

REFUGEES

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KOSOVO: One last chance

The race against winter
Yet another exodus



UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

Why Kosovo and not Kabul?

Question: *What was the world's largest war this year?*

Answer: In a conflict virtually unnoticed by the outside world, Ethiopian and Eritrean armies, each over one quarter-million soldiers strong, fought over a meaningless piece of land. Tens of thousands of people were killed, wounded or captured and at least 600,000 civilians were displaced.

once more raised troubling and legitimate concerns among aid organizations about how and why the 'international community' responds to different humanitarian crises.

The world's most powerful nations, which are also the major donors, will always commit more funds and human resources to crises which may affect their own national interests. Hence Kosovo and not Kabul.

In an era of ever tightening budgets, donors have also become impatient with apparently intractable problems such as Afghanistan.

In one important sign of this, governments increasingly ' earmark' their contributions to organizations such as UNHCR, funding high-visibility 'popular' crises such as Kosovo and ignoring more difficult situations.

Redressing the balance

will be difficult. The world community, through U.N. bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), must refocus its attention on longtime trouble spots like Africa. Greater emphasis must be placed on crisis prevention and long-term economic and social development.

But countries and regional organizations in those same areas must also redouble their commitment to effectively tackle their own problems.

If these show progress then the rest of the world may follow. Which is why recent home-grown attempts to solve wars in the Horn of Africa, Congo and Sierra Leone, however tentative and faltering, may eventually bring some good news for hundreds of thousands of uprooted people.

Question: *What was the world's most brutal war of recent times?*

Answer: For eight years virtually the entire population of Sierra Leone has been uprooted, mutilated, raped or abducted. At least 50,000 persons were killed.

Question: *What is the world's largest current refugee problem?*

Answer: There are still more than 2.6 million Afghan refugees, but UNHCR's programs to help them have been virtually bankrupt for months because of lack of donor interest.

The general public could be forgiven for answering "Kosovo" to all of the above questions, but the unprecedented news coverage and military, political and financial commitments pledged to solve the Kosovo problem have



Internally displaced persons and local Afghans awaiting a food distribution in the devastated Afghan capital of Kabul.



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Cover: Villagers who fled their town in late March return to their destroyed homes in Kosovo.

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UNHCR / L. TAYLOR

27 Unaccompanied minors from the Congo in a Tanzanian camp. There were widespread fears that the plight of African refugees was ignored during the Kosovo crisis.

A RACE AGAINST

Hundreds of thousands of Kosovars have returned home, but the approaching winter is a new enemy

By Fernando del Mundo and Ray Wilkinson

Osman Hysenlekaj found the body of his 83-year-old father stuffed into the well of the family house at the foot of the Mountain of the Damned. In his frantic search for the old man after he returned from Albania in June, Osman had, at first, paid no attention to his surroundings. But now, in the fading

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Civilians who were herded aboard special 'refugee trains' walk along the track from the train to a nearby border crossing at Blace and safety in Macedonia.

TIME



UNHCR/A.J. DAVIES



Blace border crossing, FYR of Macedonia early April 1999.

► light of a pleasant summer evening, he looked again at his father's corpse and then at the once graceful stone house in the village of Stralc i Epërm in western Kosovo. The building had been reduced to a charred shell. His 40 sheep and 10 cows had long since disappeared and the nearby fields were wilted and empty.

Osman cleaned out a barn to shelter his wife and children and, a few days later, erected a tent he received from UNHCR under a nearby tree to make the blistering summer heat a little more bearable for his family. "All I know is that I have to get on with my life," he says now with no obvious sign of bitterness. "I am ready to work and take on any job, but I need help from God and a miracle to get us through this winter."

The Kosovar, like many of the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians who fled

their homes earlier this year, said he had already given thanks to the Almighty once for delivering his family so quickly from the nightmare that had engulfed the region in spring.

It began on a Sunday, March 28, when a local gypsy came to the family home with an ominous message: they had one hour to leave, one step ahead of a military sweep of the region by Serbian forces. Hysenlekaj and his two sons escaped to the snow-covered hills and eventually made their way to the neighboring Yugoslav republic of Montenegro and then to Albania.

His wife, Sanise, and four other children clambered aboard a tractor trailer and, to the jeers of policemen telling them to "Go to Albania, Clinton is waiting for you," lumbered slowly toward the frontier and the town of Mamurasi. Seventy years ago,

Hysenlekaj's father had sheltered in the same town to escape an earlier Serb pogrom. This time, the patriarch decided to stay home.

THE FIRST CASUALTIES

On that bitter March day Hysenlekaj senior became one of the first of an estimated 11,000 people who were deliberately slaughtered during the following several weeks in what became one of the most dramatic and complex humanitarian crises in history.

There had been far larger refugee flights, even in the recent past: nearly two million Kurds were uprooted in the wake of the Gulf War. There were faster exoduses: in 1994, more than one million Rwandan Hutus flooded across the border into Zaire in just a few days.

Nevertheless, the Kosovo emergency



was unique. The first of nearly one million refugees began fleeing the region within hours of the March 24 start of a 78-day NATO bombing campaign. Yet within three months, in a dramatic reversal of fortune, most of those who fled returned home to shattered villages and a devastated province. Perhaps never before had so many people left and then returned in such a short time.

Never before had a refugee crisis been so interlaced with big-power politics, involving virtually every important capital in the world and a military campaign by the most powerful military alliance, NATO, ever assembled. And never before had what all the major players insisted was fundamentally a humanitarian problem produced such a profound aftershock.

In a gruesome knock-on effect, the re-

A CHRONOLOGY OF BALKAN EVENTS

The seeds of unrest and conflict in the Balkans can be traced back to at least the end of the last century when the then major powers in the region met to redraw the area's frontiers, with little regard for ethnic composition. Following are some historical and contemporary highlights surrounding the Kosovo crisis.

1878

The world's Great Powers redraw the map of the Balkans at the Congress of Berlin after years of conflict in the region and increasing tension with Russia. Three new countries, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, are established to ease international tensions but the wishes of the local populations are ignored.

1912-13

Two Balkan wars are fought involving all the regional powers and Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks and Albanians join forces to expel Ottoman forces from the Balkans after several centuries of domination.

June 28, 1914

Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, is shot dead by a Serb assassin in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, precipitating the outbreak of World War One.

December 1, 1918

Yugoslavia, "the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" is created from territories formerly occupied by the old Turkish and Austrian empires.

October 24, 1944

Josip Broz Tito's communist partisans liberate Belgrade and establish a communist regime in Yugoslavia.

April 24, 1987

Serbs launch their first major protest in the town of Kosovo Polje against alleged persecution by the province's majority Albanians.

1989

Belgrade ends Kosovo's autonomous status and an estimated 350,000 ethnic Albanians seek asylum in Europe in the next decade.

June 25, 1991

Slovenia and Croatia declare independence from Yugoslavia.

March 3, 1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaims independence, but Bosnian Serbs lay siege to Sarajevo and overrun 70 percent of the country.

November 21, 1995

Dayton Peace Agreement signed to end hostilities and pave the way for the eventual return home of millions of people displaced by the conflict.

March, 1998

After years of rising tensions, fighting erupts in Kosovo between the majority Albanians and Serbs and within months some 350,000 people have been displaced or fled abroad.

October 27, 1998

Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic agrees to a cease-fire and partial pull-out of Yugoslav forces and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe sends the first of 2,000 'verifiers' to monitor the agreement.

February, 1999

Talks are held in Rambouillet, France, but discussions break down and tensions and repressions rise again in Kosovo.

March 24, 1999

After repeated warnings, NATO launches its 78-day air war. Within three days, ethnic Albanians begin to arrive in neighboring Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in huge numbers, walking, on tractor-trailers and by car. Authorities expel thousands of persons by special 'refugee trains' to Macedonia, virtually emptying all major towns,

such as Pristina, of Albanians.

April-May 1999

International agencies, governments and a special humanitarian task force from NATO called AFOR begin to construct dozens of camps for refugees in anticipation they will spend many months in exile. Some 444,600 refugees flee to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro. Because of political pressures on the Macedonian government, more than 90,000 Albanians are airlifted to 29 countries for temporary safety.

June 3, 1999

Yugoslavia accepts a peace plan requiring withdrawal of all forces from Kosovo and the entry of peacekeepers under a U.N. mandate.

June 12, 1999

Russian and NATO forces enter Kosovo, followed the next day by the first contingent of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

June 14, 1999

Despite appeals by NATO and UNHCR to be patient, refugees begin to flood back into Kosovo, and in one of the fastest refugee returns in history 600,000 return to the shattered province within the first three weeks. As the Albanians stream home, however, around 200,000 Serbs and Roma head the other way, seeking safety in Serbia and Montenegro in yet another new refugee exodus.

June, 1999

UNHCR opens offices in seven locations in Kosovo and under a new U.N. civil administration, backed by tens of thousands of NATO troops, begins the work of helping hundreds of thousands of people rebuild their homes and find access to food, water and electricity with the harsh Balkan winter fast approaching.



Aerial photo of one Kosovo village shows 80 percent of the buildings destroyed.

► turn of the ethnic Albanians triggered the next of a seemingly endless number of population movements in the Balkans, this time when around 200,000 frightened Serbs and Roma (gypsies) fled for their lives as revenge killing and other atrocities swept the province.

NATO moved the first of more than 50,000 soldiers into the prostrate province and the United Nations assembled a civilian administration, the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), to oversee everything from garbage collection and street lighting to the re-establishment of a police force, judges and jails, from the reintegration of hundreds of thousands of people to the large-scale reconstruction of an entire region.

“Kosovo will be the most challenging, the most complex peace implementation

operation ever undertaken by the U.N. system or the international community in modern times,” said former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt who had earlier run a similar but more limited international operation in neighboring Bosnia. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said putting Kosovo together again would probably take at least 10 years. The estimated cost could run as high as \$30 billion.

Dennis McNamara, UNHCR’s special envoy in the region and Kofi Annan’s deputy special representative in charge of humanitarian affairs in UNMIK, said since day one of the crisis, it had been a constant race against time for aid agencies; first to help the fleeing refugees find sanctuary, then to help them return home and currently to help them survive the next Balkan winter.

WIDESPREAD DESTRUCTION

Images from U.S. sources, taken from high-flying reconnaissance aircraft showed more than 67,000 buildings out of 271,314 surveyed had been damaged or destroyed. A separate initial assessment of villages indicated widespread destruction of schools and health centers, agricultural production halted, the availability of food dramatically reduced and water supplies polluted by a range of materials, including human as well as animal corpses.

Damage in the province was very uneven. While some areas escaped virtually unscathed, others were almost entirely destroyed. When UNHCR’s Maki Shinohara visited the small village of Cabra near Kosovska Mitrovica she discovered every one of the 175 houses “turned into piles of rubble” after being deliberately torched

and then bulldozed. “Some men have returned during the day, living in blue UNHCR tents wedged between the heaps of rubble, wandering around the once prosperous homes, school and clinic,” she said.

But within weeks of the large-scale return to Kosovo, the province came back to life as people jump started their old lives, clearing rubble from destroyed homes, salvaging whatever was left in the fields, reopening shops and starting open air markets with goods from neighboring Albania and Macedonia.

To meet the approaching threat of winter UNHCR and European and American government agencies rushed 56,000 shelter kits which include plastic sheeting, timber and tools to Kosovo allowing families to weatherproof at least one room in a destroyed house before bad weather descends in November and December. UNHCR planned distribution of 30,000 tents, 60,000 stoves, more than one million blankets, 550,000 mattresses and 183,000 hygiene and kitchen sets.

Japan offered more than 500 prefabricated and self-contained family shelters

which proved their worth when a major earthquake destroyed large parts of the city of Kobe several years ago.

“The return of refugees went relatively smoothly,” said Dennis McNamara. “And we should have few problems with long-term reconstruction. But our current headache is that one step in between—emergency rehabilitation. The challenge in the next few months is going to be getting Kosovo’s population through the winter into next spring when it will be an entirely new ballgame.” ▶

“The Serbs are not a forgive and forget nation”

Albanian refugees have successfully returned home, but that is not the end of the affair in Kosovo

By Tim Judah

As far as refugees are concerned Kosovo has turned out to be the most grotesque of paradoxes. A simultaneous triumph and tragedy.

Most have already returned. Despite criticisms from some, they had been looked after in what could only be described as five star camps — if you want to compare them with other refugee centers. Ninety-two thousand were evacuated and cared for in third countries.

Inside the province all the internally displaced have also returned. Many of their homes were burned and looted, but the strength of Kosovo Albanian extended family networks means far fewer will have to live in collective centers than is the average elsewhere.

Another point in favor of a quick return to normal is that Kosovar modern history has meant that almost every family has members working abroad. Anyone who knows Kosovo will also know that while families tend to have large compounds the equally large houses are always in a state of permanent construction because bits and pieces are built as money filters in from relatives abroad.

This means that many Kosovars, unlike in the west, know how to and indeed do build their own houses. If their house is burned, most people will simply start rebuilding. With extra money expected from

the European Union and other sources, it is more than likely UNHCR’s role in helping these build to rebuild their lives will be far smaller than initially anticipated.

So much for Kosovo’s refugee triumph. The tragedy lies in Kosovo’s historic culture of revenge. The return of the Albanians has led to the flight of the Serbs, many of whom may well have approved of the original expulsion of the Albanians. It was revenge, they argued, for the Albanians having caused the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, so NATO could look after them.

Since NATO did look after them, and in a far more dramatic way than the Serbs could have imagined, they now find themselves paying the price of being Kosovo Serbs. Fine words about multiculturalism interest nobody here and the history of Serbian-Albanian relations in Kosovo this century has been nothing else but an endless cycle of domination and revenge.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Neither NATO or the U.N. can break that cycle, but inevitably it falls to UNHCR to pick up the pieces. Since NATO tanks first rolled into Kosovo on June 12, some 200,000 Serbs, gypsies and others have fled. Still, Bernard Kouchner, the head of the new U.N. administration in Kosovo, has appealed to the perhaps 25,000 remaining Serbs to stay. But is that a responsible policy?

As far as UNHCR is concerned there is no argument. In the former Yugoslavia that

question was first posed by Serb forces in the summer of 1992 in Bosnia. “Bring buses to get these Muslims and Croats out,” they told UNHCR. The organization agonised. Should it help save people whose lives were in danger, the price being that it served the interests of the ethnic cleansers? The answer then, and ever since, has been that lives come first.

So, yet again, UNHCR is having to help desperate people flee, this time Serbs. But, unlike for the Albanians, there will be no bombing to secure their return.

Some think, but may find it politically incorrect to say so publicly, that if the Serbs are cleansed from Kosovo then that is the end of the matter. After all, Greeks do not yearn to return to their ancestral homes in deepest Anatolia, any more than Turks do to return to Thrace.

If they do harbor such thoughts, they may find themselves proved wrong, if not in the near future then in decades yet to come. Aleksa Djilas, the Serbian historian and political commentator says: “The possibility of revenge increases the desire. So while today Albanians wreak their revenge, the day may yet come when Serbs can wreak theirs.”

The way the Serbs have lost Kosovo means that tomorrow the Serbs will have no chance to get it back. But what will happen in 10 or 20 years? Just over a decade ago, no one could have predicted the shape of the world as it is today.

Djilas says that the spirit of revanchism may grow. “Of course,” he adds, “I would not support such a thing, but Serbs are not exactly a forgive and forget nation. If they have remembered the 1389 defeat for 610 years, why not this one?”

Tim Judah is a journalist and author of: “The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia” (Yale University Press, 1997). ■

► **SERBIAN HOLYLAND**

Kosovo is considered the holyland by most Serbs, ironically because of a battle there that their ancestors lost in 1389 to Moslem Turks. In the following centuries, legends flourished around the defeat until it was transformed into a mythical victory fought on behalf of the Christian world against invading Moslem hordes.

But by the late 1980s, in an estimated population of around two million, ethnic Albanians who mostly follow Islam outnumbered Serbs by a ratio of around nine-to-one. When Slobodan Milosevic inflamed Serbian partisan passions by revoking Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, he set the stage for a showdown between the two groups.

While the outside world focused its attention on the violent breakup of the Yugoslav Federation in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s, the fuse was also running in Kosovo.

Between 1989 and 1998, as repression became widespread, some 350,000 Albanian Kosovars sought sanctuary in Europe. Widespread fighting erupted in March, 1998 and within months another 350,000 civilians were displaced inside the province or fled abroad.

UNHCR operated a \$28 million program with 84 personnel, helping a total of 400,000 people but in late March of this year, along with other international organizations, it was forced to pull out of the province ahead of the NATO air campaign.

"We, like everyone else at the time, thought that if it came down to a shooting match between NATO and Belgrade, it would last for a few days, and we would soon be back in operation," recalled UNHCR's Fernando del Mundo who was working in Kosovo at the time.

The bombing campaign lasted for 78 days. Nearly one million people flooded out of the province into neighboring Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia's sister republic of Montenegro. Several hundred thousand people were displaced within the province, hiding in the mountains or trekking from village to village, sheltering for weeks and months in basements and other hideaways.

UNHCR had emergency stockpiles in the region for around 100,000 people, but had

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI



Kosovo refugees pass a KFOR tank column on their return to the village of Sopi.

not anticipated a deliberate, well-planned policy to virtually cleanse the entire province as Serbian authorities now began to do. Nor did anyone else, neither major governments such as the United States, France and Britain, NATO or the bulk of Balkan specialists. Until the last moment, in fact, it had been hoped that peace talks

in Rambouillet, France, would piece together a face-saving compromise.

A CONUNDRUM

Nicholas Morris, who was then UNHCR's special envoy in the region, highlighted a conundrum which the agency faced at this juncture: key western governments were urging UNHCR to prepare to implement Rambouillet only days before the exodus began. It is unlikely, Morris argued (see page 18), that these same governments who were subsequently highly critical of UNHCR's lack of readiness when refugees did begin to arrive in neighboring countries, would have responded to a request for preparations predicated on the failure of their own peace efforts.

Refugee crises are often

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI



A German soldier with KFOR displays a deadly booby trap mine.



defined by one particular moment or one particular incident. Kosovo became embedded in the world's conscience with the arrival in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of the so-called refugee trains and the incarceration of thousands of fleeing Kosovars in a nondescript open field at a border crossing called Blace.

Tens of thousands of Kosovar civilians were packed onto the trains by Serbian authorities from the province capital of Pristina and other stations for the short journey to the border. Inevitably the trains and long lines of shocked people carrying only a few hastily gathered possessions were compared, if incorrectly, with the wagons which hauled Jews to the gas chamber during World War II. The word 'genocide' began to be used indiscriminately.

The Macedonian government, fearful that a

massive influx of ethnic Albanians could destabilize its own fragile ethnic mix, at one point kept thousands of new arrivals in an open field with virtually no medical assistance, little food, and limited access for aid agencies.

Under growing international pressure and under cover of darkness, the authorities, in an equally controversial move to the initial detention, suddenly bundled the refugees on flights to Turkey and shipped others to Albania and to nearby hastily

constructed camps. An unknown number of people died in that open field but by morning the only thing left was the sad debris of mass flight—sodden blankets, ripped clothing, a few children's toys, a few pieces of flimsy shelter, and the wretched smells left by thousands of terrified people.

Perhaps never before had so many people left and then returned in such a short time.

KOSOVO STATISTICS

■ **The most recent census** was taken in Kosovo in 1991 and listed a population of 1,956,196. It was boycotted by the majority of ethnic Albanians and was regarded at best as a 'guesstimate.'

■ **The ethnic Albanian population** was thought to be around 1.7 million people and the Serbs around 200,000 with far smaller numbers of gypsies and other minorities.

■ **After abolition of Kosovo's** autonomous status in 1989, around 350,000 ethnic Albanians left Kosovo and applied for asylum in western Europe.

■ **When the latest crisis** began in 1998 another 100,000 people left the region.

■ **NATO** began a 78-day air campaign on March 24.

■ **A total of 848,100 ethnic Albanians** fled or were expelled, including 444,600 to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro.

■ **An estimated 45,000 refugees** arrived in Macedonia on April 2 in the largest 24-hour exodus during the crisis.

■ **A total of 91,057 refugees** were airlifted from Macedonia to 29 countries as part of the Humanitarian Evacuation Program.

■ **Within three weeks** of the signing of a peace accord, more than 600,000 refugees had flooded back into Kosovo in one of the fastest returns in modern history.

■ **In the same period** an estimated 180,000 Serbs and Roma fled in the opposite direction to Serbia proper.

■ **One official British report** said at least 11,000 Kosovars had been killed by security authorities during the conflict.

■ **UNHCR estimated** at least 67,000 and possibly twice as many homes had been destroyed or badly damaged during the conflict.

CRYSTALIZING THE CONFLICT

Blace field crystalized many aspects of the crisis. The world at large, including governments, saw for the first time the sheer brutality and the careful planning behind the cleansing of Kosovo. Even though the destruction of the city of Vukovar, the siege of Sarajevo, the detention camps and the mass rapes of Bosnia had occurred only a few years earlier, there was an incomprehension, an unwillingness to admit that "This is happening again in Europe, in 1999."

► In addition to not forecasting the exodus, there was also now the perceived unreadiness of aid agencies once the influx began and their inability to deliver emergency supplies quickly enough, to build camps for the exiles and UNHCR's failure to protect refugees at Blace field.

UNHCR admitted shortcomings in some areas including not getting more personnel and aid on the ground quickly enough, but Assistant High Commissioner Soren Jessen-Petersen insisted there had also been a lot of scape-goating and sheer ignorance in play.

At Blace, for instance, while UNHCR was criticized in some quarters for its alleged timidity, at least one government insisted behind the scenes that the agency tone down its public statements and even asked for the recall of one of its spokespersons. Humanitarian considerations at the

time were less important than political efforts to stabilize a shaky government.

Seasoned journalists who wrote articles critical of UNHCR's emergency response later admitted they were unaware of the constraints placed on the agency by a cumbersome financing setup; it has no ready reserves to meet a new crisis and must appeal to donors for additional funds for emergencies such as Kosovo, causing inevitable delays. To some degree UNHCR can only react as quickly as new funding is put in place.

And ironically, though Kosovo was the most reported humanitarian story in history, rarely has UNHCR been so underfunded during its own 50-year life.

LIVING HAND TO MOUTH

"After the international community spent billions of dollars on a military cam-

paign which was intended to pave the way for the return of refugees, it is a pity they are now not prepared to spend what we have asked for and see the refugees back to their villages," Jessen-Petersen said at one point in the crisis. "We need about 10 million dollars a week and are living hand to mouth."

J. Brian Atwood, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development at the time gave his assessment: "UNHCR was not doing its job in the early days. They didn't have the resources. They didn't have the people. I say that their management failure was the direct result of our failure in providing them with the resources." Financial cuts forced on the U.N. had "wreaked serious damage which was unconscionable" Atwood said.

Even as traditional government donors severely trimmed their financial support

A doctor with Médecins du Monde helps ethnic Albanians at Morini border crossing.



for UNHCR (at the height of the exodus Italy had officially contributed \$800,000 to the agency. The Italian public donated more than ten times that amount privately), they channeled unprecedented amounts to government-to-government, or bilateral projects.

The Italians were the first to establish a camp in the northern Albanian town of Kukes, and tens of thousands of refugees benefited from this and other government run projects.

But this type of assistance produced its own headaches. UNHCR was mandated to coordinate aid and protection for the refugees, but often was among the last to know about a new program or camp. This lack of coordination produced waste, overlap and confusion. In what in other circumstances might be comical, one European government established a camp—reaped the media payoff for its actions—but

then its officials simply disappeared one night without informing any other aid agency. A private organization established another camp in Kukes, forbade UNHCR or any other officials from visiting ‘our refugees’ and refused to attend agency coordination meetings.

“Perhaps one of the most fundamental mistakes we made was to underestimate the enormity of the stakes on the table,” one senior aid official said later. “We knew of course that Kosovo was a huge humanitarian crisis, but the political and military stakes were even higher. In that environment every success, and every mistake was magnified. And while everyone was quick enough to take credit they were even quicker to pass on the blame. We were amateurs in this game.”

SYMBOL OF HOPE AND TRAGEDY

If Blaise seared the Kosovo crisis into the world’s conscience, the town of Kukes is destined to enter refugee folklore, like Sarajevo and Srebrenica before it, as a vivid symbol of human tragedy, but also perhaps, ultimately of hope.

Northern Albania is a starkly beautiful place of wild mountains and deep fjord-style lakes. Communist-era planners scarred the landscape with a series of five-storey concrete apartment blocks at Kukes to house workers for nearby mines which have since closed. It is an area of feuding, gun-toting mafias, clandestine armies, smuggling and almost universal unemployment. A twisting, crumbling road links Kukes to Morini, a seedy and sleepy border post with Kosovo.

More than 440,000 refugees escaped into Albania, virtually all of them through Morini and Kukes, a town of just 28,000 people. It is difficult to imagine any small European or American town handling a sudden influx of destitute and terrified refugees around sixteen times its own population, but Kukes did so with a degree of aplomb.

One of the most remote places in Europe, Kukes suddenly became a nerve center for the world. Dozens of international news companies established permanent

“Kosovo will be the most challenging, the most complex peace implementation operation ever undertaken by the U.N. system.”

satellite links with the town. Hundreds of media stars, aid officials, NATO officials, and celebrities descended on the area, renting seedy downtown apartments from locals for \$3,000 a month.

A down at heel hangout, perhaps

appropriately called Bar America, became the unofficial hub of the whole affair where swaggering guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army kept journalists waiting for days promising trips into ‘the occupied territories’ and where local gangs were overheard wheeling and dealing alleged white slavery deals among the refugees. Unemployment disappeared as locals became drivers, translators and odd-job men. “It was Christmas in Kukes for the locals,” one aid official said. “They had never seen such wealth, even though it was generated by a refugee crisis.”

Thousands of tractors, some without tires and running on steel rims, carrying several families at a time swamped the little town. The Italians established their high-tech camp near a disused mine and officials and troops from the United Arab Emirates built, by refugee standards, a sumptuous camp with a hospital which would grace any town in the western world.

A rickety fleet of buses and army trucks moved tens of thousands of people away from the sensitive border zone to spots further inside Albania. It was not a pretty sight, but the convoy system worked amazingly well. Many other Kosovars moved in with local families or into seven camps on the fringes of Kukes and ignored entreaties from UNHCR to move out of range of Serb artillery. They wanted to be close to the border, they said, to reunite split families and return to Kosovo as quickly as possible.

IGNORING THE WARNINGS

That seemed highly unlikely at the time, but as government and agencies geared up for a huge building program to house nearly one million refugees through the winter, an agreement was struck between NATO and Belgrade. The refugees were urged to stay where they were until Kosovo could be made safe, but they again ▶



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI

► waved away the warnings and within days headed home as fast as they could go.

“The scene at Morini crossing was surreal,” said Kris Janowski of UNHCR as he

watched floods of Kosovars going home. “Two gigantic red billboards with skull and bones painted on them in black warned against the danger of landmines. Albani-

ans just flashed a ‘V’ for victory sign and went home. ‘We don’t mind the mines,’ said one old man, ‘as long as the Serbs have gone.’

Kosovo’s first exodus

Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians had already left Kosovo before the world began paying attention

Serbian security forces came calling for Gashi after the young Kosovar had joined an underground political organization and publicly demonstrated against alleged government atrocities. Forewarned by his brother, he made a dash for the border but his passport was confiscated along with all of his foreign cash. A second clandestine attempt was more successful and he eventually made it first to Slovenia then Austria, Germany and finally Switzerland. His wife and four children remained behind in Kosovo.

Gashi’s story could be the history of any of the nearly one million refugees displaced earlier this year in the province – with one major difference. His showdown with Serbian authorities and flight to freedom came almost a decade earlier, in 1990.

And whereas the plight of hundreds of thousands of Kosovars received unprecedented media and political exposure following the start of the NATO bombing campaign earlier this year, the exodus of huge numbers of their countrymen throughout the 1990s went largely unnoticed by the outside world.

The future of these ethnic Albanians from the earlier diaspora is far less clear than that of the ‘1999 refugees’ the majority of whom have already returned home. How many of these older exiles want to go back? Will the countries where they are currently living give them a choice? And how will they and their children reintegrate in a shattered society after so long away?

Ethnic Albanians began leaving the

province shortly after Slobodan Milosevic abolished its autonomous status within the Yugoslav Federation in 1989 and began a crackdown against activists. During the next decade a massive exodus, mainly to western Europe, took place.

Between 1980 and 1988 fewer than

who fled in 1990, was refused asylum by the Swiss authorities, as were two of his children who subsequently joined him. Since then, he has been living precariously in Geneva on temporary permits, facing the periodic threat of expulsion and filling menial jobs to support his family.

He is both bemused and full of irony about the different treatment afforded his generation and the latest refugees. “When we talked about crackdowns and massacres then, no one believed us,” he said in a recent interview. “Before this NATO war, the Europeans didn’t know anything and didn’t want to know anything. Now their attitude has changed 180 degrees.” Personally, he said, he felt “betrayed.”

Gashi has not seen his wife and two other children since he fled nearly a decade ago from a village called Peqan in the Suva Reka area of Kosovo. They, too, were forced to flee to Albania earlier this year and their family home was burned down. He has since talked with his

wife by telephone and his family is well.

He will return home before the end of the year to an uncertain future. “There will be a few problems,” he acknowledges, especially for two teenage children who have become used to the sophistication of Geneva city living and who will now return to a simple village existence. “But there will be no regrets. Our future is in Kosovo.”

The majority of those Kosovars who left at the same time as Gashi will also eventually return to Kosovo. Most will probably go willingly, and with NATO and the U.N. guaranteeing the province’s safety and security. European governments will tell even those Kosovars who have started new lives and want to stay that it is now time to go home. ■



Early Kosovar asylum seekers at a reception center in Bavaria, Germany.

42,000 Yugoslav citizens applied for asylum in Europe, but between 1989 and 1998 the number jumped to 793,000 as the state imploded. An estimated 350,000 of them were ethnic Albanians from Kosovo.

Most migrated to Germany and Switzerland where many already had relatives, but their welcome was far different to the support and help the international community offered the 1999 exiles.

During the 1990s fewer than 10 percent were recognized as refugees even though repression in Kosovo continued to escalate. Indeed Kosovars were often labelled with unsavory reputations linked with smuggling and drug rings.

REFUSED ASYLUM

Gashi, the young Kosovar locksmith

“Aid workers armed with hand counters quickly gave up attempts to monitor the flood. Locally built Zastava cars which normally seat four were often crammed with nine people, roof racks groaning under the weight of mattresses and furniture piled higher than the cars themselves. Their chassis scraped along the road. A U.N. aid station had been established handing out free food, but in the rush to get home, vehicles just drove by.”

“When hundreds of thousands of refugees like these decide they want to go home, you just step aside and let them,” one awed aid official said of the return. “You go with the flow.”

The dangers officials warned about were real enough. Dozens of people were wounded and some killed in the first few weeks, not only from the hundreds of thousands of mines which had been deliberately planted, but also from unexploded ordnance, especially deadly cluster bombs, dropped by NATO aircraft. Mine experts said Kosovo was at least as dangerous as Bosnia, Cambodia and Angola, and it could take ‘a generation’ to make the region even relatively safe.

As the crisis entered a new phase, all of the parties involved faced problems and headaches as large and complex as during the emergency itself. In addition to mine hazards and the race against winter, how could the new U.N. administration successfully coax back the tens of thousands of Serbs and gypsies in the face of continuing atrocities against their communities?

There was general agreement that a lasting settlement would be impossible without addressing the grievances of these groups. And though it would be dangerous to draw too many parallels, it was discouraging to note that hundreds of thousands of persons displaced in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, 500,000 in Serbia and Montenegro, and many others in Croatia and Bosnia, were still waiting to return to their homes years after the shooting had stopped in those regions.

The bulk of the ethnic Albanians forced to flee this year, even the more than 90,000 who were flown to 29 countries around the world for temporary refuge, had returned home by autumn or signalled their intention to do so. But what about the estimated 350,000 Kosovars who fled during the early 1990s? Would they be allowed to stay in European countries where they had lived for years or, if they returned home, how successful would their reintegration be?

UNHCR/M. VACCA



Aid is distributed to refugees returning to Pec, one of the most badly damaged towns in Kosovo.

Carl Bildt noted that in the case of Bosnia a formal and binding peace agreement, the Dayton accords, had been signed, but there was no such framework to guide

liver the billions of dollars needed for humanitarian aid and long-term reconstruction.

In the broader humanitarian context, how will the preference shown in Kosovo for government-to-government programs affect the coordination of future complex emergencies and the funding of organizations such as UNHCR? What effect will NATO's role as both belligerent and major aid participant have on future humanitarian-military cooperation?

The debate over NATO's decision to bomb Kosovo will continue endlessly. Was it the only way left or was it the case, to use a Viet Nam-era analogy, of ‘destroying the village to save it’?

Whatever the merits of those arguments, however, it is clear that once the crisis began, the humanitarian operation was an overall success. Despite the initial slowness in responding to the exodus and despite other mistakes, nearly one million refugees did receive assistance. Local governments and host families played a major part, of course, but the end result was that there were fewer deaths than would be expected among a huge and vulnerable population which quickly received at least minimal shelter, food and medical care as they left Kosovo. And when they returned home, the refugees showed a resilience and strength of purpose to rebuild their homes which will be a major building block in trying to patch together the shattered province. ■

Whatever the merits of the bombing campaign, it is clear that once the crisis began, the humanitarian operation was an overall success.

the new administrators in Kosovo, making their task even more difficult.

The regional repercussions were immense. Serbia itself was crippled by the effects of the bombing campaign and a virtual international pariah. The political situations in Montenegro and Macedonia were fragile. Albania remains the poorest country in Europe. Bosnia hosted more than 20,000 Kosovars and its own internal problems remained sensitive to regional developments. There were concerns that once the spotlight shifted from Kosovo, the international community might not de-

BALKAN EVENTS

BELGRADE



© C. CUPIC

1 Members of Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian Communist Party demonstrate in Belgrade in 1989 'defending Serb rights' throughout the country. It was rising nationalism and Belgrade's decision to end Kosovo's autonomous status that same year which sparked the crisis between Serbs and ethnic Albanians in the province.

PRISTINA



UNHCR / M. SHINGHARA

2 Widespread fighting spread throughout Kosovo in 1998 and UNHCR helped an estimated 400,000 people inside the province during the year. Here an aid official checks stocks before distribution.

SERBIA



© M. BASTIC

9 As Kosovar refugees returned home, around 200,000 Serbs and Roma (gypsies) fled Kosovo fearing revenge attacks. The bulk of them, like the Serbs pictured, sought refuge in other parts of Serbia itself though U.N. officials had urged them to stay in Kosovo.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

SARAJEVO

MONTENEGRO

PODGORICA

SHKODER

TIRANA

5

ITALY

SERBIA



© M. BASTIC

8 The NATO air campaign wreaked widespread damage throughout Serbia, including against some unintended targets. A sanatorium in the town of Surdulica which had been renovated by UNHCR to house refugees was destroyed when three missiles hit the building. Sixteen refugees living there were killed.

KOSOVO



UNHCR / R. CHALASANI

7 An accord was signed in early June ending the fighting in Kosovo. Within weeks the bulk of the refugees returned home in one of the swiftest and largest repatriations in modern history.

■ More than 67,000 Yugoslavs, mainly ethnic Albanians, applied for asylum in Europe in the first six months of 1999.

■ Cuban President Fidel Castro offered to send 1,000 doctors to Kosovo and other areas of the former Yugoslavia.

■ The European Union pledged \$500 million for each of the next three years for Kosovo reconstruction.

■ The World Food Program announced plans to feed 2.5 million people in Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia.

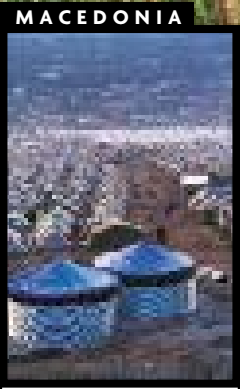


1



3 As a NATO bombing campaign got underway in late March the first of nearly one million ethnic Albanian Kosovars fled to neighboring countries. A family arrives in the Albanian border town of Kukes. Hundreds of thousands more civilians were displaced within Kosovo itself.

UNHCR / CHALASANI



4 Nearly one-quarter of a million people fled to Macedonia. Many were housed in hastily constructed camps such as the one at Cegrane until they returned home.

UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES

8

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

9

7 MITROVICA
PEC
KOSOVO

2 PRISTINA

SOPIA
BULGARIA

3

KUKES

4

SKOPJE
FYR OF MACEDONIA



5 Nearly 92,000 refugees who reached Macedonia were then temporarily evacuated to 29 countries outside the region after the Skopje government made clear it could not absorb any more people. These Kosovars were en route to the United Kingdom.

UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES

6

ALBANIA



6 The majority of refugees who reached Albania found shelter with host families. An elderly couple and their grandchild pose for a formal photograph with their hosts in the Albanian town of Bajram Curri.

UNHCR / B. BRLES

KORCE

GREECE

← Albanian refugee exodus
← Refugee return
← Serb exodus

IMAGE COURTESY OF LIVINGEARTH.COM

ORIGINS OF A CRISIS

An operation as difficult and complex as any UNHCR has faced

By Nicholas Morris

When the Kosovo crisis began to gain international attention two years ago, it was presented primarily in terms of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. But High Commissioner Sadako Ogata reported as early as September, 1998, that "Kosovo is a political problem, with devastating humanitarian consequences, for which there is only a political solution." At the heart of this problem were long-standing abuses of human rights.

The long simmering crisis took on a new dimension in February, 1998 with major clashes between Yugoslav and Serbian security forces who indulged in severe human rights abuses and the Kosovo Liberation Army which gained increased control of territory and roads. There was only limited need for relief assistance.

In a counter-offensive in July last year, the security forces re-established control over a number of key areas. They intensified a campaign of terror and forced displacement as a massive collective punishment against the civilian population for its perceived support of the KLA which itself was responsible for human rights abuses.

By late September 1998, more than 350,000 persons had been displaced inside and outside the province and High Commissioner Ogata concluded that no just and lasting solution would be possible without a fundamental change in Belgrade's attitude toward Kosovo's Albanians.

The U.N. Security Council's September Resolution 1199 demanded the withdrawal of security forces from Kosovo which began in late October. As the KLA reasserted its presence, the first unarmed members

of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Kosovo Verification Mission deployed and many displaced persons began returning home.

NO SOLUTION

It was understood by all, however, that this was not a long-term political solution: that only a little time had been bought in which to find one. By late December, the cease-fire was breaking down and security forces embarked on a series of 'winter exercises' clearly aimed at KLA strongholds but which also caused new civilian displacements.

The Rambouillet negotiating process began in February 1999, but the violence and displacement continued and accelerated markedly after the talks

ended without agreement on 23 February. When U.N. and NGO humanitarian agencies had to suspend operations in March, an estimated 260,000 persons were displaced within Kosovo itself, 100,000 elsewhere in the region and since early 1998 close to 100,000 had sought asylum further afield, chiefly in Germany and Switzerland.

By early this year UNHCR's Kosovo operations were helping an estimated 400,000 persons inside Kosovo in an operation widely seen as effective. As

in the earlier Bosnia conflict, UNHCR organized international convoy teams and made no distinctions among recipients except on the basis of need. Unlike Bosnia, access for the convoys and humanitarian staff was rarely denied and delivery was much easier, including to Serb civilians.

But the limitations of a humanitarian response in the absence of successful political action had again been made starkly clear.

During the weeks of NATO air action, around 850,000 refugees fled or were expelled from Kosovo. UNHCR became engaged in an operation as difficult and complex as any the agency has

There were no lack of claimants for successes and an obvious candidate for blame for perceived shortcomings.



UNHCR/R. LEMOYNE

faced. The practical problems of assistance were huge, but there were also major protection headaches in a highly charged political environment where the stakes for concerned governments were high.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was reluctant to grant asylum. There were security problems in Montenegro where the government was ready to protect refugees if it could, but where the presence of federal security forces posed a threat to its very existence. The KLA was actively recruiting and many families were split up during flight.

The most immediate problem was that UNHCR, like almost every western decision maker and indeed many Kosovo Albanians, did not predict the mass expulsions. Until days before the exodus, key western governments were banking on peace and urging UNHCR to prepare for the early implementation of the Rambouillet accords.



KEYSTONE/AP/AM EULER

NATO bombing began after the failure of the Rambouillet peace talks in France.



Wheatflour is unloaded at Urosevac during aid operations in Kosovo in 1998.

FAILED PEACE INITIATIVE

It is unlikely these same governments, some of whom have been sharply critical of UNHCR's lack of preparedness, would have responded to a request for massive preparations predicated on the failure of their own peace efforts. To have been prepared for what actually happened, such a request would have had to be already met at a time when the success of peace efforts still looked possible.

UNHCR's key concern as the exodus began was less the absence of contingency planning and stockpiles than lack of field staff with a high level of experience and keen political judgement.

A week after the exodus began and with 300,000 refugees already in Albania and Macedonia, UNHCR asked for NATO's assistance in an understanding which explicitly recognized the primacy of the humanitarian organizations. The potential problems of humanitarian groups working with a military are well documented. But the reason for UNHCR's April 3 request was that there was no other way to unblock a political impasse in which up to 65,000 people were left stranded on the Kosovo-Macedonia border. NATO's readiness to build camps and the start of the humanitarian evacuation program was the 'package' Macedonia required to allow asylum.

UNHCR considered that this military support was better coordinated by the agency than provided bilaterally, as it would otherwise have been, but had no illusions

as to its ability to influence governments on matters where their national interests were so engaged.

BURDEN SHARING

For years the case of 'burden sharing' has been argued in humanitarian meetings but countries of asylum wishing donors to share the asylum, not just the financial burdens, have had little leverage in the past. With NATO's presence on its territory, Macedonia had leverage and the humanitarian evacuation program was the condition for keeping the border open. UNHCR launched the program though it would have happened anyway.

Selecting refugees for evacuation was fraught with potential protection problems. The concept itself was new; it was not resettlement and not even temporary protection. Some participating governments sought to limit their responsibilities by refusing to allow immediate family reunion, even of spouses, because this could have given evacuees the full rights of refugees.

One of the ironies was that governments which had respected UNHCR's requests with regard to the protection and non-return of Kosovo asylum seekers before NATO's action, became more restrictive after it. UNHCR even had to refute arguments that because deportees had not themselves fled persecution, they were not entitled to protection as refugees.

Kosovo and Bosnia have often been compared, but the fundamental differences between these two operations have tended to be overlooked. UNHCR's Bosnia operation was, in a sense, a substitute for political action and ensuring its success was important to key governments.

The Kosovo exodus was the consequence of, but certainly not caused by, political actions of key governments. There was sud-

denly a massive humanitarian crisis which governments and NATO urgently needed to contain and major and sometimes competing political considerations were at stake. The humanitarian operation was both a vehicle for and subordinated to these concerns with no lack of claimants for successes and an obvious candidate for blame for perceived shortcomings.

DIRECT GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

Unlike in Bosnia, where UNHCR controlled the operation and coordination was relatively easy, some governments became directly involved in humanitarian initiatives, sought their own visibility and the quick solutions which were simply not available.

Coordination in Kosovo, though a mandated UNHCR responsibility, was always difficult and at times impossible in a 'free-for-all' atmosphere. UNHCR was urged to coordinate more effectively by governments which then made bilateral arrangements for assistance and camp construction about which UNHCR often learned post facto.

Some NGOs arrived without knowledge of the region or a clear understanding of the context or needs and sometimes without the necessary experience.

Such early problems are characteristic of high-profile emergencies, but proved particularly difficult to handle in this one. The experience reinforced the importance of UNHCR spelling out the challenges and problems more clearly from the start and the need for a team/consortium approach with U.N. and other partners.

UNHCR has commissioned an independent evaluation of the operation to ensure that lessons are correctly analysed and learned.

It is to be hoped that lessons will also be learned from the cumulative failures to take resolute political action that contributed to making such a difficult operation necessary in the first place. ■

Coordination in Kosovo was always difficult and at times impossible in a 'free-for-all' atmosphere.

Nicholas Morris, whose views do not necessarily reflect those of the U.N., was UNHCR Special Envoy in the Balkans in 1993-94 and again in 1998 until April 1999. This is an abridged article which first appeared in Forced Migration Review.



Ethnic Serbs flee Kosovo.

EUROPE'S LATEST EXODUS

Serbia, already host to a half million refugees, receives a new influx from Kosovo

This is a road to nowhere, except a big black hole. But for us, there is no choice. We must go," said 45-year-old Didac as he looked north from Kosovo toward the hinterland of Serbia recently, his dark eyes blank and expressionless. His wife and two children, all ethnic Serbs, along with two other families huddled silently on the back of a tractor-trailer. "We are doomed to become permanent wanderers, shunned by the world," Didac said as his small convoy of farm vehicles trundled slowly forward.

Etched deeply into his weather-lined face was not only personal tragedy, but the

dark history of the Balkans. Three times in less than a decade Didac has become a refugee as successive conflicts engulfed the region during the 1990s.

Born in the Krajina area of Croatia, Didac's family was among 170,000 ethnic Serbs chased out of that region by the Croatian army in 1995. When he reached his ancestral homeland of Serbia and apparent safety, he was

moved by local authorities and became a 'settler' in Kosovo as part of the central government's efforts to maintain control of a province dominated numerically by ethnic Albanians.

"For us life has become a permanent hell."

But when Albanian refugees began streaming back into the province in early June, he recognized 'it was time to go again' despite international pleas for the estimated 200,000 ethnic Serbs and tens of thousands of Roma (gypsies) in the province to remain. "For us life just turned into a permanent hell," Didac said as he joined a growing exodus out of Kosovo.

Thousands of gypsies tried to escape to Italy, but many were returned.

"We are a people without a country," said one Roma. "We go where the wind blows."

A SIGNIFICANT BURDEN

Around 200,000 displaced from Kosovo headed north to Serbia or west to Montenegro trying to escape an increasing number of atrocities. They became an economic burden in a country reeling from war, a crippled infrastructure, rampant unemployment and which was already host to the



UNHCR/R. CHALANASI

largest single concentration of refugees in Europe, more than 500,000 people who had fled earlier regional conflicts.

The government in Belgrade initially used a series of bureaucratic obstacles to try to force people to return to Kosovo. Displaced Serbs were forbidden to register with local police until they had 'deregistered' in Kosovo. But in a classic Catch 22 situation, there were no civil servants left in Kosovo to deregister them. Without Serbian registration the new arrivals could not obtain pensions, fuel coupons or schooling for their children. "They are trying to force them back with red tape," said UNHCR spokesman Kris Janowski at the time. When some Serbs did return to Kosovo they found their situation as precarious as when they had left. The government

later said it was working urgently to eliminate the bureaucratic bottlenecks and make the displaced more welcome.

Even when refugees found accommodation, the conditions were often inadequate. A UNHCR team visited the region and in one old school building in Sirco found around 120 refugees. In one room seven adult Kosovars and 12 children shared four beds. In another a woman still recovering from an operation, her nine-year-old daughter and husband and grandfather shared two bare steel beds and used toilet paper as pillows.

At another location, scores of refugees received only a quarter loaf of bread and a small sliver of pate per day as a food ration. In the town of Leskovac, an estimated 200 people who fled the Krajina region seven years ago, continue to live in a school with no hot water, no electric boilers, little electric light, leaking pipes and 'an overpowering smell coming out of the building'.

THE LEFTOVERS

Since 1991 UNHCR provided an estimated \$250 million in assistance to the early refugee arrivals in Serbia. But as one aid of-

ficial admitted: "Let's face it. The Serbs aren't popular refugees with international donors. The bulk of any available funds will go toward rebuilding Kosovo. The Serbs will get the leftovers."

Some ethnic Serb refugees have managed to start a new life. Serbia introduced a new Citizenship Law in 1997 and around 42,000 people were approved for citizenship and permanent residence. Since 1992 nearly 13,500 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia were resettled by UNHCR in other regions, primarily the United States, Canada, Australia, Chile and various European countries.

Disappointingly only around 5,000 people had gone back on UNHCR-organized repatriation programs to their original homes in Croatia and Bosnia by the end of 1998. Some of these returns continued

"Let's face it. The Serbs aren't popular refugees with international donors. They will get the leftovers."

through the NATO bombing earlier this year, with 815 civilians returning to Croatia and 35 to Bosnia.

More than a half million long-time Serb refugees—joined this year by an additional 200,000 people from Kosovo—are living their lives in bureaucratic limbo, unsure they will be able to return to homes some families have occupied for centuries, or whether they

will be able to start afresh somewhere else.

For its part the new U.N. administration in Kosovo is convinced the key to long-term stability in the province must be the successful reintegration of the region's Serbs and Roma. Given the discouraging example from other areas of the former Yugoslavia that may well remain an elusive goal and a future potential flashpoint. ■

Tolerance in a sea of hatred

One tiny republic keeps its doors open to everyone

Ethnic hatred and cleansing became a virulent disease in many parts of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. An honorable exception to this behavior has been the conduct of the tiny republic of Montenegro.

As early as 1991, Montenegrins vividly demonstrated their opposition to a conflict which eventually engulfed the entire region, when army reservists resisted attempts to mobilize them to fight in the Yugoslav army against Croatia, which had declared its independence from the old Yugoslav Federation.

As war spread, the tiny republic—population only 616,000—sheltered as many as 45,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Remarkably, they included both Serbs and Muslims at a time when other countries in the region were slamming their doors shut to anyone other than their own ethnic kin.

Aid officials particularly remember the government's kindness in 1992 toward Muslim and Serb men who had been held in wretched conditions in various detention centers in Bosnia, by housing them in coastal hotels which normally catered to the lucrative tourist trade.

That tradition of tolerance continued through the recent troubles in Kosovo, despite the fact that Montenegro remains officially allied with Serbia in the rump Yugoslav Federation, the Yugoslav army has troops stationed in the republic and Yugoslav police control the common frontier.

The government in the republic capital of Podgorica, which means Under the Mountain, openly opposed Serbia's actions in Kosovo, despite the obvious political threats to its own survival, and again welcomed floods of uprooted Kosovars of all ethnicities.

Initially, an estimated 70,000 mostly ethnic Albanians sought shelter in Montenegro, a region of splendid beaches, mountains and marshland. The bulk of those people returned home in early summer when the fortunes of war changed dramatically in their favor, but when Serbs and Roma fled the province in turn, Montenegro sheltered some 22,000 of them.

The government's openness toward all victims of war showed a welcome touch of humanity in an area where ethnic intolerance has become the norm. ■

“IT’S HARD TO BE OPTIMISTIC”

Dennis McNamara became UNHCR Special Envoy in the Balkans as the Kosovo crisis exploded into full-scale conflict. He was subsequently also named as a Deputy Special Representative of Secretary-General Kofi Annan in charge of humanitarian affairs for the province and in the following interview examines some of the early problems and the future.

Refugees: *The Kosovo crisis seemed to be a race against time with the international community always playing catch-up...the race to help hundreds of thousands of fleeing refugees...the race to assist the flood of returnees and now another race against the approach of winter.*

a. A half a million people fled in 10 days contrary to all predictions. Then a half a million people went back in two weeks, again contrary to all predictions. Playing catch-up was inevitable.

q. *Can the humanitarian community win this latest race?*

a. We’ve managed more people in more difficult circumstances than Kosovo over the last few decades so the humanitarian task is eminently doable. That’s not the major hurdle. The real challenge is the overall political, security and military environment and the plethora of major actors including NATO, the European Union and the UN. How are they going to fit together?

q. *UNHCR was heavily criticized for its performance at the start of the Kosovo exodus.*

a. Part of the criticism was valid, some of it invalid and some of it in-between. Parts of the system should have moved effectively and quickly, but there were no predictions of the magnitude of the exodus by any government. We had appealed early for donor support for contingency planning. The support was not forthcoming. Those factors must be balanced against the slowness of the response.

q. *Why was UNHCR constantly underfunded by donor governments who also undertook far more government-to-government programs, so-called bilateralism, than seen previously?*

a. It was a Catch-22 situation to some extent. Initial criticism led to withholding of funds and an amazing situation where we had to keep appealing for humanitarian funds during a conflict when governments had spent billions on military hardware. Increased government-to-government programs are a reflection of a global phenomenon. Governments see bilateral programs serving national interests more effectively. Hence there is support for NATO’s post-conflict role, for European Union and OSCE bodies and at the same time there has been very inadequate funding for an organization like UNHCR which is charged by these same players with coordinating the humanitarian response.

q. *Given that many of these governments are also major donors of UNHCR, isn’t this a worrying development for the future?*

a. Donors have many voices. There is rhetoric supporting UNHCR’s coordinating role but those same institutions fund agencies bilaterally and issue precise instructions not to be coordinated by the UN. Those are inherent dilemmas which have to come out in the open. The current situation cannot continue.

q. *Did UNHCR underestimate the sheer political and military complexity and magnitude of Kosovo?*

a. On the humanitarian level we have handled more difficult situations. But once NATO launched its first military action ever, the stakes were fantastically high politically and it was no longer business as usual. Humanitarian agencies are likely to get crushed when elephants of that size are unleashed and we are convenient scapegoats when things go wrong. It was also a media war, a media circus, a four-month crisis 24-hours a day and the only



A 13-year-old girl who lost both legs to a booby trapped mine when she returned home, at Pristina hospital.

© O. YOGELSON



news seemed to be bad news. Today, information and perception are as important as actual performance and that's a lesson we have had to learn. If you don't you will be trampled.

q. *Humanitarian military cooperation has always been a delicate subject. Will Kosovo strengthen or sour future coordination?*

a. That's a key question. During the war this massive interface meant constantly redrawing the lines of responsibility. NATO was one hundred times superior in manpower and resources and when not engaged militarily they began setting schedules for repatriation and doing other things that were our mandate. They didn't appreciate us saying 'hold it, don't do that.' And we didn't appreciate them overstepping the line. The powers that be, however, recognized they couldn't solve the crisis purely militarily so they returned to the U.N. to manage the consequences. It's been difficult for both groups. I'm sure it will affect future cooperation.

q. *The threat of mines is going to be with us in Kosovo for a very long time?*

a. They recently found a World War Two unexploded bomb at London airport. Kosovo will be no different. But unexploded military ordnance may be a bigger problem than mines themselves. We don't know how much is out there and where it is. We are talking years here.

q. *In humanitarian crises there always seems to be a dangerous gap between emergency assistance and longer term reconstruction which seems to be happening in Kosovo too.*

a. The rebuilding of civil society must be in the frontline with humanitarian relief. Funding states must be committed and alert enough to send in the people who are going to rebuild the roads and electrical plants, the judiciary and the police along with the aid workers. They should be on the ground with us so that this dangerous, lawless environment is not allowed to flourish in a vacuum.

q. *Isn't it just naive and wishful thinking to believe Kosovo can be multi-ethnic again after such violence and atrocities? After all, hundreds of thousands of people are still waiting to go home in Bosnia.*

a. To be sure, revenge is in the air and whether this hatred is stemmable or not, I'm not sure. What's for certain is that pro-

tection means both physical and comprehensive legal protection and this tragic gap in protection in Kosovo could be fatal to the ideals of multi-ethnicity.

q. *One refugee exodus seems to beget another. Is there any way to break this cycle?*

a. Hundreds of thousands of people have returned to Kosovo but the conflict produced another 200,000 refugees. The cycle continues. It's hard to be optimistic but population stability is the bedrock of human rights and democracy.

q. *Donors increasingly earmark funds for specific crises and the hundreds of thousands of refugees already in Serbia have sometimes been forgotten by the international community. Isn't this another dangerous trend?*

a. Earmarking funds is clearly politically driven but UNHCR has channeled \$250 million to Serb refugees since 1992. It will be far more difficult to get new funds for the latest Serb displaced and for the longtime displaced in Serbia who are living in pitiful conditions.

q. *What is UNHCR's medium and long-term role in Kosovo following the return of the majority of refugees?*

a. We will continue to address the humanitarian hazards of winter. We must continue to care for refugees in Albania and Macedonia who have not returned home and address the problems of Kosovars who went further afield to Europe, Oceania and North America. We will be engaged for a very long time.

q. *What about the surrounding states who housed so many Kosovars?*

a. A fundamental message must be 'You are not forgotten because you've served your purpose.' Our message is 'We will remain committed to you.' These countries are angry about the lack of economic assistance they believe they were promised and European nations must invest in these countries.

q. *But we've seen this all before. The cameras go away and the world forgets.*

a. Kosovo is too important politically to be simply brushed aside when the television screens are empty. When politicians are embarrassed by television images they respond. But, slogans and images are not the way to run international affairs. We had a war in Kosovo based on principle. Now let's invest in the future by continuing to support these same principles. ■

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH THE MILITARY

Soldiers and humanitarian workers often make uneasy partners, but they need each other

By Cedric Thornberry

Surely it is not an ineluctable natural law that peacekeeping's soldiers and humanity's warriors must always snarl when the cause of peace and humanity brings them together in some savage new scenario?

They have complementary roles in assuaging the outcome of disaster. Each knows its specialist segment of responsibility. But each pursues a common goal.

The era of U.N. Cold War peacekeeping, mostly after cease-fires between feuding countries, led, a decade ago, to more complex operations that began in Namibia and Central America. For the first time, multiple tasks—political, military, police, humanitarian, legal, developmental—arose.

Since then, the international community has been increasingly drawn into calamitous internal conflicts ranging from the former Yugoslavia to Rwanda, and UNHCR has become an habitual participant together with countless, but often divergent, U.N., intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Each body has a different mandate and focus. This at once affords potential for friction in even the most harmonious operations. In Namibia, for instance, UNHCR's mandated emphasis on returnee welfare was not entirely consistent with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) mission's overall duty of impartiality towards all Namibians.

How does military-civilian friction arise? In theory it should not. It is the military's business to support UNHCR and other humanitarian bodies' relief activities. UNHCR does not challenge the military's security role. But humanitarian activities may be intimately linked to the military in that peacekeepers may, in dangerous environments, be mandated to work with UNHCR to deliver protection and assistance to those in need. The mili-

tary may also be asked to supplement the humanitarians' logistical capacity.

DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE

Thus civilian and military tasks may encroach upon one another and cannot—other than on paper—be fully separated. How, for instance, is the military's negative evaluation of the security of a proposed relief convoy's route to be weighed against an imperative to reach a specific village whose inhabitants are starving?

Four years ago, UNHCR produced two booklets: A UNHCR Handbook for the



British soldiers distribute bread to refugees at Stenkovic 2 camp, Macedonia.

Military on Humanitarian Operations and a training module for its own staff on Working with the Military. Still relevant, they deal gently with a basic truth of military-humanitarian relations.

This is, that many humanitarian workers seem young and inexperienced to their military counterparts. Soldiers, in turn, are often seen as favoring simplistic, short-term and aggressive solutions to complex issues. There are, often, different mindsets, and it would be wrong to disregard the reality that training, experience and divergent approaches to decision making, use of resources, command and control, may increase difficulties of mutual understanding and enhance any tendency to think in stereotypes.

Cooperation among humanitarian bodies, and among the sprawling family of U.N. organizations, should further improve with the strengthening of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), but renewed attention needs to be given to civilian-military relations which could become a major issue in the new century.

Above all, the need of both military and civilians is for education for mixed peacekeeping operations, and for informed leadership, especially in the field. Much prejudice and misunderstanding comes from ignorance of each other's professional tasks and values.

NATO has been trying to incorporate humanitarian concerns and civilian roles into its main peacekeeping exercises in recent years without always having full support from the major agencies. Many defence forces now teach peacekeeping, including civilian tasks, as part of their staff courses.

Bridging the chasm will not be easy. Two major structural problems create unnecessary tension.

It is hard enough to maintain good coordination between soldiers and humanitarian workers when both answer within a unified chain of command emanating from a single head of mission in an integrated peacekeeping operation. Deliberately to split

military and civilian operations into two separate entities, as has happened in the Balkans, looks like reckless endangerment.

Moreover, the wasteful organizational gyrations imposed in Europe to placate a certain anti-U.N. attitude must inevitably diminish the coherence and strength of mixed-task peacekeeping.

No. It is not an immutable law of nature that soldiers and civilians should disagree. But they do need every opportunity and encouragement to talk to one another, and to learn to understand and respect one another's mandate and professionalism. ■

Cedric Thornberry was Head of Civil Affairs and Assistant Secretary-General in the former Yugoslavia, 1992-94 and a U.N. peacekeeper in Cyprus, the Middle East and Namibia.



UNHCR/F. DEL MUNDO

The massacre at Racak village in January in which 45 persons were executed.

A SENSE OF DÉJÀ VU....

A returning visitor finds a continuing degree of resilience and optimism in Kosovo.

By Fernando del Mundo

In the devastated ruins of Lodja there was a determined sense of renewal in the air. A dozen residents busily repaired a school for use as temporary quarters while they rebuilt their homes in an area which was considered the heart and soul of Kosovo's second largest town, Pec. UNHCR provided the civilians—artists, professionals and entrepreneurs—with re-

pair kits and other aid agencies fixed the electricity and water facilities. One 70-year-old woman stared at the unblemished facade of her home, which hid the ruin behind, and sighed: "This is my life... everything I had spent to build this place." But when her daughter began to cry, the old woman almost angrily hushed her. Reconstruction must continue despite the personal despair.

That was last year, before the NATO

air campaign and the worldwide headlines and I visited Lodja several times as a UNHCR field officer. An air and ground assault by Serbian paramilitary units had reduced virtually all of the 100 houses and a mosque in Lodja to rubble. It reminded me a little of my home in Manila, one of the most heavily devastated cities in World War II. Troops had scrawled graffiti on one wall declaring 'Café Lodja does not exist anymore', similar to signs other victorious Serbian forces had plastered across the Balkans in the 1990s.

I revisited Lodja recently, after most Albanian refugees had again returned. There was an immediate sense of *déjà vu*.

To be sure, there was even more destruction than I remember. Downtown Pec, with its cobbled streets of gold shops and boutiques, had also been levelled. But there was that same sense of resilience of a year earlier. A 44-year-old Albanian surveyed the wreckage of his home with his wife and four young sons, still brimming with hope. "We have to start organizing ourselves first, and then things will get better," he said, explaining he planned to reopen his carpentry shop as soon as possible.

Anyone who knows Kosovo well was not surprised that hundreds of thousands of refugees, even those as far away as the United States and Germany, would ignore the pleas of the international community to be patient before returning home. In 1998, civilians had moved like a whirlwind from one village to another, always within the vicinity of their own homes, as the Serbs and Kosovo Liberation Army played deadly games of hide-and-seek and catch. Whenever there was a lull in the conflict, they returned home as quickly as possible.

A SMALL PLACE

Kosovo is a small place. The Albanian I met in the ruins of Lodja knew me. He had seen me in September, 1998 in the village of Krusevac. More than 25,000 ethnic Albanians were fleeing from a Serbian military sweep and as the sound of artillery blasts followed them, they pleaded with me to somehow stop the bombardment. I called UNHCR's Belgrade office. The matter was raised at the highest levels, but I will never know if the phone call made any difference.

The Albanian, who admitted that he was a KLA soldier, said he saw me again the following day in Istinic, just south of Krusevac, where the civilians were cornered because the Serbs had blocked the road.

At the time UNHCR was helping around 400,000 people and staff members, including local personnel who had everything to lose in such a dangerous environment, roamed the province in vulnerable 'soft-skin' vehicles, often visiting areas where international observers would not go, on assessment missions to gauge the needs of the population.

We had run convoys virtually every single day since the spring of 1998. A colleague, Francis Teoh, led the last fleet of trucks before we were ordered out of Kosovo in advance of the NATO attacks.

The trip between the town of Mitrovica and a village called Ade normally takes 30 minutes. That day, as he negotiated 11 checkpoints, it took him several hours. At one roadblock special forces troops beat up a driver and shoved a Kalachnikov rifle in Francis' stomach as he tried to intervene. 'Nema problema' (no problem), he assured the soldiers as his infectious smile and sense of humor rescued him yet again from a tight spot.

"War is war. The pain is the same" all over the world.

We were ordered to leave for Macedonia that same night. Most of us thought we would be back within a few days. The shooting lasted for 2 1/2 months.

When I did go back, the pattern of our aid effort had changed. We continued to help the uprooted Kosovars, of course, but a major protection concern now was the enclaves—particularly the pockets of Serbs and Roma who found themselves surrounded by ethnic Albanian majorities across Kosovo.

This reversal in fortunes reminded me of a remark made earlier this year by Jo Hegenauer, who headed UNHCR operations in Kosovo. Asked if there was any difference in the suffering of people in the midst of conflict in Europe compared with other parts of the world, he replied, "War

is war. The pain is the same."

On one of my last working field trips in Kosovo I encountered a group of 100 terrified villagers huddled into two houses as special forces troops conducted an offensive against their village near Pristina. Masked soldiers angrily took away video films I had shot of the operation, but an officer apologetically handed them back to me. "There is enough space for everyone in Kosovo," he said. "But this dirt is consuming us all," he added as he twisted his boot into the mud patch on which he was standing.

As I left Kosovo this time, 14 Serbian farmers had recently been massacred by unknown gunmen. In one of the defining moments in the Kosovo conflict, 45 ethnic Albanians were slaughtered in Racak village in January. That incident drew worldwide condemnation. Now it was the turn of an Albanian acquaintance to show remorse. "Oh my God," he said on hearing the news. "We have become just like the Serbs." ■

Saving lives... but losing their own

A local charity helped many old and infirm Kosovars, but volunteers paid a heavy price

As hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes during the Kosovo war, in each village and town pockets of people remained behind. They were the old and infirm, men and women who either couldn't physically leave or had simply given up the will to live. Unable to fend for themselves "as the days went on, it became apparent they were facing starvation," says Fatima Boshanjaku from the Mother Teresa Society.

The Albanian charity had been helping 500,000 people earlier this year, but as the NATO air campaign began and Serbian troops intensified their campaign of ethnic cleansing, this aid effort collapsed.

Still, some volunteers remained be-

hind and as food levels dwindled they began scouring ruined houses for wheat flour to feed the old people.

The charity workers saved many lives, but at a high cost to themselves. In

By 1998 the society was helping a half million people and became UNHCR's main distribution partner.

the town of Djakovica, six society workers were killed, two were wounded, six captured and tortured and nine simply disappeared. Throughout the province 100 society personnel were killed or went missing.

The society was named after the late Albanian nun who won the Nobel Peace

Prize for her work among the poor of Calcutta. In its first year in 1990 society volunteers helped an estimated 15,000 people, mostly families of the unemployed.

By 1998 its network had expanded so rapidly, it was able to help as many as a half million people and became UNHCR's main distribution partner for relief supplies.

For months leading up to the NATO bombing campaign, multi-agency convoys hauled food, blankets, mattresses and other supplies to society warehouses from where volunteers distributed the aid by tractor-trailer to remote areas, many of which had been cut off by Serbian military activity.

It was dangerous work. In a foretaste of things to come, Serbian tanks targeted one tractor-trailer convoy in August last year, despite aid agency logos being clearly visible on relief boxes, and killed three volunteers.

As the chaos increased, virtually all the Mother Teresa warehouses were looted and torched. Of 92 clinics, 78 were destroyed. Most of the society's 22 officials and 8,000 volunteers fled to neighboring countries where they helped organize relief operations.

Today, the society is back in business. The majority of volunteers have returned, 38 of 44 branches and as many as 500 of the 636 sub-branches operating before the war have reopened. "Conditions are better now," says Jak Mita, the society's vice-president. "We can work freely." ■

SURVIVING ON ROOTS AND LEAVES

A crisis largely ignored by the outside world

By Peter Kessler

As world attention focused on events in Kosovo, Justine Kokolo and her seven children were surviving, barely, on a diet of manioc leaves and roots deep in the heart of Africa. The family had fled Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, late last year when fighting flared anew between government forces and guerrillas. But they only exchanged one hell for another.

They fled south to the Pool region, a swampy and inhospitable area virtually cut off from the rest of the devastated, oil-rich country. The displaced—the government estimates there are as many as 200,000 in Pool alone though aid agencies say the true figure is probably half that—survive by foraging in the forest and picking clean abandoned farms. Malnutrition has begun to skyrocket and children have begun to die, even after escaping the region and reaching the apparent safety of U.N. centers.

But food is only one of the problems facing these displaced Congolese. Civilians claim that Ninja rebels operating in Pool, who back the country's former Foreign Minister, Bernard Kolelas in his struggle against the current government, use them as human shields against attacks by government helicopters. The guerrillas are often drugged, the civilians say, rampaging through the area, issuing bizarre decrees and orders that often result in the murder of innocents for no apparent reason.

The situation in the Congo is one of the most dangerous and difficult in Africa. But it never makes world headlines and is, in fact, rarely reported at all. Humanitarian officials working in Africa worry that 'glamour' crises such as the Kosovo problem siphon off not only media attention but precious aid dollars, making it ever

more likely that people like Justine Kokolo and her family will remain destitute and homeless for all of their lives.

AN EMPTY SHELL

Conditions were so bad in Pool that mother and family decided to make the dangerous trek back to the capital recently. But Brazzaville itself is a shell of a city. Gunfire echoes through the empty boulevards 24 hours a day. Food is constantly in short supply. Many buildings are gutted. The transit center where Justine stays is a half-built sports complex which, like most other centers, has been looted many times

over. It can accommodate 2,000 people sleeping on the bare floor of a basketball court. The nearby once-elegant race track is overgrown.

Justine is having second or even third thoughts about which is the safest—or less dangerous place—in Congo, if one exists at all. There are no blankets for Justine and her family and she

One of the most dangerous and difficult situations in Africa, but it never makes world headlines.

now complains, "Life in Brazzaville is terrible. I'd like to go back to Lomou (in the Pool region) but there is no way to get there."

Since early 1999 an estimated 35,000 malnourished Congo refugees sought asylum in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, itself in a state of turmoil. A further 25,000 traumatized civilians escaped to Gabon in the first weeks of July.

Since April, despite warnings by UNHCR about the perilous nature of things at home, at least 30,000 people have returned from Democratic Congo to Brazzaville to a very uncertain future.

Salaried employment in the once-thriving capital is virtually non-existent. One-time civil servants squat in the shadow of a downtown office tower, trading what they have for what they need.

Most of these people depend on the limited supplies distributed by a few relief agencies. But the latest U.N. appeals for additional funds have thus far not been answered, making it unlikely that the lot of Congo's victims will improve any time soon. ■



A child in the destroyed center of Brazzaville, capital of the Congo.

■ Hong Kong reopened a second camp for boat people after rioting between ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese groups.

■ More than 100,000 Afghans fled the latest fighting between Taliban and Northern Alliance forces.

Seeking asylum

ETHIOPIA

Restarting operations in the Horn

The repatriation of Somali refugees from Ethiopia restarted in June after being suspended in late 1998 because of the continuing hardships faced by the returnees in northern Somalia. UNHCR scheduled three convoys a week until December and hopes to move up to 60,000 people before the end of the year. Ethiopia still hosts around 200,000 Somalis of the hundreds of thousands of people who had originally fled their country, first during the Ogaden war in the late 1970s and then during Somalia's own civil war earlier this decade.

ANDORRA

Every little bit helps

With a population of around 60,000 Andorra is one of the smallest countries in the world. However, early in the Kosovo crisis, Andorra's U.N. ambassador donated \$100,000 towards UNHCR's efforts in the conflict and said his country would be willing to accept up to 10 Kosovar refugees in need of medical assistance. Officials believe this is the first time Andorra has involved itself in refugee issues.

UNITED NATIONS

Ending a conflict

The U.N. Security Council has called for increased efforts to reinforce peace agreements signed by warring factions. In a formal statement, the Council proposed a series of 'practical measures' ensuring more effective disarmament of ex-combatants and their reintegration into civilian society. The Council noted that despite peace agreements and the presence of U.N. peace-keeping missions on the grounds, combatants in many recent conflicts simply kept on fighting.

AFRICA

Good news and bad

When African leaders gathered recently in Algiers for their last summit meeting this century, there was some good news and some bad news for the continent's refugees. Efforts to end three of Africa's most intractable conflicts—in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea—were inching slowly to-



The Presidents of Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Liberia witness the symbolic destruction of weapons.

ward resolution. If stability could be reimposed, it would bring relief to millions of people. There are currently 450,000 refugees from the Sierra Leone civil war and hundreds of thousands have been displaced within the country. At least 600,000 civilians fled the latest fighting on the Horn of Africa. In Central Africa at least 100,000 have left the Congo in recent months, another 700,000 are internally displaced and there are an additional 300,000 refugees from surrounding countries in the Congo itself. The bad news in Algiers was it remained very uncertain any of the agreements would stick. Even after a peace accord was signed in Central Africa, thousands of refugees continued to flee the Congo. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata attended the summit and said there was an "encouraging new resolve in African leaders to stop feeling sorry for themselves and to tackle the immense political and economic problems" which plague the continent. "That new attitude is Africa's hope for the future," she said. ■

WORLD

Refugee numbers

The number of refugees and other people of concern to UNHCR dropped by around four percent in 1998 compared with the previous year to a total of 21.5 million. Figures recently released show the number of refugees in that overall figure also fell by a similar four percent to a total of 11,491,710. Other categories of people UNHCR helps include asylum seekers, returned refugees, internally dis-

placed persons and certain war-affected people. The largest declines among refugees were in Latin America and the Caribbean which recorded 11 percent declines, Europe which showed a nine percent fall and Africa with a six percent drop. The estimated asylum seeker population, however, showed an overall increase of 38 percent to 1.3 million people worldwide. ■

GUATEMALA

A last journey home

As many as 45,000 Guatemalans fled to Mexico starting in the early 1980s as civil unrest gripped their own country. Some started to trickle back almost immediately and in the intervening years the great majority have returned

home, either individually or with governmental and UNHCR assistance. On 24 June, 167 refugees went home in the last voluntary repatriation, effectively bringing the Guatemalan operation to a successful conclusion. "I have a dream and that is to establish my own organization to work with the disabled, those who were injured during the war," said one male refugee who had spent 16 years in ex-

ile. "We are still nervous. We waited for several years in Mexico (following the signing of peace in Guatemala), but now we feel we can rebuild our lives in Guatemala." Some 22,000 Guatemalans elected not to go home, and the Mexican government offered the chance of full Mexican nationality to members of this group, more than 1,200 of whom have already received citizenship. ■

■ Holland said it will send rejected asylum seekers back to their countries within four weeks.

■ The European Union approved \$4.7 million in aid for Myanmar refugees living in Thai border camps.

■ Ireland is considering allowing some asylum seekers work permits to help meet the country's labor shortage.

■ Hundreds of Sudanese fleeing conscription into the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army fled into neighboring Uganda in July.

UNITED STATES

U.S. bars spousal abuse victims

A Board of Immigration Appeals has ruled that a woman fleeing violent abuse by her husband is not eligible for asylum in the United States. An immigration judge had granted asylum in 1996 to a Guatemalan woman, Rodi Alvarado Peña, who had left her home after her husband had pistol whipped her, broke windows and mirrors with her head, raped her and kicked her

so badly she hemorrhaged. It was argued the Guatemalan government had failed to protect her. The Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1995 had issued guidelines intended to recognize gender-based persecution under asylum laws, but it remained unclear whether women fleeing spousal abuse—as opposed to governmental persecution—could seek refuge. The Natu-

ralization Service appealed the first decision and in a 10-5 decision, the Board of Immigration Appeals ruled Mrs. Alvarado had not proved she suffered under any of the five categories outlined in international and U.S. law: race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a targeted social group. The dissenting Board members insisted the U.S. had an obligation to protect anyone who feared harm because of “some fundamental aspect of their identity.” ■

MALI

The end of a revolt

When nomadic Tuareg tribesmen rose in revolt against the central government in the west African state of Mali in 1990, the entire country was thrown into turmoil. More than 300,000 people were forced from their homes, more than one-third of them becoming refugees in Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Algeria and Niger. In the late 1990s, UNHCR undertook an ambitious program to help the refugees return and resettle the entire northern part of

the country. The agency spent nearly \$240 million on 638 returnee sites in the regions of Gao, Kidal, Mopti, Segou and Timbuktu. In late June, the agency officially ended its northern Mali operation when Africa director Albert-Alain Peters handed over to President Alpha Oumar Konare a 700-page report which summarized its four-year program but also called for future



Returnees in the Gao region of Mali

projects to stimulate economic growth and improve security in the region. A smaller UNHCR Mali office will continue to care for around 2,000 urban refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Great Lakes region. ■

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Another war in the islands

They gained infamy as the scene of some of the worst fighting in World War II and the battle between U.S. Marines and Japanese defenders on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands has been immortalized in dozens of films and books. Since the end of the war the Islands, deep in the Pacific Ocean, slipped back into obscurity. Recently, however, they became the scene of another conflict, this time of their own making. The U.N. helped mediate an ethnic dispute in June between the majority Gwale population and the minority Malaitan country people. Several persons were killed in the clashes and as many as 20,000 forced to flee their homes. ■

FINLAND

Gypsies on the run

Kosovo is not the only place in Europe where the continent's gypsies (Roma) are on the run. Finland recently suspended visa-free entry for Slovak citizens after more than 1,000 Slovak gypsies sought political asylum in the country since the beginning of the year. The Roma said they were fleeing persecution in the central European state. However, Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda has pledged a 'new deal' for the gypsy community as the country sought to improve its human rights record and its chance of eventual entry into the European Union. Finland is the latest destination in a string of countries targeted in the last few years by gypsy immigration including Canada, Britain, Belgium and Germany. ■

Seeking asylum

SWITZERLAND

Tougher rules for asylum seekers

Swiss voters, increasingly concerned at the growing number of people seeking asylum in their country, in June approved new rules for asylum seekers. The new measures allow collective temporary admission for certain groups such as ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, but at the same time limits refugees' rights to make their case for individual persecution, a necessity for permanent asylum. People arriving without proper identification must justify its absence to gain access to regular asylum procedures. Switzerland anticipates as many as 60,000 people will seek asylum this year, the highest number per capita in Europe.

UNITED STATES

Refugees online

The American Red Cross said it will launch a new online system for tracking refugees and displaced persons worldwide. During the Kosovo crisis, the Red Cross developed an online database for Kosovar refugees arriving in the United States. Together with Oracle, the software company, it plans to expand this “Displaced Persons Linking System” as a worldwide general reference point which refugees and other displaced persons can access.

SOMALIA

Another famine

Southern Somalia is facing another massive famine because of limited rains and continued fighting between rival warlords in the perennially troubled region on the Horn of Africa. International aid workers say as many as one million people are at risk and appealed for \$17.5 million in aid to help them. Around 300,000 people died in an earlier famine in 1992 in the same area.

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Volleyball game in Albania

A sporting hand

World sports bodies and humanitarian agencies joined forces to bring a little light relief and relaxation to at least some of the hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees during the recent crisis. The International Volleyball Federation, which has worked with UNHCR on other projects in Africa, distributed balls and nets in several camps in Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and also provided funds for local instructors. The International Olympic Committee, the International Football Federation (FIFA), the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) together with UNHCR and UNICEF also provided thousands of soccer balls and other equipment to refugee camp and community schools reaching tens of thousands of kids. "Playing a sport allowed refugees to discover that one can still live, without forgetting," says 21-year-old Leonora Luttori, herself a refugee who was wounded in the head and arm and saw her best friend die in her arms before escaping to Albania and becoming a local UNHCR field worker. The programs were launched in anticipation that the refugees could spend many months in exile, but the groups involved said they will pursue these activities inside Kosovo itself as an ongoing contribution in helping to restore the province to a semblance of normality. ■

Free at last

For 11 years he slept on a red plastic bench at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport and ate at a nearby pizza parlour and fast food restaurant. Barmen and airport doctors helped the Iranian who spent his days listening to the radio and writing a diary. But in early July the ordeal of 54-year-old Karim Nasser Miran, known to local airport officials and immigration officials as Mr. Alfred, ended when Belgium granted him refugee credentials. He was expelled from Iran, without papers, in the 1970s after protesting against the Shah's regime, but was eventually given refugee papers in the 1980s. His legal nightmare began when his briefcase containing the refugee document was stolen. He was subsequently arrested by French police



'Mr. Alfred' writes a letter from his 'bed' at Roissy airport.

and entered a bureaucratic never-never land. Because he had no official documents he could not be deported and was dumped into limbo in the so-called 'international' no-go zone of the Paris airport. The stolen document recently surfaced and the Belgian government offered him sanctuary. Miran said he had been taking a correspondence course during his incarceration and hoped to return to Brussels to complete it. ■

Good samaritans

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) announced the creation of an award for Outstanding Service to Refugees and Displaced Persons in Africa and said the first recipients were

Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire. The award is based on a country's long history of hosting large numbers of refugees, a country not being a refugee producing country itself, and its involvement at the highest

level of government in refugee issues. The launch of the award this year was timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the OAU Refugee Convention (see *Refugees magazine* N^o. 115). ■



A new Deputy for UNHCR

UNHCR has a new Deputy High Commissioner. Frederick Barton, a director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, succeeds the Austrian Gerald Walzer who retired in May after a 40-year career with UNHCR. Barton's latest job was head of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. He handled programs dealing with human rights monitoring in Rwanda, land mine projects in Angola, ethnic tolerance and violence avoidance in Indonesia and programs to promote news reporting in Balkan areas. In 12 years in the private sector he dealt with strategic planning, organizational development and marketing for a wide range of clients. ■



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“Kosovo must be rebuilt, recreated stone by stone.”

Bernard Kouchner, the U.N.'s new civil administrator for Kosovo

“They burned and burned and burned.”

A sister of the Mother Teresa Society describing the Serb withdrawal from Kosovo.



“I do ask the Serbian population to stay in their homes. We've had enough refugees. We don't want any more.”

NATO's Kosovo commander, Sir Michael Jackson, appealing to Kosovo Serbs to stay in the province.



“We must build a Europe with no front line states, a Europe undivided, demo-

cratic and at peace for the first time in history.”

U.S. President Bill Clinton on a visit to the region.



“The province of Kosovo is now one of the largest crime scenes in history.”

Louis Freeh, director of the FBI which is helping investigate war crimes in Kosovo.



“The U.S. bomblets look like round silver toys, while the British versions look like soda cans that have been painted orange.”

A western mine expert warning

children of the dangers of not only Serbian mines, but also unexploded allied ordnance.



“Thanks to Milosevic's policies there are no more Serbs in Krajina (Croatia), there are no more Serbs in Slavonia, there are no more Serbs in western Bosnia and Serbia has received about 600,000 refugees who are not being well cared for.”

Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemiji of Kosovo, condemning the policies of Belgrade in the last few years.



“We estimate that mines will be an everyday fact of life of the Kosovar people for as many as three to five years.”

U.S. mining expert Donald Steinberg, on the challenge of mine clearing in Kosovo.

“In Kosovo they got cell phones and psychological counseling. All we are asking for is maize.”

A frustrated U.N. official in Angola highlighting the world's differing priorities.



“This is probably the greatest challenge the U.N. has faced since the launching of the concept of peacekeeping in the late 1940s.”

Sergio Vieira de Mello, interim U.N. chief in Kosovo.



“In the last 10 years, four times we went into war with tanks and four times Serbs came back from war on tractors.”

Serbian opposition leader Zoran Djindjic on Serbia's involvement in several losing conflicts in the 1990s.