

**4th Meeting**

**UPDATE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE AMERICAS AND  
THE CARIBBEAN**

1. This document consists of two chapters as follows: Part I gives a regional overview and Part II contains country reviews. The Guatemala Repatriation Programme is described under the country reviews of Guatemala and Mexico. Two annexes summarize past levels and budgetary information.

**Chapter I:** Regional Overview

**Chapter II:** Country/Area Reviews (Canada, Guatemala, Mexico, United States of America, Central American Region, Northern South America and the Caribbean, Southern South America)

**I. REGIONAL OVERVIEW**

2. By the beginning of 1996, there were over 1.5 million refugees and returnees of concern to UNHCR in the Americas and the Caribbean. Out of that total, however, only some 82,300 continued to be in need of material support from UNHCR, with an estimated 50,000 being assisted as refugees and some 32,000 returnees benefiting mainly from community-based projects.

3. This marks a considerable improvement as compared to the situation that prevailed in the region less than a decade ago, prior to the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) and the profound political changes that took place in large parts of Latin America.

4. The only major refugee situation still requiring sustained attention is that of the Guatemalan refugees, some 38,000 of whom remain in camps and settlements in Mexico. Thirty thousand others have already repatriated to Guatemala, the majority of whom returned since 1993 through collective organized movements. While the pace of returns has recently been slower than anticipated, hope remains that a set of measures combining continued voluntary repatriation with action leading to integration in the country of asylum for part of the population would allow the Mexican Government and UNHCR to phase out assistance to the Guatemalan refugees within three to four years.

5. Immigration issues continue to have a high profile on the political agenda in North America and are of major public concern. In this context, UNHCR remains active in promoting a better understanding of the necessary distinction between genuine refugee cases and other migratory flows.

6. Elsewhere in the region, activities concentrate on the consolidation of durable solutions and cooperation with Governments in improving or developing national legislation on refugees and asylum-seekers and related procedures. The continuing arrival of small groups of asylum-

seekers from other continents constitutes a new phenomenon which UNHCR offices in the region monitor closely.

7. It is in this context of positive developments in achieving durable solutions and a shift in priorities towards promotional activities that the Office recently adopted a regional strategy and initiated a process of streamlining UNHCR's presence. The four-year strategy focuses on the pursuit and consolidation of durable solutions, support for the strengthening of national commitments and capacities to uphold asylum and international refugee law principles, as well as increased cooperation with national entities, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the overall goal of preventing future refugee flows.

8. The plan also calls for the consolidation of UNHCR's presence in the region, over the next two years, around three major UNHCR Regional Offices located in Venezuela, Mexico and the United States by the end of 1998. This would result in the closure of eight UNHCR Offices, including those in Chile, Haiti and Honduras, which have already been phased out over recent months, as well as an overall reduction of posts by some 30 per cent. This will be made possible through increased reliance on governmental or NGO partners, including new partnerships, as exemplified by the recent signing of Letters of Understanding between UNHCR and the Offices of the Ombudsmen in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

## **II. COUNTRY/AREA REVIEWS**

### **1. Canada**

#### **(a) Beneficiaries**

9. During 1995, 25,677 persons sought asylum in Canada — an increase of 18 per cent as compared to 1994. According to statistics provided by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), 26,072 refugee claims were referred to the Convention Refugee Determination Division (CRDD), representing a 16 per cent increase over the 1994 figure. During 1995, 17,189 decisions were rendered (a 12 per cent decrease compared to 1994). Of these, 3,479 claims were withdrawn or abandoned, refugee status was granted to 9,614 cases and 4,096 were rejected, giving a recognition rate of 70 per cent.

10. The three main countries of origin of asylum-seekers remained the same as in 1994; Sri Lanka (1,889), Somalia (1,364) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (1,227).

11. The combination of an increase in claims and a decrease in decisions rendered resulted in a 55 per cent increase in the backlog. At 31 December 1995, 26,394 cases were pending.

#### **(b) Recent developments and objectives**

12. In February 1995, the Canadian Government announced the imposition of a \$ 975 "right of landing fee" on all applicants for permanent residence over the age of 18. The landing fee is in addition to the \$ 500 "cost recovery fee". The combined fees add up to a total of \$ 1,475 to be paid by all adult applicants, including all asylum-seekers.

13. Canada remains a major resettlement country with a target for 1996 and 1997 of 10,300 (7,300 government-sponsored and 3,000 privately-sponsored).

14. The 1997 country programme objectives will be similar to those in 1996 and 1995. There

will, however, be an increased focus on monitoring legislative developments affecting asylum-seekers and refugees. The two most important potential developments are the draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the United States of America and Canada on the sharing of responsibility for refugee claims and the proposed legislative modification of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB).

15. Regarding training and refugee law dissemination, the UNHCR Branch Office in Canada is developing a more focused programme based on a survey of training needs and requests made by the Canadian authorities. The Branch Office will seek to renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UNHCR and the IRB which provides for the sharing of training material and the exchange of experts.

16. UNHCR's public information activities in 1997 will focus on sustaining the public awareness raised through the 1996 national refugee awareness-building project. This project revolves around marking the tenth anniversary of the awarding of the Nansen medal to the people of Canada.

**(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

17. CARE Canada continues to be UNHCR's implementing partner.

**(d) Budget**

18. No major changes are foreseen during 1996 and 1997.

**(e) Post situation**

19. The 1997 staffing level will be reviewed in November 1996 as part of the streamlining of UNHCR's presence in the whole region.

**(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

20. UNHCR will continue to monitor and encourage relevant bodies, for example the IRB or the Post Claim Determination Office, to develop guidelines for specific groups/cases such as children, gender-related cases, post-traumatic disorder cases, and others.

**(g) Oversight reports**

21. No reports were initiated during the reporting period.

**2. Guatemala**

**(a) Beneficiaries**

22. As at 1 January 1996, the recognized refugee population in Guatemala numbered 1,498 persons comprising 1,040 Nicaraguans, 382 Salvadorans, 14 Hondurans and 62 refugees from other countries. This number shows a considerable drop in comparison with last year's estimate of 4,700 refugees, a clarification which emerged from a case-by-case census and socio-economic survey carried out during 1995. Of the refugee caseload, 30 per cent are women and 30 per cent children.

23. During 1995, 9,524 Guatemalan refugees repatriated, mostly from Mexico. This brings

the total number of returnees as at 1 January 1996 to 30,163 since repatriation movements were started in 1984. Of this number, 15,275 returnees have repatriated on an individual basis and 14,888 collectively since the latter movements were initiated in 1993. Of the returnee caseload, 49 per cent are women and 45 per cent children.

**(b) Recent developments and objectives**

24. During 1995, only ten refugees living in Guatemala requested assistance for voluntary repatriation, although it is believed that many more returned by land without UNHCR assistance, mainly to El Salvador and Nicaragua. The voluntary repatriation of refugees will continue on a case-by-case basis through 1996 and 1997. However, as the vast majority of the refugees are opting to stay in Guatemala, efforts will continue to be made to support their local integration. An estimated 900 refugees will continue to receive assistance in obtaining permanent residence permits and enhancing their self-sufficiency.

25. Despite some progress in finalizing the peace agreement, the process of voluntary repatriation of Guatemalan refugees from Mexico was hampered by serious protection incidents, including the massacre of ten returnees at the Xaman settlement in October 1995, the scarcity of land, as well as internal divisions between and within the various organizations representing the refugees.

26. The projected total of 10,000 returnees for 1995 was nearly reached with the return of 9,524 refugees during the year. In view of the constraints referred to above, the projected number of returnees for 1996 has been revised downwards from 12,000 to 8,000.

27. UNHCR provided immediate material and logistical assistance and escorts for the repatriation and reception of returnees in 1995, and will continue to do so for the 16,000 Guatemalan refugees expected to return both collectively and in individual repatriation movements during 1996 (8,000) and 1997 (8,000). UNHCR also facilitates visits to Guatemala of potential returnees to ensure access to land prior to their repatriation.

28. The vast majority of the returnees repatriated from camps and settlements in the Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo, while others returned from various countries in the region. After arrival, returnees were provided with basic shelter and receive agricultural tools, seeds, fertilizers, etc., as well as nine months of food assistance.

29. The focus of UNHCR activities on behalf of the returnees subsequently shifts to monitoring their safety and supporting their reintegration through community-based Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) aimed at enhancing opportunities for returnees' reintegration and at supporting the reconciliation process with the resident population. Efforts are made to focus QIPs on vocational training and productive projects and to reduce investment in infrastructure, an area where increased governmental responsibility is being encouraged. In the formulation of QIPs, efforts are made to incorporate gender and environmental considerations, particularly where significant numbers of persons return to environmentally fragile areas. During 1995, a total of 107 QIPs were implemented. An additional 200 QIPs are expected to be implemented in both 1996 and 1997.

30. Following a request made to UNHCR to participate in the Technical Committee that oversees the implementation of the Agreement for the Resettlement of Uprooted Populations, a plan of action is being prepared which aims at assisting a group of 14,500 (initially estimated at 8,000) internally displaced persons who are clearly in a refugee-like situation. These internally displaced persons are presently residing in areas where the durability of the solution for returnees

cannot be dissociated from the attainment of a solution for this group of internally displaced persons. UNHCR assistance to internally displaced persons in Guatemala is subject to the signing of a final peace agreement, as well as a final review of budgets being developed in the field.

31. With the aim of linking returnee aid to development activities in the zones where virtually all returnees settle, UNHCR also plays a catalytic role in facilitating longer-term development activities by other national, bilateral and multilateral institutions, as well as by NGOs operating in these areas.

### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

32. In close coordination with UNHCR, the Bufete Profesional Vives y Asociados is responsible for the provision of legal and material assistance to refugees. Air transport arrangements for refugees repatriating from Guatemala to their countries of origin are entrusted to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Efforts are also made to strengthen links with ministries and civic institutions in order to increase their support to refugees.

33. As in previous years, the Office of the Chargé de Mission in Guatemala will continue to coordinate closely with the UNHCR Regional Office in Mexico in organizing transport arrangements of Guatemalan refugees from Mexico. The Office will also continue to provide, through the Guatemalan Commission for Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (CEAR), reception facilities and individual assistance in terms of basic shelter and agricultural inputs. The Confederación de Religiosos de Guatemala (CONFREGUA) will also continue to facilitate the issuance of personal documentation to returnees by municipal authorities.

34. Other important implementing partners for the provision of health services, sanitation and temporary shelter include international and local NGOs such as Médecins sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde, as well as the Catholic Church. The Government of Guatemala also lends important support to the repatriation programme by providing administrative and operational staff resources to CEAR and through the extension of credit for the purchase of land for returnees.

35. Under an agreement with UNHCR, the Canadian NGO Centre Canadien d'Etudes et de Coopération Internationale (CECI) administers the community-based QIPs aimed at facilitating the reintegration of returnees in Guatemala. The QIPs are implemented by a wide range of agencies and organizations including NGOs, organized community groups and church dioceses through arrangements made between CECI and these implementing partners.

36. In addition to the food assistance provided by WFP, collaboration with other United Nations agencies, through technical or material inputs offered by agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, FAO and Habitat, and the United Nations Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), has been very fruitful.

### **(d) Budget**

37. The budgetary requirements under General Programmes will be slightly reduced in 1997. The budgetary requirements for the Guatemala Repatriation Programme, which is a Special Programme, were increased in 1996 in comparison to 1995 due to the expected increase in the number of returnees. Although the estimated total number of returnees for 1996 has now been revised downwards from 12,000 to 8,000, it would be difficult to effect major reductions in this programme since a high percentage of the costs are fixed or linked to QIPs benefiting returnees and reconciling local communities.

**(e) Post situation**

38. The level of staffing remains stable in Guatemala, although a redeployment of staff between field duty stations is taking place to enhance effectiveness, and a new post of Driver was created as of January 1996.

**(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

39. As of January 1996, a Senior Regional Advisor for Refugee Women was assigned to the Regional Office in Costa Rica to advise on all activities related to refugee women and children in the Americas and the Caribbean. In addition, an Associate Programme Officer (Junior Professional Officer), who is specialized in gender issues, has been assigned to the Office of the Chargé de Mission in Guatemala to oversee the implementation of gender policies in Guatemala.

40. With the support of the UNHCR Senior Environmental Coordinator, a study has been made on the impact on the environment caused by returning refugees. The findings and recommendations of this study will be shared with the Government of Guatemala and other parties at round-table meetings scheduled tentatively for August 1996.

**(g) Oversight reports**

41. Internal auditors undertook an audit in Guatemala in March 1995. A response to the auditors' observations has been submitted and their recommendations are being implemented.

**3. Mexico**

**(a) Beneficiaries**

42. At 1 January 1996, Mexico hosted some 38,600 refugees. This number included 5,070 urban refugees of various nationalities (mainly from Central America) living in Mexico City and other urban centres, and 33,567 Guatemalan refugees living in camps and settlements in the States of Chiapas, Campeche and Quintana Roo. Among the Guatemalans living in these three south-eastern States, some 50 per cent were women, and the average family size was five. Now, after 13 years in exile, some 48 per cent of this refugee population are entitled to Mexican citizenship by birth. The natural population growth rate is 4.6 per cent.

**(b) Recent developments and objectives**

43. Refugees, particularly urban refugees, have been seriously affected by the difficulties of the Mexican economy as their employment possibilities, both in the formal and informal sectors, have significantly diminished.

44. Local integration possibilities for Guatemalan refugees who do not wish to repatriate is under active discussion between the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados (COMAR) and UNHCR. A draft proposal for the "stabilization" of the Guatemalan refugees by the year 2000 has been submitted recently. It foresees the gradual documentation of all refugees who would not opt for repatriation, including those in Chiapas, as well as other measures that should lead to their total economic and legal independence.

45. In light of progress already achieved in implementing durable solutions in the sub-region, it has been decided to merge the Mexico and Costa Rica Regional Offices into a single Regional Office as of 1 January 1997. The subsequent impact on 1997 activities and budgets will be reviewed in November 1996.

46. The overall objectives for the Guatemalan refugees in the camps/settlements in Campeche, Chiapas and Quintana Roo will continue to be voluntary repatriation and the identification and implementation of satisfactory durable solutions for those not willing to repatriate. Negotiations with the Mexican authorities will continue in order to secure proper refugee documentation for those wishing to remain, including birth certificates for all those born in Mexico. These negotiations will now be conducted within the framework of the proposed integration project. This will also be the framework for making the final leap to total self-sufficiency in the seven settlements in Campeche and Quintana Roo. Given the already well advanced de facto integration in these two States, efforts will initially focus on the issuance of adequate legal documents for refugees and the resolution of the question of land titles.

47. The objective for urban refugees will continue to be to enhance self-sufficiency through orienting refugees towards training courses, apprenticeships, and employment with on-the-job training possibilities. Contacts with other sources of assistance, governmental or private, will be pursued, particularly for refugees with special needs whom UNHCR is not adequately equipped to assist.

48. Vulnerable cases and refugees with security problems are submitted for resettlement. While there were few such cases in the past, the Mexican Government has recently been applying a more restrictive policy towards regularizing the status of refugees of certain nationalities (mostly other than Latin American) and have requested that these persons be resettled to a third country.

49. The main objective for UNHCR in 1996 and 1997 regarding the promotion of refugee law is the continuing effort to encourage the Mexican Government's accession to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

50. COMAR will continue to be UNHCR's main implementing partner for the programmes in the south-eastern States. In Chiapas, formal agreements have been signed with the NGOs Capacitación en Ecología y Salud para Campesinos AC (CCESC), Investigación y Desarrollo Femenino AC (IDEFEM) and Promoción de Servicios Comunitarios AC (PROSECO), which work in the health, nutrition and income-generating sectors, with particular emphasis on projects targeting women. Since 1 January 1996, assistance to urban refugees is being provided by the NGO Sin Fronteras IAP.

### **(d) Budget**

51. No major changes are foreseen in the 1996 budgets; the budget for 1997 might have to be adjusted based on the outcome of current discussions regarding local integration.

### **(e) Post situation**

52. The recently announced merger of the Regional Offices in Costa Rica and Mexico, effective January 1997, implies a thorough review of the staffing level in the region. Hence, initial submissions for 1997 will be adjusted during the November 1996 Regional Operations Review.

### **(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

53. In order to assess and address the unsatisfactory situation of women upon their return to Guatemala, particularly in regard to their role in community/project activities, an evaluation of

refugee women's participation in planning, decision making and implementation of protection and assistance activities was carried out in late 1995. Following this evaluation, an increased awareness of gender issues is being reflected in project design and implementation and is becoming visible in most implementing partners' work. The objective is to facilitate the future reintegration of returnee women in Guatemala, and to increase participation in community activities among those who stay in Mexico.

#### **(g) Oversight reports**

54. In addition to the evaluation mentioned above, a further evaluation was undertaken in late 1995 of current income-generating activities, including market research, which led to a re-orientation of income-generating projects to increase income levels.

#### **4. United States of America**

##### **(a) Beneficiaries**

55. During the 1995 fiscal year (1 October to 30 September), a total of 149,566 asylum applications were filed in the United States. This figure includes 71,509 American Baptist Churches cases, i.e. pending cases from a class action suit against the Government. In 1995, 12,477 claims were approved and 14,162 were denied, a recognition rate of 47 per cent. The United States had a backlog of 467,670 asylum claims at the end of the 1995 fiscal year.

56. Nearly 100,000 refugees were resettled in the United States of America during fiscal year 1995. The United States continues to be the main refugee resettlement country world-wide.

##### **(b) Recent developments and objectives**

57. The negotiations between Canada and the United States on the Memorandum of Agreement regarding the sharing of responsibility for refugee claims has been put on hold until the United States Immigration bill is finalized. The UNHCR Branch Office in Washington D.C. has already provided extensive comments on the draft agreement, which will have to be revisited in light of the finalized immigration legislation.

58. The two immigration bills, proposed by the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively, are being consolidated before submission to the President for signature. The Branch Office has provided comments regarding UNHCR's perspective on the asylum-related provisions of these proposed bills.

59. During 1997, the Branch Office will continue to build upon activities and initiatives started in previous years. The Branch Office is, however, placing a greater emphasis on the importance of public awareness and is seeking effective means to expand promotional activities beyond the Washington, New York policy community to a concerned public in other parts of the country.

60. The Branch Office pursues its close cooperation with NGOs on matters related to refugee protection at both the legal and policy levels.

##### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

61. UNHCR is working out a pro-active strategy for public awareness, which will be carried out as far as possible in conjunction with USA for UNHCR and other NGO partners. Church World Service and USA for UNHCR will continue to be UNHCR's implementing partners in the

United States of America.

**(d) Budget**

62. No major changes are foreseen under General Programmes. Due to a new strategy of public awareness, an increase in the Special Programme requirements is foreseen for 1996 and 1997.

**(e) Post situation**

63. The existing level of staffing is being reviewed due to the restructuring exercise undertaken by the UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Caribbean. The status of the office in Washington will change from Branch Office to Regional Office covering the United States of America and four countries of the Caribbean as of January 1997. Staffing implications, expected to be met through re-deployment, will be reviewed in November 1996.

**(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

64. UNHCR will continue to assist asylum-seekers presenting gender-related claims and to include these issues in staff training programmes.

**(g) Oversight reports**

65. No reports were initiated during the reporting period.

**5. Central American region**

66. This chapter covers UNHCR activities in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

**(a) Beneficiaries**

67. At 1 January 1996, there were 8,754 refugees in Belize, 24,266 in Costa Rica, 155 in El Salvador, 63 in Honduras, 602 in Nicaragua and 865 in Panama. In Belize there are, in addition, some 10,000 to 20,000 undocumented Central Americans in refugee-like situations. The majority of the refugees in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama are of Nicaraguan, Salvadoran and Guatemalan origin. There are also some refugees from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America, especially in Belize, Costa Rica and Panama. Approximately 45 per cent of the refugees in these countries are women and over 10 per cent are children under 5 years old. Most of the refugees of Central American origin are farmers living in rural areas, while refugees from other regions tend to settle in urban areas.

**(b) Recent developments and objectives**

68. In order to consolidate the significant achievements in identifying and implementing durable solutions in the region and to prevent future refugee flows, efforts will continue to concentrate on activities such as enacting and harmonizing national refugee legislation, establishing refugee determination procedures in countries still lacking them, training government counterparts, and promoting durable solutions for the residual caseload in Central America.

69. These traditional activities are being combined with preventive activities which are carried out through inter-agency cooperation in which UNHCR acts as a catalyst for the promotion of rights of refugees, returnees, and other uprooted persons. Activities such as the support to national post-CIREFCA follow-up mechanisms, the cooperation with Human Rights Ombudsmen Offices in the region and the implementation of the regional PARinAC plan of action are also part

of this strategy.

70. Durable solutions will continue to be achieved through voluntary repatriation and, for refugees who do not opt to return, through the issuance of permanent residence permits. The search for these solutions will be supported by Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). During 1995 and up to 1 May 1996, a total of 263 refugees were assisted in repatriating from the region. An estimated 200 refugees will repatriate during 1996. Regarding legal integration, some 10,500 refugees were granted resident status in Costa Rica by 1 May 1996. In addition, some 500 refugees have obtained residence status in Nicaragua, Panama and Honduras. In Belize, the QIPs programme will continue throughout 1996 and 1997 at a reduced level aimed at facilitating the socio-economic integration of some 3,500 refugees and undocumented persons in refugee-like situations. Although durable solutions were identified for the vast majority of refugees in previous years, an estimated 4,200 refugees will continue to benefit from subsistence grants, health assistance, legal protection and education assistance in the region.

### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

71. In Costa Rica, Consultores y Asesores Internacionales will implement project activities related to the local integration of refugees and provide legal counselling and follow-up on all legal aspects related to the residence status of refugees, while Rodriguez y Zamora SRL will administer arrangements with support staff to monitor the local integration process. Furthermore, Consultores Asociados del Este will administer financial support to the governmental body Dirección General para la Ayuda y Protección de los Refugiados (DIGEPARE), which coordinates national refugee programmes.

72. In Panama, the UNHCR programme is implemented by the Government through its Ministry of Government and Justice, which in turn has delegated responsibility to the National Office for Refugees (ONPAR). Operations in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras are covered by regional projects out of Costa Rica. In El Salvador, Fundación Salvadoreña de Apoyo Integral (FUSAI), which is partially funded by UNHCR, continues to assist returnees and in Honduras, Centro de Investigaciones para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos has been implementing UNHCR activities since the closure of the Liaison Office in Honduras in June 1996.

73. In Belize, the local NGO Help for Progress is the implementing partner for the QIPs programme, the government Refugee Department carries out status determination, and the Belize Council of Churches handles material assistance and economic integration activities including education, training, vocational skills development and income-generating projects to promote self-sufficiency. The Human Rights Commission of Belize is involved in human rights-related training of refugees and of community leaders, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) makes international travel arrangements for refugees repatriating from countries in the region.

### **(d) Budget**

74. Budgetary requirements for the above-mentioned countries in 1996 have been reduced as compared to 1995. Small reductions in all regional projects have been combined with a major reduction of the QIPs programme in Belize. This downward trend will continue through 1997.

### **(e) Post situation**

75. The reduction of staff continues in Central America with the closure of the Liaison Office in Honduras in June 1996 and the planned conversion of the Regional Office in Costa Rica into a Liaison Office by January 1997 and that of the Office of the Chargé de Mission in Belize into a

Liaison Office by June 1997. A National Public Information Officer post was created in Costa Rica.

**(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

76. As of January 1996, a Senior Regional Adviser for Refugee Women was assigned to the Regional Office in Costa Rica to advise on all activities related to refugee women and children in the Americas and the Caribbean. Emphasis is being given to ongoing projects in Guatemala and Mexico, where the majority of the caseload is located.

**(g) Oversight reports**

77. In view of the successful implementation of durable solutions in Central America, a plan based on a report by UNHCR's Inspection and Evaluation Service has been prepared for the streamlining of UNHCR's field presence in Central America.

78. Internal auditors undertook audits in El Salvador and in Belize. A response to the auditors' observations has been prepared and their recommendations are being implemented.

**6. Northern South America and the Caribbean**

79. This chapter covers UNHCR activities in Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Venezuela, Jamaica and other Caribbean countries.

**(a) Beneficiaries**

80. Countries in Northern South America and the Caribbean host a population of some 35,000 refugees and persons of concern to UNHCR, of whom about 4,800 benefit from UNHCR assistance. The largest single group are Haitians, mainly in the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas and Jamaica. Colombians are found in Ecuador and Venezuela, Peruvians mainly in Ecuador, and Cubans in Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador. For its part, Cuba hosts most of the African refugees in the region, who are principally Western Saharans and Sudanese.

**(b) Recent developments and objectives**

81. In Haiti, the return to constitutional rule allowed the repatriation of Haitian refugees and the recent closure of the UNHCR Liaison Office, which had been established to support that return programme. Elsewhere, the overall implementation of programmes has remained stable and has followed plans defined for the year. It is significant to note, however, that the increasing number of asylum-seekers coming from countries outside the region has created strains in the processing of claims and the provision of material assistance. In this connection, such basic services as interpretation and translation have been introduced in selected countries.

82. Several training events have been organized in the region, mostly during the second half of 1995. Among the most significant of these events was the Regional Protection Seminar with government representatives of member States of all the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries. Another key event will be a regional programme follow-up workshop with implementing partners from Spanish-speaking countries, concerning programme management, assistance criteria and more effective work methods.

83. In the field of international protection, the main objectives for 1997 are the following:

- (i) to ensure that protection principles are respected regardless of the country of origin of the asylum-seekers;

- (ii) to ensure that the notion of burden-sharing is properly understood and to promote durable solutions for each individual case or refugee group; and
- (iii) to continue to collaborate with Governments to reinforce their respective protection frameworks, including accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and the adoption of national legislation in harmony with international refugee law. UNHCR will also reinforce its contacts with CARICOM to encourage the adoption of regional approaches on refugee issues.

84. Regarding assistance, emphasis will continue to be placed on the rationalization of care and maintenance assistance and the promotion of activities leading to self-sufficiency. To this effect, educational assistance will increasingly focus on vocational training. In Cuba, the African caseload already engaged in higher education will continue to receive assistance from the Government and from UNHCR, to pursue their studies. Concerning repatriation, UNHCR will assist a small number of Haitians returning from the Dominican Republic to their country of origin.

85. In the sector of training and promotion of refugee law, training plans will address the multicultural reality of the region at governmental, non-governmental and public opinion levels. UNHCR is also updating its network of contacts with the media, NGOs, the academic community and the public in the 17 countries covered.

### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

86. UNHCR's main implementing partners in the region are the Conferencia Episcopal Venezolana (CEV) in Venezuela, the Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social (SNPS) in Colombia, the Comité Pro-Refugiados (CPR) of the Conferencia Episcopal Ecuatoriana in Ecuador, the Centro de Trabajo Social Dominicano (CTSD) in the Dominican Republic, Justice et Paix in Haiti and the Pater Ahlbrinck Stichting (PAS) in Suriname.

87. The UNHCR Regional Office in Venezuela also counts on the valuable political and logistical support of the UNDP Resident Representatives throughout the region, particularly those based in Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Colombia and Ecuador. In Suriname, the Regional Office is also supported by the Representative of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which is the United Nations System Representative in the country on behalf of the UNDP Resident Representative based in Trinidad and Tobago. In Cuba, the Ministry of Higher Education is in charge of the implementation of educational assistance, and a UNDP consultant is responsible for material assistance, liaison with the relevant authorities and the overall monitoring of UNHCR assistance activities.

### **(d) Budget**

88. An allocation was made from the 1996 Programme reserve for Cuba to meet basic assistance requirements for students (previously funded under DAFI) and to provide for limited subsistence allowances for an increased caseload of asylum-seekers. During 1997, it is expected that these additional requirements will be met through reallocations or savings incurred elsewhere in the region. The level and structure of budgets is therefore expected to be broadly the same in 1997 as in 1996, with some decreases foreseen, notably due to the closure of the Liaison Office in Haiti.

### **(e) Post situation**

89. Plans to streamline UNHCR's presence in the region will affect staffing levels only as of 1998.

**(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

90. The Senior Regional Adviser for Refugee Women will continue to advise on all activities related to refugee women and children in the sub-region, although priority will continue to be given to ongoing projects in Guatemala and Mexico, where the majority of the caseload is located.

**(g) Oversight reports**

91. An inspection mission visited South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela) and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic) in October and November 1995. The mission concluded that, in view of the favourable regional attitude towards refugees, UNHCR should build upon local capacities and assume primarily a supervisory role, which would facilitate a streamlining of its field presence. As a result of the mission, and within the framework of the Regional Strategy for the year 2000, a plan of action for the reduction of UNHCR's field presence in the Americas has been developed and is currently being finalized.

**7. Southern South America**

92. This chapter covers UNHCR activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

**(a) Beneficiaries**

93. At 1 January 1996, government estimates put the number of refugees in Southern South America at 15,900. Of this number, 2,300 were assisted by UNHCR. The refugees come from a wide range of countries, although most are from Africa (predominantly young single males from Angola, Liberia and Zaire). African asylum-seekers arrive mainly in Brazil, with which they share historical, cultural and economic links, and gradually move to neighbouring countries. Other asylum-seekers are from Eastern Europe as well as from Latin America (mostly Peru and Cuba). Asian refugees come mainly from the Middle East, although there is an old Indo-Chinese caseload that arrived in the 1980s through a resettlement programme. All asylum-seekers are of urban origin and usually settle in the urban centres of the region.

**(b) Recent developments and objectives**

94. The stabilization in the number of new arrivals from other continents during 1995, particularly in Brazil, and the end of the repatriation programme in Chile, has resulted in a drop in the assisted refugee population.

95. In Brazil, the trend in the arrival of asylum-seekers, as well as the assistance criteria for them, have undergone important changes during 1995 and the first quarter of 1996. The number of African asylum-seekers has decreased considerably, partly due to the improvement of the situation in Angola. At the same time, the monthly cash subsistence allowances for properly documented refugees were adjusted upwards in September 1995, but for a maximum of six months per person. The 1996 project reflects the developments in the caseload and the new assistance policy, as savings from the care and maintenance sector have been reallocated to activities leading to self-sufficiency. Achievements regarding local integration are encouraging and the Government continues to progressively assume a greater responsibility concerning refugee issues and the provision of assistance to refugees.

96. Peruvian and Cuban refugees continued to arrive in Chile, although in smaller numbers than in 1995. UNHCR cooperates with the Chilean Government in assistance and legal matters. Existing national training programmes and job placement facilities are made available to refugees.

97. Asylum-seekers from Peru continued to be reported in Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, although the outflow remains modest. UNHCR, in coordination with the Catholic Commission for Migration and IOM, assists family reunification with refugees abroad and the legalization of documentation on a case-by-case basis.

98. In the education sector, a Regional Workshop on Educational Assistance to Refugees was held in Buenos Aires in March 1995. Following the conclusions of the workshop, procedures have been streamlined to achieve a better coordination of educational policies in the countries where educational assistance is being provided to refugees.

99. After the application of the Cessation Clauses of the UNHCR Statute and the 1951 Convention to Chilean refugees in March 1994, the repatriation programme for Chilean refugees was successfully finalized in July 1995. The Liaison Office in Chile was closed on 31 December 1995. UNHCR continued to facilitate the repatriation of Chileans throughout 1995 and returnees were able to avail themselves of legal assistance until the end of that year.

100. The countries covered by the UNHCR Regional Office in Argentina are all parties to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. However, not all of them have incorporated these international instruments into their own national legislation, and most of the countries of the region are in process of developing or improving national legislation.

101. In Chile, the Migration Law, containing a chapter on refugees, is still awaiting the approval of the Senate for its final issuance. In Brazil, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, with the assistance of the UNHCR Office of the Chargé de Mission in Brazil, have prepared a final Refugee Law draft, which is under review by the Congress. Following endeavours by the UNHCR Regional Office in Argentina, the Governments of Uruguay and Paraguay are working on respective decrees for the implementation of the 1951 Convention. To ensure the coordinated regional application of protection principles, a regional seminar on Refugee Law in southern South America was held in Buenos Aires in August 1995 to discuss regional harmonization of legislation and procedures.

102. During 1997, special emphasis will continue to be placed on the phasing down of care and maintenance assistance in favour of activities leading to self-sufficiency. As a general policy and in line with UNHCR activities in recent years, 1997 objectives focus on a greater involvement of Governments in refugee matters, especially through the creation or strengthening of institutional networks on protection and assistance. Efforts will be made to ensure that refugees have access to the national education and social security systems.

103. In the field of education, following the conclusions of the Regional Workshop on Educational Assistance to Refugees and the increasing demand by refugees, assistance for post-secondary vocational education will be reviewed to increase the refugees' employment opportunities.

104. Concerning voluntary repatriation, two main refugee groups in southern South America may still wish to return to their countries of origin, namely the Indo-Chinese and the Angolans. Following the peace agreements in Angola, the repatriation of Angolans from Brazil is foreseen, and UNHCR maintains close contacts with both the Angolan and the Brazilian Governments. However, only a few cases have to date applied for voluntary repatriation. Regarding the Indo-Chinese, voluntary repatriation is being facilitated as a pilot project for a small group of Lao who were resettled in Argentina in 1979 and 1980. The conclusions drawn from this experience will serve as a basis for the implementation of other repatriation movements to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Further assessments will be made bearing in mind the fact that many

refugees have children born in Argentina who have the right to Argentine citizenship.

105. UNHCR will continue to cooperate closely with Governments in the process of issuing new, or improving existing, legislation. The countries which have yet to adopt adequate legislation are Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay. Refugee law will continue to be promoted through dissemination activities, among them three seminars on refugee law foreseen in Argentina and one in Chile, one seminar on Implementation at Domestic Level planned in Brazil, and one seminar on Refugee Law and Internally Displaced Persons to be held in Peru. At the regional level, and taking into account the current trends of economic and political integration, UNHCR is also actively promoting the coordination of refugee policies and the harmonization of procedures on a regional basis, following- up the conclusions of the 1995 Regional Seminar on Refugee Law in Southern South America.

### **(c) Implementing partners/arrangements**

106. UNHCR implements its assistance programmes throughout the region in collaboration with a network of NGO implementing partners, and in close cooperation with its governmental counterparts. The NGOs also collaborate in eligibility determination procedures by undertaking the first interviews of asylum-seekers. In countries where there is no UNHCR office, the implementing partner assumes responsibility for refugee-related issues under the supervision of the Regional Office, which undertakes regular missions. Several training activities are foreseen in 1997 to strengthen the implementation capacity of these agencies and to improve coordination and alignment with UNHCR objectives.

107. Counselling and assistance to refugees will continue to be provided through specialized agencies which possess extensive experience in migration and refugee-related issues such as the Catholic Commission for Migration (CCAM) in Argentina, the Specialized Centre for Migration Studies and Services (CESEM) in Bolivia, CARITAS in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, as well as the Centro Italo Brasileño Asistencia e Instrucciones de Migraciones (CIBAI) Porto Alegre in Brazil, the Catholic Institute for Migration (INCAMI) in Chile, the Catholic Commission for Migration (CCPM) in Peru, the Organization for the Protection and Assistance for Refugees (OPR) in Uruguay and the Church Committee for Emergency Assistance (CIPAE) in Paraguay. The Regional Office will continue to work with IOM with regard to voluntary repatriation throughout the region.

### **(d) Budget**

108. Budgets are proposed at slightly higher levels than in 1996 due to the strengthening of the local integration strategy in Argentina and Brazil.

### **(e) Post situation**

109. The plans to streamline UNHCR's presence in the region will affect staffing levels only as of 1998.

### **(f) Implementation of policy priorities (women, children, environment)**

110. A Plan of Action has been prepared by the Senior Regional Adviser on Refugee Women, based in Costa Rica, to effectively provide internal training and to encourage close follow-up on gender-approach in order to mainstream refugee women's needs into the Regional Office's daily tasks. Two specific activities are scheduled to take place during the last quarter of the year: a reintegration workshop for refugee women planning to repatriate to Brazil and a training session in Chile on gender approach issues.

**(g) Oversight reports**

111. See paragraph 91 above.

*Editor's Note: Annexes I and II are not reproduced here for technical reasons. They are available in hard copy through the UNHCR Library.*