they may not wish to invest them in the peripheral border areas where the largest numbers of returnees are typically to be found.

Experience has demonstrated that development organizations are poorly placed to compensate for the absence of governmental capacity. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), for example, tends to focus on long-term development issues, working at the national level through government structures. It is not institutionally well equipped to undertake the speedy and local-level rehabilitation activities which are required when large numbers of people suddenly return to areas which have been devastated by war.

Fifth, while host governments and donor states were previously reluctant to endorse an expansion of UNHCR's activities in the area of returnee reintegration, that situation has been reversed with the emergence of new approaches to the problem of forced displacement. As suggested in previous chapters, states are increasingly weary of the refugee problem, and are eager (in many cases, too eager) to promote the early repatriation of refugees.

Recognizing the extreme fragility of many war-torn societies, the international community now understands that the effective reintegration of former refugees has an important part to play in preventing the recurrence of violence and population displacements. There is consequently a broad consensus that UNHCR should not restrict its activities to the task of refugee protection and assistance, but that it should undertake a broader range of activities, both in countries of asylum and in countries of origin. The task of refugee repatriation and reintegration, of course, provides an important link between the two.

As a result of these different factors, UNHCR has in recent years become much more extensively involved in the task of returnee reintegration. During the past few years, the organization's annual spending on repatriation programmes has increased substantially (see Figure 4.3). The following sections examine three of the primary ways in which these resources have been used.

Peace-plan operations

On a number of recent occasions, UNHCR has played an integral part in comprehensive peace-plan operations undertaken by the United Nations. Largely unknown until the late 1980s, this new form of peacekeeping operation has had two principal objectives: to facilitate the implementation of cease-fires and peace agreements signed by the warring parties; and to consolidate the transition from war to peace through the election of new governments.

Sometimes referred to as 'multidimensional peacekeeping operations', these initiatives have involved the different components of the UN system in a wide range of activities: demobilizing the combatants, disposing of their weapons and removing the land-mines which they have laid; assisting governments to introduce constitutional and administrative reforms; registering voters and organizing free and fair elections; and assisting refugees and displaced people to go back to their homes.

While UNHCR has played a supporting role in several of these activities, the organization's primary responsibility has naturally been with the last, namely refugee repatriation. By assisting with the repatriation of refugees, UNHCR has tried to maximize the number of returnees who have been able to participate in the electoral process. And by undertaking reintegration and rehabilitation projects in returnee-populated areas, the organization has attempted to bring a degree of stability to communities which are struggling to absorb large numbers of new arrivals.

Such are the objectives which have guided UNHCR's activities in a number of recent peace-plan operations: Namibia, which involved the repatriation of more than 42,000 exiles, not only from neighbouring states but also from many other countries around the world; Cambodia, where UNHCR was responsible for the return and initial reintegration of around 370,000 refugees who had been living in Thailand; and Mozambique, which witnessed the return of some 1.7 million refugees from six different asylum countries between 1992 and 1996. Most recently, UNHCR has also been asked to play a leading role in the Bosnian repatriation and reintegration effort, which forms an essential part of the peace-plan operation set in motion by the Dayton accords (see Box 4.4).

The peace-plan operations which have been completed since the end of the 1980s have not been without their difficulties. The parties concerned have not always respected the commitments they have given to the international community – a problem which in the case of Angola led to a serious setback in the peacebuilding process and blocked the large-scale repatriation programme which UNHCR had planned to launch. Nor has it always been easy to coordinate the military and civilian elements of these operations, often because of their tendency to work to different timetables; while the military prefers to make a quick exit once a formal transition to peace has been accomplished, civilian activities in areas such as reintegration and rehabilitation require longer-term planning and implementation. Even so, it is difficult to disagree with former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, when he referred to the "conspicuous success" of the peace-plan operations undertaken during his term of office.[27]

Human rights protection and the rule of law

UNHCR repatriation programmes have always included a human rights protection element, a function that was emphasized by the organization's governing body in 1985. "The High Commissioner," the UNHCR Executive Committee asserted, "should be recognized as having a legitimate interest for the consequences of return... Within the framework of close consultations with the state concerned, [UNHCR] should be given direct and unhindered access to returnees, so that [it] is in a position to monitor fulfilment of the amnesties, guarantees or assurances on the basis of which the refugees have returned."[28]

Since that statement was made, the protection activities undertaken by UNHCR in the context of large-scale repatriation programmes have changed in a number of ways. First, while UNHCR continues to monitor the welfare of returnees, the organization now undertakes this task in a more intensive and systematic manner, and over a longer period of time than was previously the case. Second, while returnees continue to be UNHCR's main preoccupation, there has been a growing recognition that the organization's protection role cannot be limited to one sector of the population.

Myanmar provides a useful illustration of both these points. In that country, around 55 international and local UNHCR staff members continue to monitor the situation of more than 200,000 former refugees who have repatriated from Bangladesh, even though a large majority of that number returned more than two years ago. Moreover, in addition to its work on behalf of the returnees, UNHCR monitors the well-being of the Rohingyas as a whole, given their precarious status in the country and their vulnerability to forced displacement. In this respect, it should be acknowledged that human rights abuses in Myanmar and movements of Rohingyas to Bangladesh have continued to take place during the past two years.[29]

Third, UNHCR has in the past few years begun to play an active role in an entirely new area, known as 'legal and judicial capacity-building'. This role has again been endorsed by the organization's governing body. As the Executive Committee agreed in 1996, "for states to fulfil their humanitarian responsibilities in reintegrating returning refugees... an effective human rights regime is essential, including institutions which sustain the rule of law, justice and accountability." In this connection, the Committee called upon UNHCR "to strengthen its activities in support of national legal and judicial capacity-building."[30]

In Rwanda, for example, UNHCR has provided logistical support and office equipment to the Ministry of Justice and other elements of the judicial system. The organization has organized local-level seminars on legal and human rights issues, focusing on relevant topics such as arrest procedures. Given the dearth of legal expertise in the country and the huge number of court cases arising from the genocide, the exodus of Rwandese refugees and their subsequent repatriation, efforts have also been made to support the teaching of law in the country's universities. As one UNHCR document explains, "the aim of this assistance is to further assure equal access to legal redress for returnees, long-term residents and new settlers alike."[31]

In Tajikistan, UNHCR has provided training and technical support to judges, government officials, law enforcement agencies and lawyers' associations, with the intention of building up an effective and impartial network of judicial institutions, especially in the main returnee-receiving regions of the country. In addition, working in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, UNHCR has arranged for the publication of basic legal texts, and their distribution to judges, prosecutors, universities and libraries.

This is not to suggest that government officials and other actors are always able or willing to practice the legal principles and human rights standards to which they are exposed. Rwanda, for example, has experienced a great deal of violence since the new administration came to power in 1994, much of it provoked by members of the former army and militia forces. The methods used to counter these

attacks have been criticized by many commentators, who allege that excessive and extra-legal force has been used by the authorities.[32] Moreover, by mid-1997, UNHCR was unable to undertake its monitoring function in several parts of the country due to the prevailing insecurity.

Tajikistan has also experienced some difficulties in matching principles with practice. The government has, for example, introduced a very ambitious law, intended to ensure that returning refugees are able to get back the land and jobs which they had before they left the country. "Unfortunately," Human Rights Watch reports, "this laudable legal regime has been impossible to implement," due to a lack of resources and the reluctance of some local authorities to implement the laws.[33] Even so, UNHCR's protection efforts amongst returnees in Tajikistan do appear to have had some positive results. Human Rights Watch, for example, reported in May 1996 that "many returnees in southern Tajikistan felt that the incidence of human rights abuses dropped significantly when UNHCR maintained a visible presence in their village."[34]

Economic and social reintegration

Finally, in its efforts to mitigate the serious economic and social difficulties encountered by returnees and other people in war-torn societies, UNHCR has recognized the need to provide assistance in a form that goes beyond the traditional repatriation assistance package and short-term food distribution programme. More specifically, the organization has pioneered the use of 'quick impact projects', small-scale initiatives that can be implemented at modest cost, with considerable speed and with the participation of the local community.

While there is no such thing as a typical quick impact project (QIP), such initiatives normally include the reconstruction of schools and health centres, the installation of water wells and handpumps, as well as the repair of roads, bridges and other elements of the infrastructure. Originally devised by UNHCR in Central America, the largest programme of QIPs to date has been undertaken in Mozambique, where UNHCR financed just under 1,600 projects between 1993 and 1996, most of them budgeted at less than $40,000. Around 55 different organizations were contracted to implement these projects, including international and local voluntary agencies, government departments, other UN and bilateral agencies.

One objective of QIPs is to provide an immediate injection of resources into areas which have been devastated by war and which are confronted with the need to absorb large numbers of returning refugees and displaced people. In this way, UNHCR has sought to compensate for the very limited capacity of state structures to undertake urgent rehabilitation activities and to alleviate some of the hardship which returnees inevitably experience when they first return to their homes. By implementing projects which are of benefit to the population as a whole, which require the participation of the local community, and which require former enemies to work together, the organization has also attempted to avert any conflict between the new arrivals and the resident population.

At the same time, QIPs have been devised with longer-term objectives in mind. In principle at least, they are intended to assist communities in their efforts to create and take advantage of local development opportunities, thereby enabling them to enjoy a greater degree of material security. By linking QIPs with the broader and longer-term reconstruction activities of government departments, development agencies and financial institutions, UNHCR has also tried to ensure that its reintegration efforts provide a basis for sustainable growth in returnee areas.

While QIPs have generally proved quite successful in meeting their immediate objectives, they appear to have been less effective in attaining their longer-term goals. As a number of recent evaluations have indicated, there is a fundamental tension between speed and sustainability in UNHCR's new approach to returnee reintegration. Implemented very quickly but with relatively little

planning or preparation, doubts have been raised about the cost-effectiveness of QIPs and the extent to which they are viable once UNHCR has left the scene.[35]

In many instances, UNHCR's reintegration activities have been planned at too late a date, with the result that the organization has been unable to establish the necessary linkages with longer-term development agencies by the time that its own programmes have come to an end. At the same time, recent evaluations suggest, UNHCR activities in countries of asylum and countries of origin have been inadequately coordinated. Indeed, relatively little thought has been given to the way in which the organization's refugee assistance programmes might contribute to the eventual return and reintegration of exiled populations.

SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION FROM WAR TO PEACE

UNHCR's involvement in activities such as returnee monitoring, legal capacity-building and the implementation of quick impact projects has an important part to play in facilitating the repatriation and initial reintegration of displaced populations. But it would be naive to pretend that such efforts have a determining or long-term influence on the ability of returnees to enjoy a secure and stable life within their own country. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has observed, "activities for the reintegration of returnees are only a small, if important, part of the sum of post-conflict rehabilitation needs. But the future welfare of returnees and the peace of any country as a whole will depend on how those other needs are met." [36]

Those other needs are wide-ranging. According to one recent study, the peacebuilding process incorporates a dozen different but interlocking tasks: strengthening the capacity of official institutions; holding free and fair elections; monitoring and promoting human rights; addressing the problem of accountability for previous human rights violations; building a strong civil society; demobilizing combatants; removing land-mines and unexploded ordnance; reforming the security services; restoring education and health facilities; assisting war-stricken children; reviving agricultural production; rebuilding the physical infrastructure; and instituting macro-economic policy reforms. What is more, all of these peacebuilding activities must be carried out simultaneously if displaced populations are to be effectively and sustainably reintegrated in their own society. [37]

There is good reason to think that the transition to peace in war-torn societies may prove even more difficult in the future than it has in the recent past. While they appeared to be intractable at the time, the armed conflicts in countries such as Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia and Nicaragua were quite readily resolved once the period of superpower rivalry was over. And while all of these countries have experienced various difficulties during the past three or four years, none of them has yet slipped back into large-scale violence.

Given their deeper social roots and more overtly communal character, recent and current conflicts in regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central and West Africa may prove far more difficult to bring to a definitive end. It also remains to be seen whether, at a time of increasing preoccupation with their domestic affairs, the world's more powerful states will be prepared to invest the political and financial resources required to underpin the peacebuilding process in these troubled parts of the world.

Since the middle of the 1990s, UNHCR and many other organizations have devoted a great deal of attention to the problems of peacebuilding. As a result, there now exists a considerable body of knowledge about the transition from war to peace and the ways in which that process can most effectively be supported.[38] While it is beyond the scope of this book to examine every aspect of this

complex issue, a number of key lessons can be learned from the international community's recent efforts to bring armed conflicts to an end and to safeguard the security of the affected populations.

Diverse and differentiated strategies

First, there is no blueprint for peace. Looking at war-torn societies such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Guatemala, Rwanda and Mozambique, it is quite apparent that the circumstances which lead to, sustain and eventually bring an end to civil wars and communal conflicts are extremely diverse. Peacebuilding strategies must reflect this diversity and be carefully tailored to the situation at hand. They must also be based upon a rigorous analysis of the circumstances which have led to violence. For as several experts have observed, the primary purpose of the reconstruction process must be to avert a recreation of the conditions which produced the conflict in the first place.[39]

The importance of a differentiated approach can be illustrated with regard to the issue of impunity. Influenced to a large extent by recent events in Bosnia, Rwanda and South Africa, there has been a growing tendency for commentators to suggest that without truth and justice there can be no reconciliation – and therefore no peace – in a war-torn society. This may be true in many cases, but it should not be a uniform principle. When the Mozambican peace agreement was established, for example, the country's political leaders agreed not only to declare a general amnesty but also to forego the opportunity of establishing a 'truth commission' of the type created in South Africa, El Salvador and a number of South American states. Given the absence of revenge and recrimination witnessed in Mozambique – a remarkable phenomenon in view of the atrocities which occurred during the war – this can only be regarded as a wise decision.

Foresight and early planning

Second, effective peacebuilding requires foresight and early planning. Even when a country is still at war, steps can be taken to support the transition to peace. Assistance programmes for refugees and internally displaced people, for example, can be designed in a way that discourages dependency and which provides the beneficiaries with skills which will support their eventual return and reintegration. A good example of this approach is to be seen in the land-mine awareness training that UNHCR and other organizations have provided to refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia and Mozambique. Efforts can also be made to promote democratic values, human rights principles and a 'culture of peace' amongst the citizens of war-torn states (whether living in exile or in their own country), a particularly important function in the case of children and adolescents who have grown up in the midst of conflict.

Planning for the process of reintegration and reconstruction should also begin at a much earlier stage than has customarily been the case. Effective planning requires accurate information, and even in countries which are still at war, it is normally possible to collect a substantial amount of data about the situation in areas which have been devastated by conflict. In fact, it is with precisely this objective in mind that UNHCR and UNDP have recently devised a process known as 'district development mapping'. First undertaken in Mozambique, the objective of this exercise is to build up a detailed and regularly updated picture of all the development needs and opportunities which exist in potential areas of return. Looking to the future, far greater efforts should also be made to understand the repatriation strategies devised by displaced people themselves and to ensure that they are effectively supported by agencies working in both countries of asylum and in countries of origin.

Combining speed with patience

A third principle of peacebuilding is the need to combine speedy action with patience. The end of an armed conflict inevitably raises high hopes. Once the fighting has died down and uprooted populations have made their way home, people will expect their circumstances to improve very

rapidly and in a tangible manner: through better access to education and health services, for example, as well as improved security and greater freedom of movement.

It is imperative to ensure that such expectations are at least partially fulfilled. It is equally important to ensure that the dividends of peace are shared fairly amongst different sections of the population. If they are not, there is a very real risk that old conflicts will be revived and that new tensions will surface, thereby delaying or reversing the peacebuilding process.

While speedy action is required in the aftermath of an armed conflict, it would be quite wrong to assume that there are any quick fixes in the transition from war to peace. Even when cease-fires have been introduced, peace agreements signed, combatants demobilized, refugees repatriated and democratic elections held, it can take a great deal of time to re-establish the nexus between citizens and the state.

If it took many years to reconcile the nations of post-second world war Europe, then it may take at least as long (certainly much longer than the one or two-year mandate usually given to the UN's peace-plan operations) to establish a degree of trust between groups of people who have inflicted terrible abuses on each other. It is also unrealistic to expect the transition from war to peace to progress in a unilinear manner. As witnessed most clearly in cases such as Afghanistan, Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, there will almost certainly be setbacks, whether in the form of new political crises, fresh outbreaks of violence and population displacement or an upsurge in criminal activity. Such setbacks must be the occasion for an intensification and a reorientation of the peacebuilding effort, rather than a pretext for a reduction or withdrawal of international support.

Generous and sustained financial support

Fourth, and as a logical consequence of the preceding statement, peacebuilding requires generous and sustained assistance. Given the deliberately destructive nature of contemporary warfare, post-conflict reconstruction is an enormously expensive undertaking. As societies which have experienced long periods of warfare are not in a position to fund this process themselves, and as private investors have little interest in infrastructural rehabilitation and the restoration of basic public services, the world's more affluent states must shoulder a large part of the burden. Moreover, this burden should not simply fall on traditional donor countries such as Canada, Japan, the USA and the states of Western Europe. Those newly industrialized countries which have recently enjoyed the most spectacular rates of economic growth – some of which have themselves benefited from international assistance in the past – should also play a more active role in mobilizing resources for reconstruction.

Those resources are required over an extended period of time. During the past few years, large sums of money have been allocated to peace-plan operations, repatriation operations and demobilization programmes for former combatants. But donor interest in peacebuilding processes tends to diminish too quickly. As one commentator has written, "despite a virtually universal consensus that fragile peace arrangements must be consolidated by means that visibly improve the security, well-being and confidence of the former adversaries and victims of conflict, international funding invariably declines far too soon after the ceasefire is in place."[40]

This statement is echoed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "When there is no impending emergency, it is difficult to generate resources for what is perceived as – and often is – a risky and drawn-out process of rebuilding war-torn societies." It is for this reason that UNHCR has called for the creation of a new international funding arrangement for post-conflict reconstruction, designed to make resources available in a more predictable manner and to bridge the traditional gap between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term development assistance. "Until now," the High Commissioner continues, "relief and development programmes have been treated as two significantly different ways of supporting people and countries in distress, leading to a dual structure

in aid management which does not facilitate rehabilitation."[41] It is therefore of some significance that the World Bank has recently established a trust fund for post-conflict reconstruction, as well as a specialized new unit, dedicated to this issue.

Effective coordination

Effective coordination constitutes a fifth principle of peacebuilding. For without such coordination, there is always a risk that some elements of the peacebuilding process will be overlooked, that other activities will receive a disproportionate amount of attention, and that initiatives taken by one actor may contradict the efforts of another.

Unfortunately, recent experience suggests that effective coordination is easier said than done. This is partly because of the sheer number of institutions involved in the transition from war to peace. Thus in Bosnia, up to 240 international NGOs alone are believed to have set up a presence in the country, although nobody can establish a very accurate figure! But the problem of coordination also derives from the diversity of the organizations which are involved in the peacebuilding process.

UNHCR’s involvement in the single task of returnee reintegration, for example, has required the organization to develop a working relationship with a range of different partners. To participate in comprehensive peace-plan operations, the organization has had to collaborate with the political components of the United Nations and the peacekeeping forces of member states. By developing an extended role in the area of returnee monitoring, UNHCR has been drawn into a new relationship with the UN’s Centre for Human Rights and human rights field missions such as those established in Guatemala, Haiti and Rwanda.

UNHCR’s efforts to implement QIPs and to link those projects to longer-term rehabilitation activities have naturally involved UNDP and international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Above all, perhaps, the task of reintegration has required UNHCR to work intensively with the national and local authorities in war-torn states.

Even if all these actors share a general interest in the transition from war to peace and the protection of human security, it would be unrealistic to imagine that their priorities are identical or even compatible. To give just one example, the World Bank and other financial institutions are primarily concerned with laying the foundations for long-term economic growth, an objective they have pursued by urging the governments of war-torn states to introduce market-oriented reforms and structural adjustment programmes. But as many aid organizations have pointed out, the short-term impact of such measures may be to increase unemployment, reduce wages, cut public services and provoke social or political unrest – conditions which are hardly conducive to the reintegration of returnees.[42]

While such institutional differences cannot simply be wished away, they can at least be managed and mitigated. At the global level, there is a particular need for organizations which are working together in reintegration and peacebuilding programmes to develop a much better understanding of each other’s mandate, objectives and working methods, as well as their strengths and limitations. UNHCR’s early and unrealized expectations of UNDP, for example, were based upon a general ignorance of the latter organization.

There are several steps which could be taken to avoid such problems: regular high-level coordination meetings; joint research and evaluation activities; a more systematic exchange of information and ideas; joint training initiatives as well as staff exchange and secondment programmes. There is also considerable scope for the establishment of inter-agency coordination units. In Central America, for example, the creation of a UNHCR/UNDP Joint Support Unit, staffed by personnel from both agencies, is widely recognized to have contributed to the successful implementation of CIREFCA, a regional programme focusing on the return and reintegration of displaced populations.[43]

The different actors involved should also treat the peacebuilding process in a more holistic manner than has commonly been the case. This is an issue which the member states and agencies of the UN system have discussed at considerable length in recent times. While the results of this process remain somewhat nebulous, an important principle has at least been established: the need for an agreed strategy which enables the government concerned, donor states, multilateral and non-governmental organizations to pool their resources and to ensure that the efforts of these different actors support, rather than contradict, each other.

International and national responsibilities

Sixth and finally, peacebuilding processes should carefully balance the principles of international solidarity and state responsibility. There are, of course, many ways in which external actors – particularly the world's more affluent countries – can support the reintegration of returnees and the broader transition from war to peace. They can provide the resources required to repatriate and reintegrate large numbers of displaced people. They can deploy the military forces required to demobilize an army and decommission its weapons. They can help to register voters and organize democratic elections. And they can pursue economic, foreign and human rights policies which encourage war-torn states to respect the rights of their citizens.

Such contributions, however, will be of little value unless they are matched by efforts to develop the indigenous capacities of war-torn states. Nor will they be effective unless they are accompanied by a genuine willingness on the part of national and regional leaders to promote social tolerance, to ensure that disputes are resolved in a peaceful manner and to be held accountable for their actions.

Unfortunately, in countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Liberia and Somalia, some of the people who wield the greatest power evidently have nothing but contempt for such values. As a result, the return and reintegration of displaced populations and the transition to peace in general seem likely to be fraught with difficulties. More positively, however, it is worth recalling cases such as El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nicaragua and South Africa, countries where political leadership has been exercised in a largely responsible manner, enabling the peacebuilding process to move forward more smoothly and rapidly than many observers anticipated.

NOTES

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10 See, for example, T. Allen, *op cit*; T. Allen and H. Morsink (eds), *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Africa World Press and James Currey, Geneva, 1994; C. Watson, *The Flight, Exile and Return of Chadian Refugees*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1996.

11 For a discussion of these issues, see T. Allen and D. Turton, 'Introduction', in T. Allen, *op cit*.

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13 C. Watson, *op cit*, p. 105.

14 'Bosnia: property disputes cloud repatriation prospects', *Forced Migration Monitor*, January 1997.

15 C. Watson, *op cit*, p. 119.

16 L. Studdert, 'An assessment of food security and livelihood of repatriated households in Cambodia', World Food Programme, Rome, 1995.

17 See, for example, the speakers and participants at a UNHCR/International Peace Academy conference at Princeton University, July 1996, reported in *Healing the Wounds: Refugees, Reconstruction and Reconciliation*, International Peace Academy, New York, 1996.

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20 The State of the World's Refugees, *op cit*, p. 106.

21 S. Holtzman, *op cit*, p. 7.

22 R. Hogg, 'Changing mandates in the Ethiopian Ogaden', in T. Allen, *op cit*, p. 162.

23 C. Sorensen, *op cit*, p. 2.

24 ‘Preparatory WSP mission to North-East Somalia: mission report’, War-Torn Societies Project, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, December 1996, pp. 6-7.

25 S. Holtzman, *op cit*, p. 15.

26 ‘Voluntary repatriation and other return movements: the role of UNHCR in the country of origin’, internal paper, UNHCR, Geneva, August 1990, p. 4.

27 *The State of the World’s Refugees*, *op cit*, p. 108.

28 ‘Voluntary repatriation’, UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 40 of 1985, on *Refworld* CD-Rom, UNHCR, Geneva, 1997.

29 Human Rights Watch, ‘Uncertain refuge: international failures to protect refugees’, report 9/1, New York, April 1997, p. 9.

30 ‘Report of the 46th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s programme’, UNHCR Executive Committee document A/AC.96/860, October 1995, on *Refworld*, *op cit*.

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34 Human Rights Watch, ‘Uncertain refuge’, *op cit*.

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36 S. Ogata, ‘Towards healing the wounds: conflict-torn states and the return of refugees’, statement presented at the conference ‘The United Nations: the next fifty years’, Korea University, April 1996.

37 K. Kumar, *op cit*.

38 For a useful review of the literature, see P. Weiss-Fagen, *The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies: A Bibliographic Essay*, War-torn Societies Project, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 1995.

39 See, for example, K. Bush, ‘Towards a balanced approach to rebuilding war-torn societies’, *Canadian Foreign Policy*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1995.

40 P. Weiss-Fagen, ‘The meaning and modes of reintegration’, paper presented at the conference ‘People of concern’, UNHCR, Geneva, November 1996, p. 1.

41 S. Ogata, ‘From humanitarian relief to rehabilitation: a comprehensive response’, statement presented at the advanced development management programme, Sophia University, Tokyo, October 1995, on *Refworld* CD-Rom, *op cit*.

42 See, for example, K. Kumar. *op cit*, pp. 32-33.

43 For further details of this initiative, see *The State of the World's Refugees*, *op cit*, pp. 50-51.

Box 4.1
The Tuareg repatriation

Little noticed by the international community, a substantial repatriation movement has been taking place in the heart of the Sahara desert. The refugees concerned are going back to some of the harshest living conditions to be found anywhere in the world.

The Tuaregs are nomadic pastoralists who live across the Sahelian belt in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mauritania, Mali and Niger. The largest Tuareg populations are to be found in the latter two countries, 750,000 of them living in Niger and 500,000 in Mali. Distinguished by their Berber origins and nomadic way of life, the Tuareg have remained ethnically, racially and linguistically distinct from the majority population of the societies in which they live. As a result of their refusal to assimilate and their fierce desire to preserve their culture, they have often clashed with the governments of the region. Now, however, many of those who were displaced during earlier periods of armed conflict are making their way home.

Economic decline

In pre-colonial days the Tuareg were a wealthy and powerful people. But aggressive colonization, economic decline and environmental disasters have all eroded their influence. Many have been forced to abandon their nomadic way of life and have moved to the outskirts of cities, where they survive by means of casual work and begging.

Throughout the Sahel, but most notably in Niger and Mali, the Tuaregs have called for greater autonomy and in some cases for self-government. In the early 1990s, militant Tuareg groups in Mali started to carry out armed attacks against government forces stationed in the north of the country. Despite the signing of a peace agreement

between the insurgents and the government in January 1991, the attacks continued until the president was removed from power later that year. By this time, thousands of people, most of them Tuaregs and Moors, had fled from military reprisals and summary killings and crossed the border into Algeria, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal.

In 1992, with the help of international mediation, a pact was signed between the Malian government and the major Tuareg rebel groups. As well as declaring a mutual cease-fire, the agreement also provided for the enrolment of former rebels in the army or civil service and the establishment of development programmes in the northern provinces of the country. Unfortunately, very few of these proposals were actually realized and fighting resumed in 1993. It was only in 1994 that the government really started to implement the pact, thus returning some peace and stability to the north of the country and enabling plans for the repatriation of the refugees to proceed.

During the same period, a similar rebellion by a coalition of armed Tuareg opposition groups took place in northern Niger. As in Mali, the government responded with harsh military reprisals, which forced up to 20,000 Tuaregs to flee into Algeria and Burkina Faso. After several thwarted attempts, a peace agreement was finally signed by both sides in April 1995.

The fighting continued sporadically throughout 1995, however, as certain rebel groups refused to accept the settlement.

The situation began to improve following a round table conference between the government, rebel groups, local authorities, traditional chiefs and the donor community in October 1995. As a result of these discussions, all sides agreed to support the peace process. Concrete plans were also put into place for the rehabilitation of pastoral zones and the implementation of development programmes in northern Niger. In March 1997, the government began to introduce an amnesty for all prisoners who had been involved in the armed conflict, and the cease-fire between both sides was finally respected. Since then, there has been a marked improvement in security conditions in the north of the country and plans for the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced people have begun.

Assistance package

The repatriation of the Malian refugees started in November 1995, and by March 1997 around 100,000 refugees had returned to that country. In May 1997, UNHCR estimated that a further 60,000 Malian refugees remained in exile, many of them in Niger. The great majority of Malian refugees have returned to their homes independently, with a smaller number repatriating in UNHCR convoys. Whatever means they use to return, former refugees are entitled to an assistance package which includes items such as tents, mosquito nets and food. On returning to their home areas, the refugees also receive a settlement grant.

Despite the signing of various agreements and the launch of funding appeals, plans for the repatriation and reintegration of some 10,500 Nigerien refugees, most of whom are in Algeria, are proceeding at a slower pace than in Mali. Although conditions in the northern provinces of Niger have improved, the political, security and economic situation in the region is still fragile, and UNHCR and the government are keen not to aggravate such problems with a rushed and poorly planned repatriation movement. In fact, an earlier repatriation programme to Niger, established in 1989 for refugees who had fled to neighbouring countries in the 1980s, actually aggravated the political situation by rasing expectations that were subsequently not fulfilled.

In both Mali and Niger, the refugees are returning to areas which have been ravaged by conflict, civil strife, drought and environmental degradation. The economy of those areas has been shattered, the infrastructure is in a state of disrepair, there is an almost total absence of government services and development activities have ground to a halt. The majority of refugees are nomadic livestock herders, with a smaller number of them engaged in other economic activities, such as crop production, masonry and carpentry. While some of the refugees have been able to return with a few animals, the majority of those who were living in refugee camps have lost all their livestock and other means of livelihood. They are therefore returning with no independent means of support.

A main priority for all the Tuareg returnees is the availability of water. As one Malian refugee explained to the journal Jeune Afrique, “for us, the Tuaregs, water is life. When we have water, we can look at our feet and we don’t have to keep looking at the sky.” To meet this important need, UNHCR has allocated around 40 per cent of its programme funds to the construction and rehabilitation of water sources. In addition, resources have been provided to restock the refugees’ herds, to distribute seeds, tools and other agricultural inputs, to train refugees in appropriate irrigation techniques and to establish micro-credit and income generation projects for both women and men.

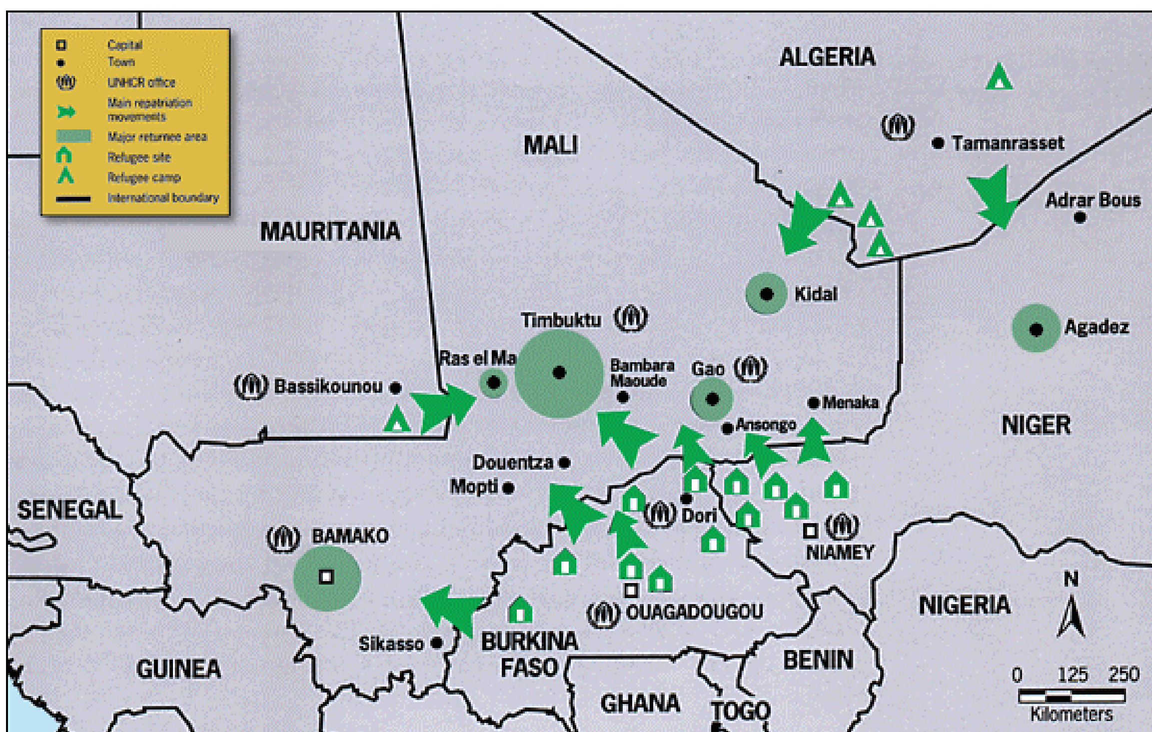
Another priority for many of the refugees is access to education for their children, many of whom were not able to attend school while they were living in exile. UNHCR’s assistance activities therefore include the repair and construction of school buildings and the provision of school furniture and classroom materials. Unfortunately, the response to UNHCR’s appeal for funds for this little-known repatriation programme has been very poor.

The repatriation and reintegration process is further complicated in both Mali and Niger by the simultaneous return of both refugees and internally displaced people. The mixed nature of the returnee population and their nomadic lifestyle have required UNHCR and its operational partners to adopt a flexible and community-based approach. UNHCR's assistance programmes, for example, make no real distinction between former refugees, returning displaced people and the resident population, as the needs of these different groups are all essentially the same.

Despite the difficulties which they have encountered on returning to their own country, many refugees have been able to rebuild their lives and livelihoods in Mali. As a result, they are now encouraging their families and friends to return as well. "We still have brothers and sisters in Mauritania," a refugee named Mohamed ag Hamani explained to the magazine Jeune Afrique. "I have written to their community leader to encourage them to come back. It is important that they are sure that it is really me who has written."

Map J

The Tuareg Repatriation



Box 4.2
The scourge of light weapons

In recent years, considerable international attention has been paid to the problem of land-mines and the destructive impact which they can have on societies which are attempting to recover from protracted periods of armed conflict. The issue of small arms, however, has attracted considerably less interest, despite the potential of such weapons to disrupt the peacebuilding process, to prevent the re-establishment of the rule of law and to impede the reintegration of displaced populations.

Light weapons are characterized by their accessibility, durability and utility. Because they can be carried by individual combatants, they are easy to transport, smuggle and hide. Their size and relative technological simplicity make them cheap and easy to produce. As they become more widely available, prices are driven down, making them accessible to a much wider cross-section of groups and individuals.

In many parts of Africa today, an AK-47 automatic rifle can be procured for a sum equivalent in value to that of a goat or a bag of maize. Once purchased, small arms usually require little in the way of maintenance or spare parts. Moreover, only minimal training or expertise is required to use them. A relatively small quantity of light weapons can cause significant destruction, even in the hands of inexperienced, irregular and under-aged soldiers.

Supply and demand

The widespread availability of light weapons is a reflection of some important changes in the global balance of supply and demand. Economic hardship, declining external aid and mounting debt have inhibited the transfer of larger conventional weapons to many developing countries. But growing social unrest and other challenges to state authority have dramatically increased the demand for small arms.

At the same time, in the face of declining domestic demand and a glut in production capacity, the arms industries in both NATO and former-Warsaw Pact countries have been looking for new overseas markets. Technology transfers have also given many low and middle-income countries the capacity to manufacture small arms for the first time, further increasing the number of suppliers in the global arms market.

Arms merchants have successfully exploited the emergence of transnational commercial institutions and the weakness of existing regulatory mechanisms to create a sophisticated black market in small arms. In many cases, arms merchants utilise the same networks which are used to market other illegal goods, particularly drugs. When wars draw to a close, unwanted weapons are often sold on to nearby countries which are also gripped by armed conflict.

The trade in light weapons has had a range of negative consequences for people around the world. Armed societies are insecure societies. Once certain members of society begin to resolve disputes and secure a livelihood through the use of violence, then others are obliged to protect themselves in the same manner. In Colombia, for example, small arms have become a defining feature of the country's current civil strife. There are now estimated to be one million legal and five million illegal weapons in the country, resulting largely from a convergence of political terrorism and drug-related violence.

The arming of adolescents and children in many recent conflicts is evidently storing up social and political problems for many years to come. Will the thousands of uneducated Liberian, Sierra Leonean, Somali and Sudanese boys who have grown up carrying a rifle ever be able to support themselves through peaceful economic activities?

Control and limitation

Despite the scale of the small arms problem, states have been slow to subject such weapons to any form of control or limitation. In part, this stems from a lack of information and consensus amongst policymakers. Because the international community has until recently focused its attention on weapons of mass destruction and on larger conventional weapons, relatively little is known about the commerce in small arms. Indeed, much of the evidence relies on fragmentary and anecdotal sources of information. In addition, many governments share the assumption that it is impossible to control the flow of light weapons to conflict-affected countries, given the massive stocks and numerous suppliers which already exist, and the ease with which they can be transferred from one part of the world to another.

Small arms transfers are not included in the major mechanism for controlling the arms trade – the UN register of conventional arms – which is principally concerned with the threat that large weapons systems pose to international or regional stability, rather than the security of people in war-torn states. While the register could potentially play a role in monitoring the flow of small arms, such an initiative would still not address the issue of illicit arms transfers. Thus while the effort to curb the trade in light weapons is a necessary step in controlling the proliferation of small arms, it is not sufficient in itself.

The disarmament and demobilization of combatants after armed conflicts have come to an end is another important issue which must be addressed, which has direct consequences for the return and reintegration of displaced populations and the transition from war to peace. One reason for the limited success of recent initiatives in this area appears to stem from an over-emphasis on the collection and destruction of weapons and the inadequate attention paid to the integration of soldiers into active civilian life. As one study perceptively notes, "success in disarming and demobilizing soldiers... depends on the extent to which warring parties and individual combatants believe that their physical and economic security will not be adversely affected by relinquishing arms and abandoning what for many is not just a profession, but also a way of life."

As demonstrated by the progress made in relation to the banning of land-mines, there is tremendous scope for governments and other actors to address the proliferation of small arms as well as the problem of post-conflict demilitarization. Effective initiatives in this area could do much to bring a greater degree of security to the members of war-torn societies and to avert the recurrence of armed conflict and population displacement.

Box 4.3
Women in war-torn societies

"Many women who lost everything and who are heads of households for the first time are faced with the difficult responsibility of trying to rebuild their lives while providing food, shelter and school fees for themselves and their surviving relatives. Regardless of their status – Tutsi, Hutu, displaced, returnees – all are facing problems because of the upheaval caused by the genocide, aggravated by their generally disadvantaged status as women." Those are the words used by Human Rights Watch to describe the situation of women in Rwanda at the end of 1996.

While genocidal killings of the type which took place in Rwanda are mercifully rare, the difficulties experienced by the women of that country are by no means unique. In any society where an armed conflict has come to an end and where displaced people are going back to their homes, women are confronted with particular challenges. Acknowledging the importance of this topic, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees observed in 1991 that "relatively little had been documented on the specific issues facing women returning to their homes after years of exile." Six years later, that statement holds true; there is still a dearth of research on the situation of female returnees and other women in war-torn societies. At the operational level, however, some important initiatives have been taken in this area.

The Bosnia Women's Initiative

Economic recovery in post-war Bosnia is proving to be a slow process, and for every sector of the population, access to income-earning opportunities is a major concern. For displaced and returnee women, a large proportion of whom are widows and single heads of households, the economic situation is particularly difficult. Many were financially dependent on their spouses before the war and they consequently have no marketable skills or entrepreneurial experience. Others who are of rural origins and who are unable to go back to their home areas face considerable problems in adapting to life in a town.

Visiting Bosnia in the aftermath of the war, a team of experts, some of them from the US-based Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, concluded that displaced and returnee women required much better access to vocational, literacy and skills training programmes, as well as banking and credit facilities. Without such services, they would not become economically independent. Acting upon these findings, in 1996, UNHCR established the Bosnia Women's Initiative (BWI) with the help of a major grant from the US government. The organization then began a detailed process of consultation with the many women's groups which had sprung up in Bosnia during and after the conflict, so as to gain a better understanding of their needs and aspirations.

Administered from the UNHCR office in Sarajevo, the BWI initially focused all of its efforts on income-generating projects. But this approach was challenged by many Bosnian women, who

argued, in the words of one Gorazde woman, that “the trauma of these people is not over with the last bullet.” Responding to such comments, the project selection committee, comprised of representatives from UNHCR, the US government, the World Bank and Bosnian women, extended the range of the programme to include counselling and psychosocial rehabilitation projects.

In its first year of operation, the BWI has sponsored a wide range of activities, including the provision of legal training and advice to Bosnian women on issues such as land, property, employment and pension rights, as well as family law. The latter is of particular importance as there has been a disturbing increase in the incidence of domestic violence since the war came to an end. The programme also attempts to address some of the particular legal, social and political problems experienced by women with husbands from a different ethnic group. In addition, BWI funds have been used to establish health projects, day care facilities for children and the elderly, as well as a women’s community radio project. One of the most celebrated BWI projects is the Gorazde cow bank, which has provided 40 women from that town with a cow, so that they can produce their own milk and cheese. The women are obliged to return their cow’s first calf to the project, but are free to keep or to sell any additional calves, thereby enabling them to generate some additional income.

While it is still too early to provide a full assessment of the BWI, independent observers have already argued that this approach should be extended to other war-torn countries. The Open Society Institute’s Forced Migration Monitor, for example, has recommended that a similar initiative be launched in Croatia, with a particular emphasis on the situation of displaced, widowed, elderly and sick women. “With some additional refinement,” the report concludes, “the BWI may become a model for emulation, perhaps in the countries of the former Soviet Union”.

Women in Rwanda

Rwanda is one country where the BWI approach has already been emulated. Although the social and economic context of the two countries is evidently quite different, many Rwandese women, like their Bosnian counterparts, have also suffered severe psychological and physical trauma as a result of recent events. As many as 5,000 Rwandese victims of rape are believed to have given birth since the 1994 genocide. Much larger numbers of women have been widowed and are now struggling single-handedly to support large numbers of dependants. The generally disadvantaged status of these women, as well as their lack of education and skills, oblige them to eke out a very precarious existence.

Modelled on the programme in Bosnia, the Rwanda Women’s Initiative (RWI) was established at the end of 1996. The programme is administered by UNHCR and funds are channelled through the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs as well as several women’s organizations. It is targeted primarily at widows, women heads of household, single mothers, victims of sexual violence and foster families. In the first few months of its existence, the RWI has funded a range of different activities, including a brick-making project and a tailoring school for widows in the Umutara and Kigali prefectures and an assistance programme for families who have fostered orphans of the genocide. Again, self-sufficiency is the objective; rather than being provided with free food, families are provided with a goat and the necessary veterinary drugs, so that the beneficiaries can supplement both their diet and their income.

As in Bosnia, the legal status and legal rights of Rwandese women are a primary UNHCR concern. Under customary local law, women are unable to inherit land or property, and married women cannot engage in commercial activities or employment without the authorization of their husbands. Such practices pose enormous difficulties for women who are the sole providers for their families. Recognizing these problems, the government is currently revising those laws which discriminate against women, with support and advice from UNHCR. At the same time, UNHCR is

working with the government to provide legal training to local authorities and to women’s associations. While such activities evidently cannot remove the physical and psychological scars of the country’s recent history, they could play a small part in building the foundations of civil society.

Box 4.4
Return and reconstruction in Bosnia

During 1996 and 1997, UNHCR faced enormous difficulties in trying to implement what has turned out to be one of the most contentious provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement: the return of refugees and displaced people to their homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By mid-1997, 18 months after the Dayton agreement brought the conflict in that country to a formal end, there were still up to 900,000 people displaced within the country and another 900,000 living as refugees in other states.

The military provisions of the peace agreement, such as the separation of the former warring sides, were swiftly and quite smoothly implemented by the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), later renamed the Stabilization Force (SFOR). But Annex 7 of the agreement, which was intended to undo the process of ethnic cleansing and to restore the multi-ethnic composition of the country by facilitating the return of displaced populations, could only be implemented in a limited measure.

Right to return

By mid-1997, an estimated 300,000 people, including both refugees and internally displaced people, had returned to their homes in Bosnia – a significant figure, but far below UNHCR's initial projection of half a million returnees in 1996 alone. Regrettably, the return of many other people was blocked by the leaders of Bosnia's divided communities, some of whom openly pursued in peace the same policy of ethnic separation which they had previously pursued during the war.

As a result of the Dayton agreement, two political and administrative 'entities' have been established in Bosnia: the Bosnia-Croat Federation and the Republic of Srpska. Many officials, most notably those in the latter entity, openly refused to fulfil the commitments they had made under the agreement, which explicitly gave all Bosnian refugees and displaced people the right to return home.

A similar attitude prevailed in certain areas controlled by Bosnian Croats. In some cases, houses rebuilt at a great cost under UNHCR's shelter programme were subsequently destroyed in an attempt to prevent minority returns. In other cases, the return of refugees to areas where they would be part of an ethnic minority met with a violent response, with attacks on returnees and on members of the resident minority population. In general, the situation of minorities and the attitude toward minority returns has been considerably better in areas controlled by the Bosniacs.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the once hostile ethnic groups and to make minority returns possible, UNHCR introduced a number of confidence-building measures: bus lines running between the two entities, for example, and assessment visits by potential returnees to their places of origin. The bus lines – 14 of them by mid-1997 – proved to be extremely successful and

were used every week by many thousands of people. In a divided country where there were no telephone connections between the two entities and where the vehicle registration plates of one were not recognized by the other, the UNHCR buses were often the only way for the people of Bosnia to stay in touch with each other.

A major obstacle to the return of displaced Bosnians has been the shortage of habitable accommodation throughout much of the country. It is estimated that 60 per cent of Bosnia's housing was either damaged or destroyed during the war. One of UNHCR's main programmes during 1996 and 1997 was a shelter project, entailing the repair of housing in urban and rural areas, as well as a gigantic glazing project in Sarajevo and the former enclave of Gorazde, where most of the windows had been shattered as a result of the war. Hundreds of thousands of people benefited from these schemes. In Sarajevo, UNHCR and the City Development Institute also renovated 1,200 publicly owned apartments in different parts of the city, on condition that the original owners, members of minority groups, were allowed to return and reclaim their pre-war accommodation.

Much needed as it is, the shelter project cannot be a substitute for the major reconstruction effort required if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to absorb the many refugees and displaced people who are yet to go home. As a result of the war, the country's population is now much smaller and physically weaker than it was prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Large numbers of highly qualified people have left, and are perhaps the refugees who are least likely to return. Few people have proper jobs, and unemployment is estimated at between 65 and 75 per cent. Almost half a million demobilized soldiers now have to adapt to civilian life.

War damage

While it is impossible to estimate the total amount of war damage in Bosnia, it is clear that the cost of reconstruction will run into many billions of dollars. And yet the country's per capita gross national product has shrunk by more than two-thirds since 1990, while industrial production stands at less than 20 per cent of its pre-war level.

The scope and pace of reconstruction, however, as well as the willingness of donors to provide funds for it, depends largely on the ability of the two entities to piece the country together and to form joint institutions such as a central bank. Sadly, a major donor conference on Bosnia had to be postponed several times because of the failure of the two entities to make sufficient progress in this respect.

A final problem hampering the return of displaced people in Bosnia has been the presence of millions of land-mines (no exact figures are available) in many rural areas of the country. Despite enormous pressure from the international community, Bosnia's former warring factions have been extremely slow to address this issue. Mine clearance has also been hampered by the lack of local expertise in this area, the absence of accurate mine field records and the country's severe winters, when much of the ground is frozen and covered with snow.

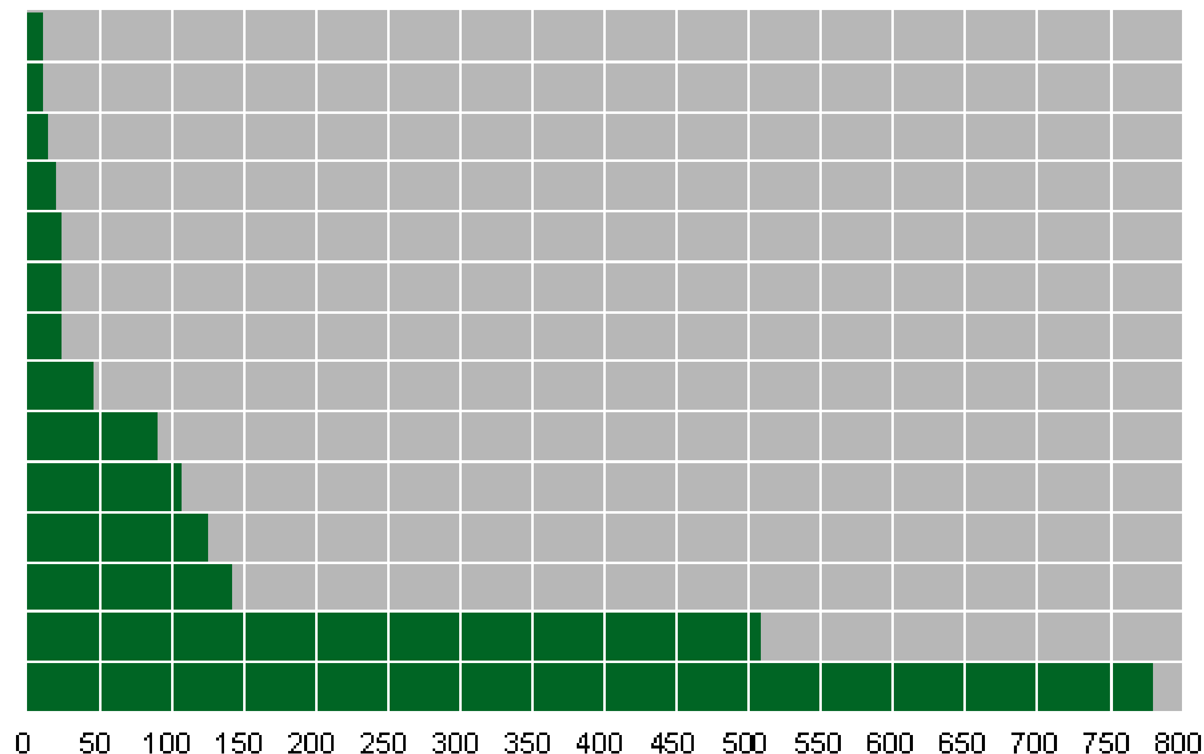
Until the land-mine threat is removed, it seems likely that much of the country, which relies heavily on its agricultural sector, will remain a dangerous and economically stagnant wasteland. Moreover, while rural areas remain inaccessible, the cities will be overburdened with people and unemployment will be high, exacerbating the country's existing social and political tensions.

Map K
The new states of former Yugoslavia

Fig. 4.1

Major repatriation movements in 1996

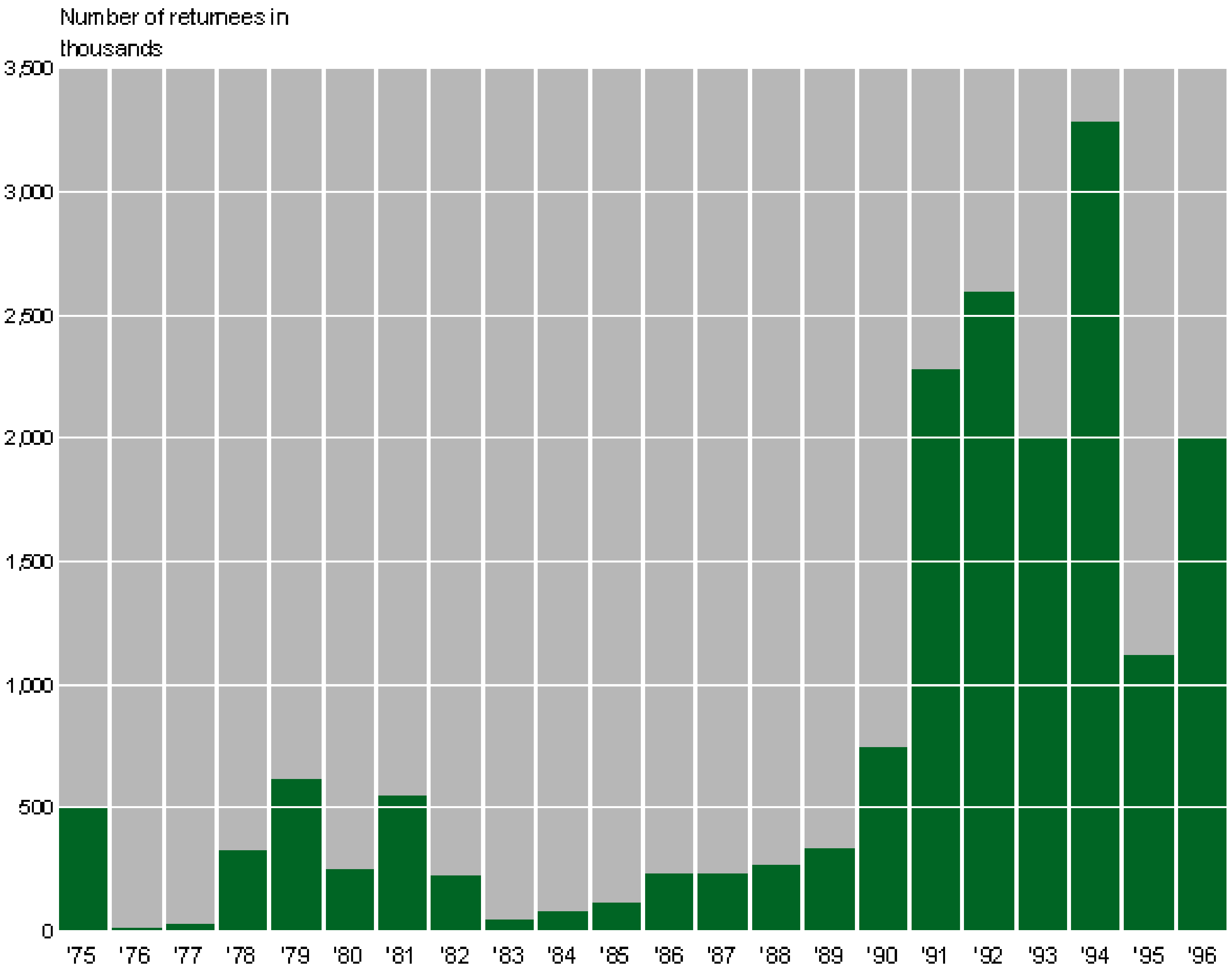
From	To
Iran	Afghanistan
Hong Kong	Viet Nam
Benin	Togo
Mauritania	Mali
Croatia	Bosnia & Herzegovina
Sudan	Ethiopia
Bangladesh	Myanmar
Ghana	Togo
Iran	Iraq
Zaire	Burundi
Burundi	Rwanda
Pakistan	Afghanistan
Tanzania	Rwanda
Zaire	Rwanda



Number of returnees in thousands

Fig. 4.2

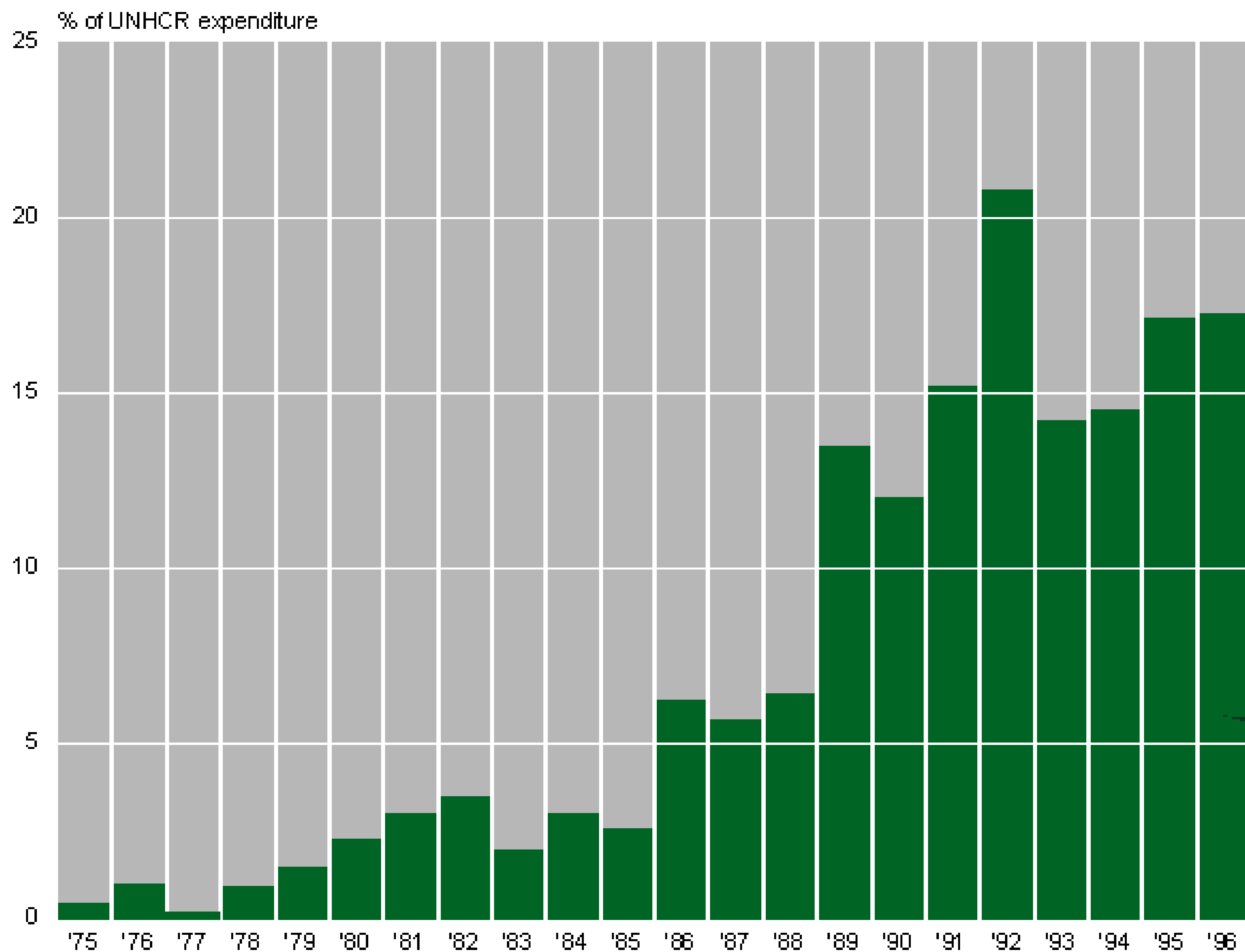
Annual returnee totals, 1975-96



Source: Barry Stein, data from various organizations

Fig. 43

Percentage of UNHCR expenditure on refugee repatriation 1975-96



Map I
Major returnee populations worldwide

Bosnia and Herzegovina
Almost half of Bosnia's 4.4 million citizens were uprooted during the 1992-95 war. Many refugees and displaced people are now making their way back to their homes, some voluntarily and others because their countries of asylum have insisted that they repatriate. Reintegration seems certain to be a long and difficult process, given the country's continuing political tensions and economic problems.

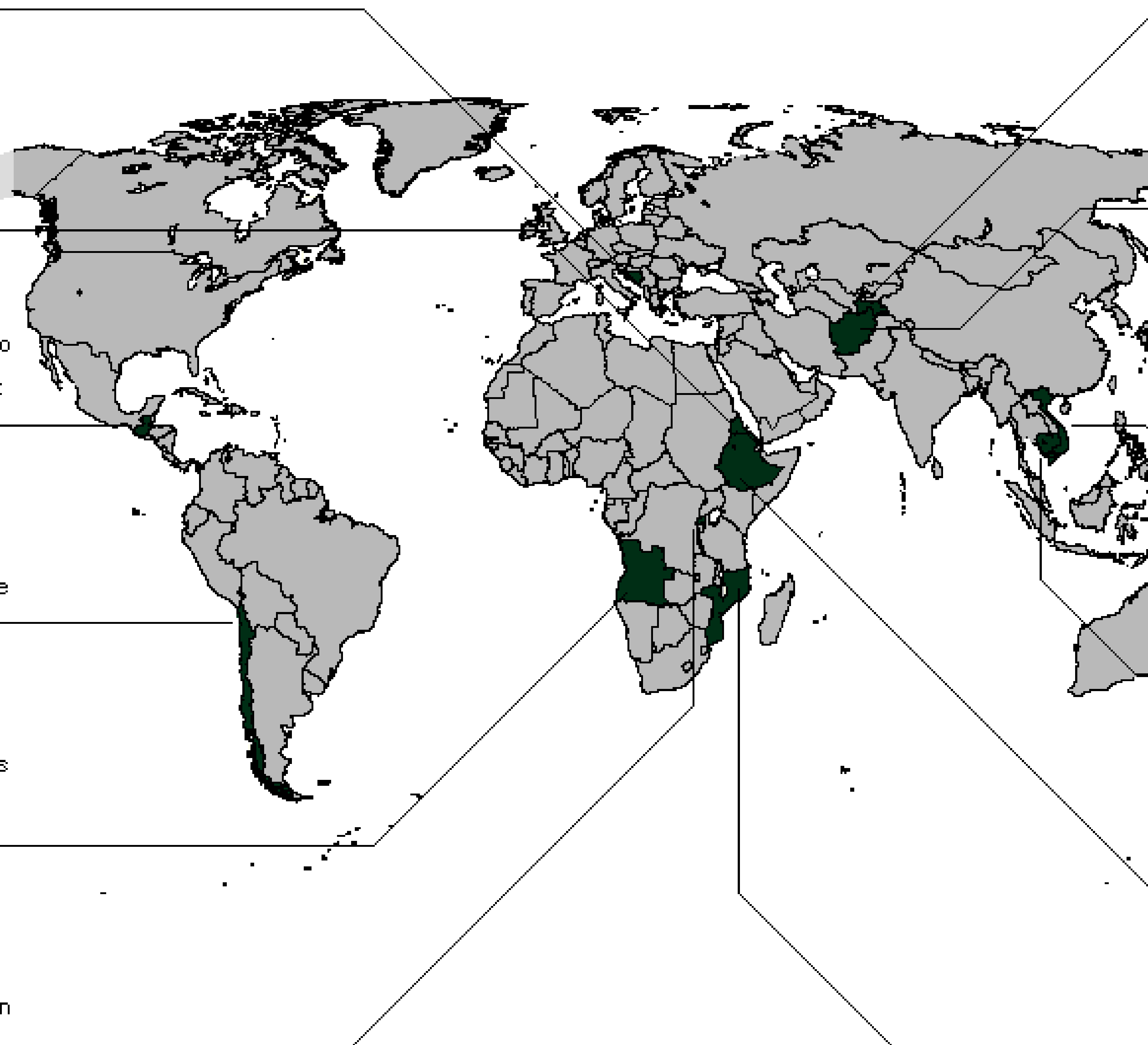
Eritrea
The repatriation of Eritrean refugees has been disappointingly slow since the country gained its independence six years ago - largely as a result of the country's economic devastation and disagreements about the level of international support required to return and reintegrate those refugees who remain in Sudan. Even so, up to 200,000 Eritreans were believed to have repatriated by the beginning of 1997.

Guatemala
The Guatemalan peace process has enabled well over 20,000 refugees to repatriate from Mexico since the early 1990s. Those who have returned, however, continue to experience many difficulties, not least of which is access to land. According to some estimates, around 65 per cent of the country's land is owned by little more than two per cent of the population.

Chile
During the 1970s and early 1980s, thousands of Chilean citizens fled to other parts of the world to escape from human rights violations and the country's authoritarian system of government. Since the return to democracy at the end of the 1980s, many of these exiles - a large proportion of whom were educated and professional people - have made their way back to their homeland.

Angola
UNHCR has drawn up several plans for the return and reintegration of Angolan refugees, the largest numbers of whom are to be found in Zaire, Zambia and Congo Brazzaville. Unfortunately, the continued instability of the country and a shortage of funds has prevented these plans from being implemented. Even so, around 60,000 refugees are estimated to have returned independently to Angola in 1996.

Rwanda
Rwanda has witnessed a succession of massive repatriation movements in recent years: the return of some 700,000 long-time refugees, primarily from Uganda, following the victory of the Rwandese Patriotic Front in 1994; the repatriation of more than 700,000 refugees from conflict zones in eastern Zaire in 1996; and the return of an additional 600,000 refugees from Tanzania in 1996-97.



Tajikistan
A large proportion of the people displaced by recent conflicts in the former Soviet Union have not yet been able to go back to their homes. While this has also been the case for some of the Tajik refugees in Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, more than two-thirds of all the 60,000 people who fled the country's civil war in 1992 had returned by the middle of 1995. Repatriation continued at a modest pace in 1996.

Afghanistan
Despite the continued fighting in their homeland and the absence of a central government, more than 2.7 million Afghans repatriated from Pakistan and Iran between 1992 and 1996. UNHCR has facilitated the repatriation of those wishing to go home by providing returnees with cash grants and by undertaking rehabilitation projects in their areas of origin.

Viet Nam
Between 1989 and 1996, more than 90,000 Vietnamese asylum seekers whose claims to refugee status had been rejected repatriated voluntarily from camps throughout South-East Asia. Thousands more have been returned involuntarily. UNHCR has been monitoring the situation of both groups and assisting local communities to absorb the returnees through small-scale development projects.

Cambodia
In 1992 and 1993, around 370,000 Cambodians repatriated from camps in Thailand, where many had been living since the end of the 1970s. They have been confronted with a range of different problems: a shortage of agricultural land, exacerbated by the presence of land-mines, continued political instability and sporadic violence in the countryside.

Ethiopia
After years of war and famine, Ethiopia's change of government in 1991 prompted the repatriation of up to a million refugees, primarily from Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan. The armed conflict in Somalia, which hosted around 400,000 Ethiopian refugees at the beginning of the 1990s, also acted as an important stimulant to the repatriation process.

Mozambique
Between 1992 and 1996, some 1.7 million Mozambican refugees returned to their homeland from six neighbouring states: Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Despite the brutal nature of the war which ravaged the country during the preceding decade, Mozambique experienced remarkably little violence in the first four years of the peace settlement.

Source: "The State of The World's Refugees 1997-98, A Humanitarian Agenda". Copyright © 1997 UNHCR