

REFUGEES

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GOING HOME
Eritrea



**THE
BALKANS**
What
Next?



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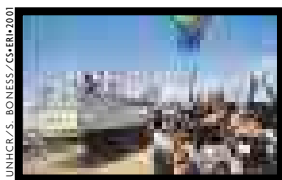
UNHCR/A. CHALASANI/CSPI/001

4 The Balkans are again at a crossroads, with the future direction very unclear. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has teetered on the edge of a major civil war since the beginning of the year. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have returned home from earlier 1990s conflicts in the region, but an estimated 1.3 million are still uprooted.



UNHCR/M. VACCA/CS/BIH/1994

12 Along with other U.N. protected enclaves, Gorazde became a symbol of the war in Bosnia. There have been some startling changes in the last few years.



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26 One of the world's oldest and largest refugee communities is finally going home—from Sudan to Eritrea.

Is the glass half full or half empty?

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE TROUBLING PARADOXES which so characterizes the Balkans. Even as ethnic Albanian and Macedonian leaders prepared to sign



a comprehensive peace settlement in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) recently, six months of clashes between the two sides continued near the capital, Skopje.

The ceremony, so symbolically full of hope, was still so fraught with tension, the timing and venue of the ceremony were kept secret until the last minute.

The situation in FYROM was the latest regional flashpoint, but even in countries where the guns have fallen silent the situation for refugees and other displaced persons remains full of contradiction.

As many as 1.8 million people have gone back to their countries and homes in the last few years. The expulsion and return in 1999 of virtually the entire ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo was one of the fastest reversals of fortune in refugee history. Encouragingly, the number of people in Bosnia-

Herzegovina going back to sensitive areas where they will be minorities accelerated in the last two years. Even Serbia, for so long regarded as an instigator of ethnic cleansing, for the first time welcomed back groups of minority ethnic Albanians who had fled during the turmoil.

Democratic governments have replaced authoritarian regimes in Croatia and Yugoslavia.

The extradition of Slobodan Milosevic to The Hague raised hope that other suspected war criminals may soon be apprehended.

But less encouraging news is never far away. An estimated 1.3 million people are still waiting to go home and it may be more difficult to successfully help them than in the past. An estimated 230,000 ethnic Serbs, Roma and other minorities who fled Kosovo in a 'second exodus' as the Albanians returned, are increasingly frustrated with their life in limbo. Yugoslavia continues to host 390,000 refugees from earlier conflicts.

Humanitarian and development dollars are in increasingly short supply, though there is a continuing need for the reconstruction of homes and infrastructure.

Corruption, ethnic hatred are widespread in some areas.

One day in Bosnia, a 16-year-old girl can be ruthlessly gunned down, jeopardizing months or years of patient ethnic bridge building. On another day and on a more promising note in Kosovo, a project is launched to rebuild 50 houses for Serb returnees.

In the Balkans, the question can continue to be debated: Is the glass half full or half empty?

| COVER

THE LONG



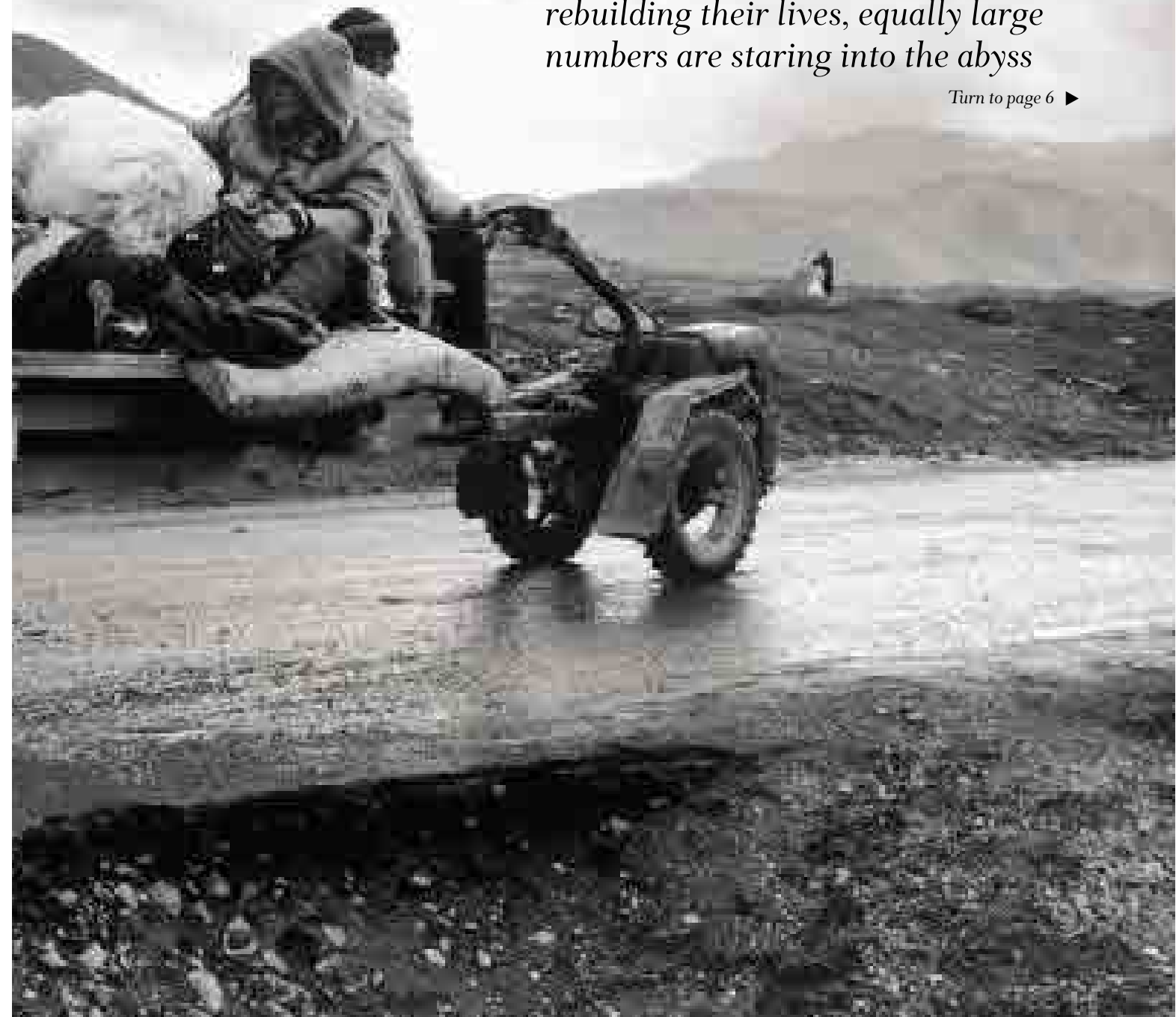
Balkan refugees
on the road.

STORY |

ROADHOME...

The Balkan region is a bewildering mosaic of hope and despair... While hundreds of thousands of civilians are rebuilding their lives, equally large numbers are staring into the abyss

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▶ THE **LONG ROAD** HOME...

by Ray Wilkinson

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO LOOK INTO the mirror and confront the devil," a humanitarian aid worker said in Belgrade recently. "This is a sobering and perplexing time for us."

She was trying to put into some kind of perspective the rapidly changing and often contradictory developments sweeping across Yugoslavia.

The extradition to The Hague to face

nearby River Danube, the 'newest' victims of the 1999 crisis in Kosovo. As many as 1,000 corpses have now been recovered from the river and surrounding lakes, far away from the battle fronts, sparking outrage, anger, denial and simple disbelief among Yugoslavs.

"Just what you see depends on who is looking into that mirror and how they interpret the image staring back," the aid official said shaking her head.

Which is true not only for Yugoslavia. The Balkan region is a bewildering mosaic of hope and despair, of progress and renewed crisis.

murder of a 16-year-old Muslim girl in a Serbian area of Bosnia can undermine years of patient bridge building between communities. Conversely, the determination of former Serb and Muslim enemies in a tiny village overlooking the once-infamous Bosnian town of Gorazde to live together again and share "even each individual piece of chocolate we receive" renews hope that the experiment can eventually work.

THE GOOD NEWS

At least 1.8 million civilians throughout the Balkan region have gone back since the wars began to wind down. The returns ranged from the spontaneous mass repatriation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians to Kosovo within a matter of weeks under the watchful eye of NATO tanks, to numerous individual decisions, of people determined to restart their lives even amidst neighbors they may still suspect of wartime atrocities.

Authoritarian regimes in Yugoslavia and Croatia were replaced by democratic governments. Among their first actions were pledges to resolve ongoing refugee crises.

Between 110,000-120,000 civilians have already returned home in Croatia, and Zagreb insisted other refugees who fled during the 1990s would be fully reintegrated by the end of 2002.

Belgrade relaxed its laws, making it easier for many of its 390,000 refugees to apply for citizenship and stay permanently. Encouraged by those developments, UNHCR High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said for the first time in a decade there was now a real possibility the refugee problem could be successfully resolved.

The international community signaled its pleasure with Belgrade's flexibility by approving a nearly \$1.3 billion aid package



Around 1.8 million people have gone back since the 1990s wars have ended, including these Muslim minority returnees to Republika Srpska in Bosnia busily rebuilding their homes.

war crimes trials of Slobodan Milosevic; the establishment of democratic government; the reopening to the outside world after years of isolation; the hopes for a better future for hundreds of thousands of

The world's greatest powers and military machine, NATO, may have established peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, but it is an uneasy and tenuous kind of stalemate. Long-term success—or

THE BALKAN REGION IS A BEWILDERING MOSAIC OF HOPE AND DESPAIR, OF PROGRESS AND RENEWED CRISIS WHERE GRANDIOSE GLOBAL STRATEGIES MAY ULTIMATELY DEPEND ON THOUSANDS OF TINY INDIVIDUAL GESTURES.

refugees and displaced persons was the kind of good news which would have been unthinkable only months earlier.

But also on that day, people in the capital were confronted with the first grisly discovery of truckloads of bodies in the

failure—ultimately could be governed by small, personal actions multiplied many times over as efforts to return and fully integrate millions of people uprooted by more than a decade of conflict continue.

Incidents like the recent coldblooded

to help rescue an economy devastated by years of war and isolation.

The extradition to The Hague to face war crimes of Yugoslavia's former leader, Slobodan Milosevic, opened the way for the further arrests of possibly thousands ▶

► of other wanted war criminals without which “a genuine breakthrough (toward reconciliation) is not possible,” according to Wolfgang Petritsch, the international community’s High Representative in Bosnia.

In the central Balkans, virtually all of

a million homes. Five billion dollars in aid poured into the country.

The capital, Sarajevo, has since recovered some of the panache and *joie de vivre* which helped it capture the 1984 Winter Olympic Games in happier days. The heavily sandbagged airport which became

less than six years, while still only a start, was nevertheless extremely encouraging.

THE BAD NEWS

Pessimists viewed Balkan events through a different prism.

Though the wars of the 1990s subsided

SINCE THE SHOOTING STOPPED, THE ENTIRE REGION HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN A HUGE CONTEST OF ‘MUSICAL HOUSES.’

the 880,000 Kosovars who fled or were forced out of that province in the spring of 1999, returned within months in one of the fastest and most dramatic reversals of fortune in refugee history. Today, Kosovo’s roads are clogged with traffic, the skyline of Pristina, the capital, is decked in a veritable forest of television satellite dishes, the landscape is alive with the hammering and banging of reconstruction and one of the largest American bases overseas with the unlikely name of Bondsteel sym-

bolizes the world’s security commitment to the region.

both a symbol of resistance and through which aid poured from the world’s longest humanitarian airlift to sustain the city through 3 1/2 years of war, has been rebuilt. The number of NATO troops in-country was sharply reduced to around 20,000.

More than 730,000 Bosnians returned home. Significantly, the number of people going back to their houses in areas where they will now be minorities in that deeply divided land—probably the most difficult and intractable problem in Bosnia—accel-

erated sharply in the last two years.

into uneasy standoffs, another state, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), teetered to the edge of full scale insurrection throughout the first half of 2001 as government forces and local guerrillas skirmished around the capital, Skopje in yet another ethnically-inspired conflict.

The fighting was modest compared with earlier clashes, but relations between minority ethnic Albanians and Slavs deteriorated, the government lurched from crisis to crisis and around 150,000 civilians were uprooted. The majority went to neighboring Kosovo where civilians who only two years before had sought safety in FYROM were now able to return the compliment of providing sanctuary in their own homes for the latest refugees (see page 11).

Humanitarian agencies drew up contingency plans for a far worse scenario in which hundreds of thousands of people could be displaced by generalized warfare, a development which would jeopardize not only FYROM, but also the security and stability of surrounding states.

Even before this latest crisis, there were still an estimated 1.3 million refugees and persons displaced within their own countries—so-called IDPs—scattered across the region. Refugee officials said it would be increasingly difficult to find solutions for these uprooted peoples compared with those who had already gone home.

Some problems inspired local solutions—Belgrade’s decision to make it easier for refugees to obtain citizenship, for instance. Others crisscrossed national boundaries in every direction, particularly the housing crisis which has become one of the worst legacies of the Balkan wars.

As communities fled during the upheavals, whole towns and villages were deliberately destroyed, creating widespread



New troubles in the Balkans: Fighting flared in 2001 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and more than 150,000 civilians fled.



© S. SALGADO/YUG-1995

future housing shortages. Homes left standing were distributed among the new 'majorities' as an effective way of reinforcing 'ethnic cleansing.'

Since the shooting stopped, the entire region has been involved in a huge contest of 'musical houses' rather than 'musical chairs' to try to right those wrongs. There has been some reconstruction and repair—125,000 dwellings in Bosnia have been rehabilitated out of nearly 500,000 damaged or destroyed. International administrators and governments revised, rewrote or tightened property laws, actions which have helped increase the number of people returning home. Demarcation lines were also redrawn in some areas (in parts of Sarajevo until recently, the line between Serb and Croat-Muslim sections cut right through several high-rise buildings, including individual apartments).

But hard-line local officials determined to enforce the status quo or individuals determined to stay or with nowhere else to go, have been adept at delaying or halting the return of minorities to their own properties. The problem has been compounded by people occupying two or more properties



UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/ASYUG2001

Virtually the entire ethnic Serb population fled Croatia in 1995. Some, like Slobodan Pupovac and his wife have now decided to settle permanently in Yugoslavia.

and, at the other extreme, of untold numbers of vacant homes deliberately hidden or withheld. Each individual act of going home can involve an exhausting and com-

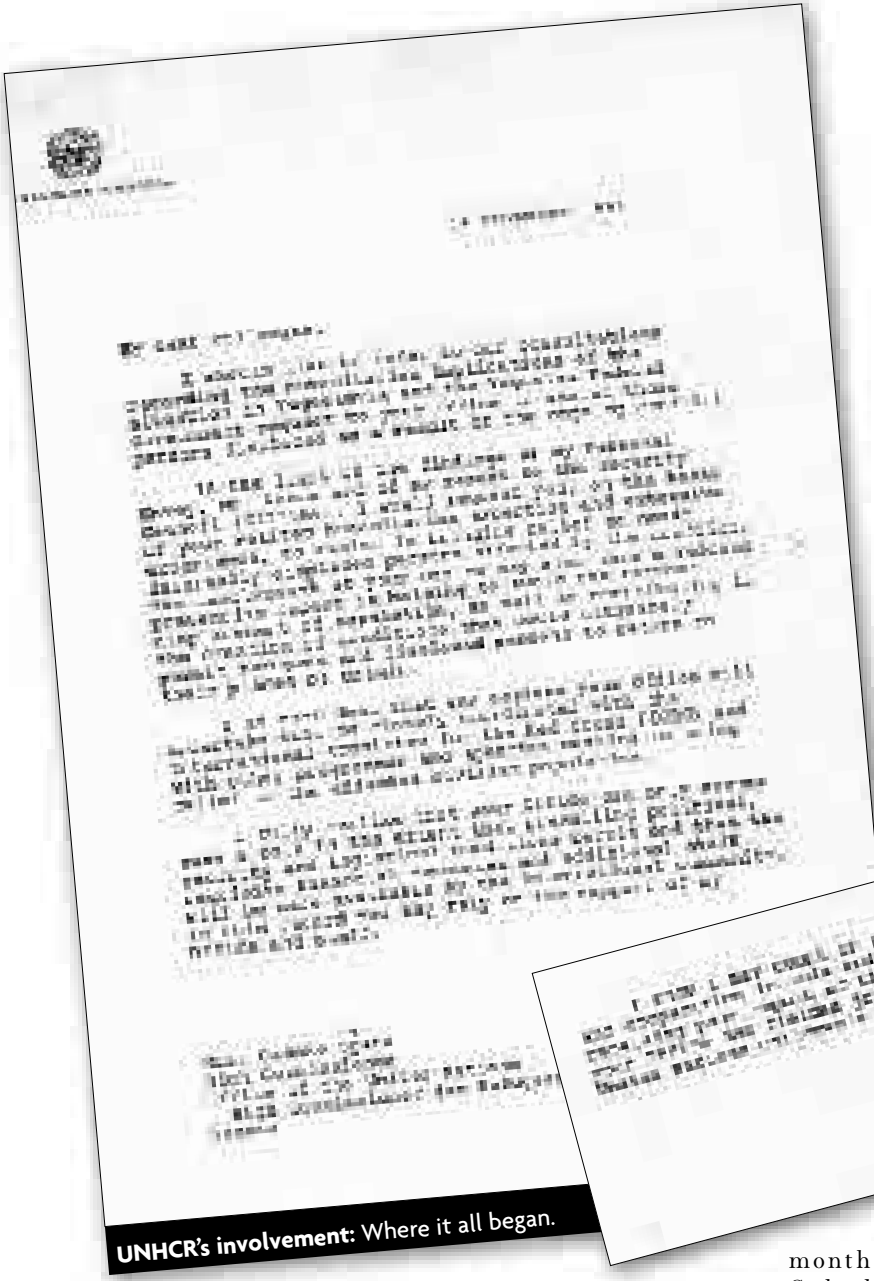
plicated game of administrative chess played between several groups of people of different ethnicities in different countries.

DAUNTING TASK

Belgrade's decision to promote 'local integration' for longtime refugees as well as repatriation wherever possible, is admirable. But at a time of diminishing humanitarian assistance and a region-wide battle for only a limited number of development dollars, the task of creating jobs for everyone in an economy where unemployment can reach 70 percent, of providing schooling, housing and expensive long-term care for many aging exiles, is daunting.

Ironically, in the short term the situation of most refugees, along with the civilian population as a whole, has gotten worse in this new era of liberalization, with aid often being reduced, prices rising and work still unavailable.

Croatia, despite its promises, continues to suffer a credibility problem among ethnic Serb refugees mulling the possibilities of going home. After visiting both Belgrade and Zagreb recently, High Com- ▶



ranking refugee official in Pristina judged that, "The era of shoot 'em, bomb 'em and burn 'em has ended. And there's light at the end of the tunnel which may not be an oncoming train."

But despite that assessment, security remains a problem. Eleven Kosovo Serbs were killed earlier in the year during an attack on a bus. Orthodox churches are ringed with barbed wire, armored personnel carriers and guarded by soldiers of the international force, KFOR, to prevent their destruction. Minority enclaves are similarly protected—whether a Serb village high in the hills or a group of ethnic Albanian apartment buildings in the Serb dominated section of Mitrovica town.

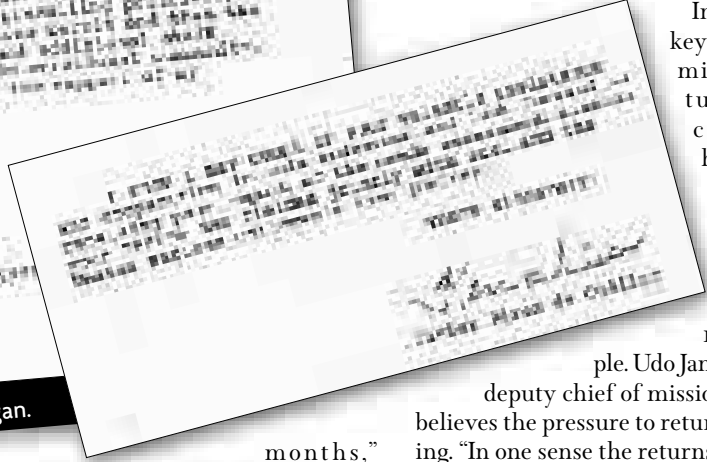
Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica vowed that "there is not a single door that I will not knock on" to solve the refugee and other problems, but he also warned a recent summit meeting: "The old Balkan story of violence and ethnic cleansing is not yet over."

In Bosnia, the key yardstick of minority returns is encouraging, having accelerated rapidly in the last 18 months to nearly 100,000 people. Udo Janz, UNHCR's

deputy chief of mission in Bosnia, believes the pressure to return is increasing. "In one sense the returns are unstoppable. People are fed up," he said. "They just want to go home. They have switched off from the incessant propaganda and are trying to re-establish themselves against all the odds."

But those odds remain formidable. The minorities represent around 13 percent of total returns in a region which once

Continued on page 15 ►



UNHCR's involvement: Where it all began.

► missioner Ruud Lubbers said there was a widespread perception among the refugees that there was "not the political will" in Croatia to welcome them back. "This is still part of the tragedy of the past," he said.

And while Kosovo's ethnic Albanian population recovers from its own 1999 exodus, the 230,000 ethnic Serbs, Roma and other minorities who fled or were forced out when the Albanians returned, now live in collective centers, camps and private homes on the fringes of the province, increasingly frustrated by their life in limbo.

A few have ventured back, but there appears little hope that large numbers will go home anytime soon. "The Albanians went home in two

months," one angry Serb told a visitor recently. "We have been here two years. Why are there good rules for the Albanians and bad rules for the Serbs?"

Things have improved in Kosovo compared with the inflammatory aftermath of the return of the Albanians when minorities were openly threatened, beaten, thrown out and often killed. One high

THE U.N. REFUGEE AGENCY FACES A DIFFICULT PROBLEM IN BOTH PROMOTING RETURN FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO HOME, BUT AT THE SAME TIME HELPING LOCAL INTEGRATION FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO STAY.

“THE OLD BALKAN STORY OF VIOLENCE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IS NOT YET OVER.”

proudly boasted of its mixed population. The country remains deeply divided between Republika Srpska and the Croat-Bosniak Federation. Hard-line nationalists still dream of their own entity or federation with Croatia. Civilians who do go back to sensitive areas face harassment, including killings, beatings or more subtle pressures including excessive taxes, lack of job opportunities or restricted education facilities for their children. And with bitter irony, at the very time when minority returns have increased, the funding needed to sustain the movement has become more difficult to find.

HOPES AND FEARS

A recent journey through the region and visits with individual refugees highlighted all of these contradictions—the hopes of return and the fear of permanent exile, the passions and continuing animosities, the resilience of refugees and a wonderful generosity of spirit from people least able to materially afford kindness.

The rump Yugoslav state and Croatia are both at a crossroads. Each has installed democratic governments, restored their ties with the international community and promised to quickly tackle the refugee crisis. Expectations were raised, but in the

short term at least many things have only gotten worse.

In Serbia, industries crippled by the war and a worldwide embargo remain gutted. Unemployment is as high as 70 percent in some areas. Many of the estimated 390,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have seen their assistance progressively reduced. UNHCR slashed its own budget from an originally estimated \$65 million in 2000 to \$27 million in 2002.

Slobodan Pupovac and his wife Danka, were among the 60 percent of refugees recently canvassed who opted to accept the government’s offer to integrate locally rather than return to Croatia which they fled in 1995. This issue presents the U.N. refugee agency with a difficult balancing act to follow—promoting return for those who want to go home, but at the same time helping local integration for those who wish to stay.

Pupovac, a powerfully built man and an ethnic Serb, salvaged a truck and tractor as he abandoned his Croatian home and trudged 700 kilometers in 12 days, meandering across Serbia until his family finally settled near Belgrade. He bought a plot of land and began to build a house, selling off his truck, part by part, to finance the future.

In 1997 Pupovac was hit by another truck. His spine was shattered and he has been wheel chair bound ever since. With three small children, an ill father-in-law and an invalid husband to care for, Danka does not have time for other work. They raise a few animals, but rely mainly on the goodwill of neighbors and aid agencies to survive.



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSY1002001

Housing is one of the biggest problems for uprooted peoples. The dividing line between Serb and Croat-Muslim sides of Sarajevo literally ran through this apartment block until it was recently readjusted.



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSY1002001

There are 600 collective centers like this one for uprooted people in Yugoslavia.

The family elected to stay in Serbia and he recently received his citizenship. Would he ever go back to Croatia? “No,” he replied instantly. “Everything there was destroyed. My houses were burned down. What is there to go back for?” But later in the conversation he admits, “Perhaps if everyone else went back, we would think about it.” This ambivalence surfaced repeatedly in talks across the region: ‘No’, but then ‘maybe’ if things improved in Croatia.

There was ambivalence, denial and hostility among Serb refugees about the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic and the Kosovo atrocities which continue to sur-

Continued on page 18 ▶



TWO SUCCESS STORIES

◀ Belgrade recently welcomed back ethnic Albanian citizens like Hussein Abdiqeviq in a major policy switch.

Trajko and Divna Arsiare are among very few ethnic Serbs who have thus far gone back to Kosovo. ▶

UNHCR/P. CHALASANI/CSYUIG/2001

▶ face. “We all expected something to happen after Milosevic left,” said Pupovac. “Well, something has happened. Electricity prices shot up and the children’s allowances have been slashed.” Another refugee in southern Serbia said angrily: “Was Milosevic the only one to commit crimes? What about the Albanians, the Croats, the Muslims? They were all guilty.

He should not have been extradited.” His neighbors nodded in agreement.

Dusan Karapandze, his wife and three children did return to Croatia last year, only to find their home in the village of Majske Poljane occupied by a Bosnian Croat settler. The Karapandzes moved into a small shed on the property and submitted an application for repossession of their

house. “We are still waiting for a decision,” he said recently.

Even more galling, the temporary occupant was away, reputedly working in Germany, and when Dusan was found in the house he was charged with illegal entry into his own property.

Similar absurdities abound. One Serb returnee in northern Croatia was denied

Seeking the truth... *As civilians try to return*

T IHOMIR STANIMOROVIC WAS PASSIONATE and adamant: “The international community escorted the Albanians back to their homes in Kosovo in two months. We have been here for two years.”

It seemed, according to this Serb, almost like a mission impossible. “People can go to the moon easily these days,” he added, “but in the Balkans we can’t even go the few miles back to our homes.”

Stanimorovic, his wife and two children, along with an estimated 230,000 Serbs, Roma and others left Kosovo—he said he was deliberately expelled by NATO forces—as allied troops and ethnic Albanians flooded back into the province in a dramatic swing in the fortunes for the area’s civilians at the end of 1999.

For one week, ‘terrorists’ blindfolded him and beat him up, he said, before he was released and eventually made his way to a motel on the edge of the southern Serbian town of Bujanovac which was converted into a collective center for around 130 people. They have been there ever since.

A few tractors and cars which they managed to salvage are parked nearby. Each family was allocated a room or a very tiny miniature alpine cabin in the grounds. There is running water

and electricity and compared with conditions endured by other uprooted peoples in the region and other parts of the world, things are not too bad.

But there is a festering resentment, growing frustration and a continued sense of ‘victimhood’ at the Motel Bujanovac. While the guns have become silent and political change has swept much of the area, displaced Serbs are apparently being left behind.

“There should not be one rule for the Albanians and Bosniaks and another rule for the Serbs,” said Stanimorovic, a natural spokesman for the motel people. A young girl in the audience which has gathered around a visitor wears a T-shirt: “Nobody sings like Serbians do and we party better too.”

But there is no party mood here. “It is all NATO’s fault,” he insisted in the kind of statement repeated by displaced Serbs across the region. “If they didn’t come we would be continuing to live together peacefully. We did not do anything wrong. It is always the ‘little man’ who suffers.”

While the guns have become silent, displaced Serbs fear they are being left behind.

ELUSIVE TRUTH

Stanimorovic’s village of Novo Selo is less than one hour’s



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSYUG02001

possession of his home because another temporary occupant used it for his dog.

COLLECTIVE CENTERS

There are 600 collective centers in Yugoslavia—converted factories, hotels, sports centers, office blocks—sheltering 40,000 persons, often the very old and infirm, with nowhere else to go. Conditions vary

widely, from overcrowded temporary dormitories with almost no amenities, to simple but clean family accommodation. Moods also vary in these centers, from apathy to anger.

Juplja Stena (Hollow Rock) near Belgrade is a former children’s summer resort set among wooded hills. Some Bosnians have been there for a decade.

“Three members of my family have died here, including my husband,” one elderly woman said, adding with a touch of awe “but my grandchildren were also born here.”

“When we left Mostar (in Bosnia) in 1992 I had a loaf of warm bread in my hand,” she said. “Nothing more. When we first got here we thought, ‘we will go home

home, the truth of what actually happened in the war remains elusive...

drive from the motel. It had been a mixed village before the conflict, but he claimed that all the Serb houses had been burned down as they left by ethnic Albanians “and all of our wells were poisoned in the presence of American troops.”

After talking to the exiled Serbs, a visitor toured Novo Selo. Serb homes remain wrecked, rusting television sets, cookers and a burned sofa scattered among the ruins. A flock of geese waddled slowly by.

Soldiers from KFOR have established a nearby firing range and the boom of cannon echo down the pretty valley and hillsides.

Truth, however, remains elusive and ever changing.

“He is welcome back,” shrugged one Albanian subsistence farmer who lives only a few hundred yards from the Serb’s home. “Why not?”

It is the sort of easy answer that visitors receive all the time, making it difficult to gauge the true feelings of civilians and the overall mood of any region in the Balkans.

As the conversation continues, the emphasis changes. “The Serbs burned down our mosque before they left,” the ethnic Albanian farmer said. “This guy helped them. He was a leader. His son also fought for the Serbs here and in Bosnia.”

The farmer and members of his family warm to the theme. The Serbs, they said, had actually burned down their own homes



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSYUG02001

Kosovar ethnic Serb families wait to go home in a collective center. But their old village has been destroyed.

as they left, to be able to later blame the Albanians.

A half an hour later, Stanimorovic would not be particularly welcome to return home: “If he does come, it will then be up to the police.” But the Albanian family added, “If he goes to jail, his wife could still live here peacefully.”

Patching up relations between neighbors in villages like Novo Selo remains key to any long lasting stability, but emotions remain raw and volatile in the Balkans. ■

► soon. Now there is no hope, especially for us old people. There is not one day that I do not cry," she said, beginning to sob. "There is no joy for me, no future."

The longer people stay in such centers, where they do receive minimum assistance, not only apathy but also dependency takes a firm grip. Many longtime refugees simply no longer have the willpower to make decisions. Some refugees, for instance, hesitate about taking citizenship because it would mean leaving a collective center and fending for themselves.

The residents at the Pension Belgrade and other collective centers in southern Serbia were displaced persons from Kosovo. They have been exiles for far less time than the Bosnian refugees and are full of bewilderment and anger.

"Hundreds of officials and journalists have come here. They have taken our stories, photographed our faces, but nothing happens," one woman at the Pension Belgrade said before turning on her heel and leaving. At a converted sports center in the town of Vranje which houses around 120 people, a visitor was met with hostility. "What has happened to the 1,300 Serbs who were kidnapped in Kosovo?" one person asks. "No one has found their bodies." "Why should we participate in the elections?" another wonders about forthcoming balloting in Kosovo in November. "They are not for us. They are for the Albanians." A little later the visitor is turned brusquely away at the door.

A SUCCESS STORY

When Albanian refugees began flooding back into Kosovo in late 1999, ethnic Serbs, fearing revenge, headed out of the province. Thousands of other ethnic Albanians living in Serbia proper, who had not been directly involved in that crisis, nevertheless became caught in the crossfire of refugee flows and mounting local unrest and they crossed into Kosovo. It was a local mini drama played out against the backdrop of the main event, part of the mad mosaic of movement at the time.

Now, they have begun to head home to Serbia—the first time the Belgrade government, normally vilified for its ethnic policies, openly welcomed the return of a large minority. "Conflict was avoided here when it would have been so easy to slide into total chaos resulting in tens of thousands more people leaving home," said



UNHCR field officer Bill Tall as he watched the first 99 returnees clamber from two buses and head for their isolated farmhouses in the surrounding hills. It was also, of course, a calculated political gesture. By encouraging its own minorities to return, Belgrade was in a better position

doubtedly 'in', Serbs and other minorities undoubtedly 'out'. A United Nations civil administration, UNMIK, backed by KFOR troops, guides the shaky province towards an uncertain future. "In Kosovo we don't have a minority problem," a senior humanitarian official said. "We have a ma-

THE LONGER PEOPLE STAY IN COLLECTIVE CENTERS,
NOT ONLY APATHY BUT ALSO
DEPENDENCY TAKES A FIRM GRIP.

to demand the return of ethnic Serbs to Kosovo.

But even with government encouragement and police protection, these returnees face a difficult future. Their homes have been gutted. "When I left this place, the last thing I did was let the cattle loose," said Hussein Abdijevisq as he looked at the shell of his home and across the beautiful valley down which his animals had disappeared. Doors and windows were ripped away. Exercise books and mattresses littered the floors. One wall was daubed with both Serb and Albanian military slogans. A child's broken bicycle lay in the courtyard.

Hussein was given a few emergency items, a stove, blankets and a few rations on his way home and he prepared to camp out. "I must clean this up before my wife arrives," he grinned through broken teeth. "I'm very happy and sad at the same time. What can I say? I'm home." Similar scenes were repeated in neighboring valleys. (But even success stories can be fragile. Shortly after this visit, unknown gunmen shot dead two local policemen and wounded two others, threatening to undermine the returns and stability of the whole region.)

MAJORITY PROBLEM

In Kosovo, ethnic Albanians who were themselves refugees two years ago, are un-

derstandably "in", referring to the Albanian attitude towards the Serbs.

Within that sweeping and simplistic statement are thousands of individual stories—of Serbs who stayed amidst a sea of hostility; of the few who have since returned; of groups of Albanians in the opposite predicament, trying to survive in Serb majority enclaves and of the sudden arrival of more than 80,000 refugees from FYROM (see page 11).

Slivovo, an area of eight villages, has the picture-postcard beauty of Switzerland. When four brothers were hanged from a tree in 1999 by Albanian vigilantes, most Serb residents fled. Miro Pavic decided to stay among his vegetables, wheat, corn, fruit trees and cattle.

Swedish troops have built a command post down the hill from Pavic's farm and man watch towers atop nearby hills. UNHCR has organized a local bus to transport the few Serbs in the area through Albanian territory to the 'outside world.'

It is a precarious situation, but Slivovo is considered one of around a dozen areas in Kosovo safe enough to encourage minority return. Miro Pavic keeps a register of all the Serb families who fled and is the main cheerleader for their return. "Fifteen families have come home," he said, but though this trickle back is encouraging,

Continued on page 24 ▶

MUSLIM SURVIVORS OF SREBRENICA

It was the worst atrocity in Europe since the end of World War II. After Serb forces overran the Muslim enclave of Srebrenica in 1995, they systematically killed more than 7,000 Bosnian men and boys, but generally sparing the females. In early July 2001, thousands of Muslims under U.S. armed guard returned to weep and unveil the foundation stone of a memorial for the victims. Several weeks later, Serb General Radislav Krstic was sentenced to 46 years in prison for genocide for his part in the massacre. Though the guns have been silent for many years now, the town remains overwhelmingly Serb, a continuing legacy of the war.



© S. SALGADO/BRH995



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSWUG2001

Minorities still need protection in Kosovo, whether Albanian, Serb or Roma. British troops and a UNHCR field officer check with a Serb farmer about security conditions.

► refugee officials acknowledge it is unlikely that the great majority of the 230,000 Serbs and other minorities who left will return anytime soon.

The British government has provided 15 greenhouses both to encourage further return and sustain the Serb community, but this guarded enclave has become “a gilded cage,” Pavic said. “We are still prisoners among our vegetables. Security has improved in the last year, but the presence of Swedish troops was still absolutely essential,” he said. “I couldn’t think of life without them.”

FLASHPOINT

Neither could Slobodanka Nojic, a

priest’s wife in the orthodox cathedral in Mitrovica. Kosovo’s second largest town is the effective frontline in the struggle between the province’s Albanians who dominate the southern suburbs, and ethnic Serbs who control northern areas. Passions and hatreds are raw and often on public display in Mitrovica and even when it is quiet, one aid official worries “I’m so afraid something will happen. This is too quiet. It’s eerie.”

The cathedral is in the south of the city, among the Albanians. Greek troops ringed it with barbed wire, sandbags and armored personnel carriers. The church is officially open, but only a dozen people attend services. Priests are accompanied by troops

when they leave the compound. Slobodanka Nojic never leaves. “I am too afraid,” she said. “And if we tried to leave alone, we would be kidnapped or killed. To be sure, we would never return to this house.”

Halit and Zadi Maxhuni have led a similar life in reverse. Ethnic Albanians, they live in the Serb-dominated north. He is almost blind. During the worst of the troubles they spent an entire year in their darkened apartment, the windows covered with blankets, one small radio as their only contact with the outside world, and two friendly Serb women neighbors buying them occasional groceries.

When Halit Maxhuni finally ventured out recently for a haircut, Serbs in the

DURING THE WORST OF THE TROUBLES THEY SPENT AN ENTIRE YEAR IN THEIR DARKENED APARTMENT, THE WINDOWS COVERED WITH BLANKETS, ONE SMALL RADIO THEIR ONLY CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

neighborhood silently lined their balconies to watch. When his wife left the apartment for the first time she was overwhelmed: "At first I had a feeling that everything was spinning out of control. And then I saw the sky and sun. It was beautiful."

TUROVI REVISITED

In 1998, this visitor wrote about Turovi village in Bosnia (REFUGEES n° 114): "For nearly two years, UNHCR has been involved in tortuous negotiations with the Serb mayor to promote minority returns to Turovi. In exchange for building 20 Muslim houses, UNHCR offered to rehabilitate 20 Serb houses, a school and a sawmill. But the goal posts kept being moved, first over which houses should

be rebuilt first, then over numbers involved. Turovi is a deserted shell today" under several feet of snow and garbage.

It is one sign of progress in Bosnia that on a return visit, that long impasse had

been broken. Sixty homes have been rebuilt. Red tiled roofs glint in the sunshine and window boxes are ablaze with flowers though life is still tough. Muslim villagers are mainly elderly, there are still few farm animals and most people are in similar circumstances to Mustafa and Sevdal Dedovic who survive on the equivalent of \$50 per month pension.

As this couple chatted about their wartime experiences and their joy in finally returning home, his brother, wife and two sons who had lived in the same village but eventually fled to Sweden, arrived for a surprise visit. "Today life is sweet," Mustafa said even though the lottery of war had been much sweeter to his brother.

Zuko Rasim, another Muslim, moved back to neighboring Trnovo town which became Serb-dominated during the war. He has not been so lucky. When he reopened a bakery there were many Serb customers initially, but hard-line municipality officials intervened, scaring customers away and charging him excessive local taxes. Even children from across the road began avoiding the shop with the sweet smells. "I guess they are just trying to run me out of town," Zuko said.

THE CUTTING EDGE

The views across the Drina Valley are among the most spectacular in Europe. It is an area slashed by deep gorges, forests, and on the higher alpine slopes by fields of yellow, violet, white and pink wild-

flowers. The region around Visegrad was a particularly savage battle zone before Serb forces drove out the Muslims early in the war.

Now it is the scene of an experimental return. High up on a mountain slope, a tiny 1950s red Renault car chugs along an overgrown path. Only a few yards away, totally hidden by foliage, lies the destroyed village of Dubocica. Cato Feridjz picks his way down the slope, past crumbling walls and a few weathered picket fences.

He has difficulty in finding his old house, but there, finally, is a fake silver tray among the suddenly revealed ruins. "My mother was shot here. Killed," he said. "She was 80. They burned the house."

He points to a fruit tree. "Slivovitz," a local plum brandy, he says proudly. He picks a wild flower and crushes it into ash before proclaiming, "Tea." The only functioning thing on the mountainside is a pipe carrying fresh water into a trough. Cato strips off and plunges into the icy pool. "My water," he says proudly.

He and the other men who have walked to this village have been given a few blankets and some food, but they are determined to stay amid the ruins and rebuild.

This is the very cutting edge, the front-line of return in the Balkans. Conditions don't get any tougher. If these villagers can survive the rigors of the mountain with almost nothing, overcome the hostility of nearby Serbs and successfully rebuild their homes and lives then perhaps, just perhaps, there is hope for the entire region. ■



Muslims arrive back at the site of their mountain homes high above the Drina Valley.

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CSA/HR-001

A brief history of the Balkans

1878

After years of conflict, the world's Great Powers redraw the map of the Balkans at the Congress of Berlin. Three new countries, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania are established, but the wishes of local populations are largely ignored.

1912-13

Two Balkan wars are fought to try to end several centuries of Ottoman rule. All the regional powers, Romanians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and Albanians are involved.

June 28, 1914

A Serb assassin kills Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, precipitating World War I.

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 partisans liberate Belgrade from the Nazis and establish a communist regime in Yugoslavia.

June 25, 1991

Croatia and Slovenia proclaim independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Serb forces overrun 30 percent of Croatian territory.

October 8, 1991

Yugoslavia asks for UNHCR's assistance. The U.N. Secretary-General then designates the organization as the lead humanitarian agency in the crisis.

March 3, 1992

Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaims independence. Serb forces seize 70 percent of the country's territory and lay siege to Sarajevo.

July 3, 1992

UNHCR begins a 3^{1/2} year airlift into Sarajevo which will become the longest-running humanitarian airbridge in history. At the height

of the conflict agencies are helping as many as 3.5 million people throughout the former Yugoslavia while an estimated 700,000 Bosnians flee.

July 11, 1995

Srebrenica, one of several regions in Bosnia designated by the U.N. as 'safe areas' falls to Serb forces. Around 7,000 men and boys are slaughtered in the worst single atrocity in Europe since World War II. Other safe areas such as Gorazde survive.

August 12, 1995

Croatia launches Operation Storm and retakes the Krajina area from rebel Serbs, 170,000 of whom flee. Many remain refugees.

November 21, 1995

The Dayton Peace Accord is signed to end hostilities in Bosnia and pave the way for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. Hundreds of thousands of persons have still not gone back. The NATO-led Implementation Force deploys to the region.

March 1998

Fighting erupts in Serbia's southern Kosovo province between the majority ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Within months 350,000 people have been displaced or fled abroad.

March 24, 1999

After the failure of peace talks in Rambouillet, France, and repeated warnings, NATO launches a 78-day airwar. Within three days, ethnic Albanians begin to flee or are forced out of the region by Serb forces. Eventually nearly 444,600 civilians fled to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro. More than 90,000 people are subsequently airlifted to 29 countries for temporary safety to ease regional political pressures.

June 12, 1999

NATO and Russian forces enter Kosovo after Yugoslavia accepts a peace plan requiring withdrawal of all forces from Kosovo. The next

day UNHCR and other agencies return. Refugees flood back and in one of the fastest returns in history, 600,000 people go home within three weeks. In a reverse exodus, an estimated 230,000

the solution of the refugee problem in the region and return of displaced persons to Kosovo will be one of the country's top priorities.



As generalized war broke out in the 1990s, ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina established prisoner of war camps such as this one near Banja Luka.

Serbs and minority Roma, fearing revenge attacks, seek safety in Serbia and Montenegro. A U.N. Civil Administration is put into place and the task of rebuilding the province begins.

December 11, 1999

Political change begins to sweep the region. Croatian strongman Franjo Tudjman dies in Zagreb, paving the way for democratic government in that country.

October 6, 2000

Slobodan Milosevic concedes defeat in presidential elections after protestors set the Yugoslav parliamentary building on fire. He is placed under house arrest and on June 28, 2001, he is handed over to the International Tribunal in The Hague to face war crimes. Economic sanctions are ended, diplomatic relations restored. A new government in Belgrade says

February 2001

Conflict breaks out in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). As international mediators and the government struggle to hold the country together, more than 150,000 people flee, principally to neighboring Kosovo.

July 2001

Despite massive aid during the last few years, resumption of regional and international diplomatic relations, the establishment of democratic governments, the Balkans remain in turmoil. Many war criminals remain free, more than one million civilians have still not returned to their homes and the region remained braced for another possible major conflagration.

August 13, 2001

Under the watchful eye of western powers and NATO, FYROM's two sides sign a peace agreement. ■

Returning the favor

A Kosovo family gets an unusual chance to repay a kindness



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/05/08/2001

Members of the Macedonian and Kosovar families together.

WHEN SERB FORCES INVADED the village of Zhegra on March 29, 1999, they immediately gunned down a neighbor of Mitant Zimani. Fourteen other civilians were killed before she, her husband and her children could escape to the nearby hills and begin a 30-hour trek from Kosovo to neighboring former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and safety.

Across the border, the family of Rexhep Murseli and her nine children were waiting. “We had to help. We are ethnic Albanians and these people needed us,” she said recently. They took the entire family of Mitant Zimani under their wing. “We cooked together and slept on the floor with each other,” she added. “But it was no problem. There really wasn’t anything else to do.”

Nearly one million people fled or were evicted from Kosovo in 1999 and the bulk of them stayed with so-called ‘host families’ in neighboring Albania and FYROM who threw open their homes to the refugees in return for small grants of international assistance.

Humanitarian organizations such as

UNHCR acknowledge that the willingness of private families to help was key in sheltering so many people in such a short span of time.

The Kosovars stayed with their hosts for three months, but as the fortunes of war swung wildly, they returned to their village in the wake of NATO troops and began rebuilding their home and their lives.

REPAYING KINDNESS

War often allows people to show great kindness to others in distress, but rarely does it allow that kindness to be returned in such spectacular and symmetrical fashion as in the case of these Macedonian and Kosovar families.

When trouble flared recently in FYROM, it was now time for the Murseli family to abandon their home and flee to the relative safety of Kosovo. Some members took the same mountainous route that Mi-

tant Zimani had taken two years earlier. Others left legally.

The two families had kept in sporadic contact by telephone but had never again visited. However, the Macedonian family slowly made their way to Zhegra village.

“We didn’t know they were coming until there was a knock on the door and there they were,” Mitant Zimani said. “Of course they were welcome.”

Life is not easy. A total of 25 grown ups and children crowd to-

gether in four small rooms. Again, like earlier times there is communal cooking, eating and sleeping. The visiting children have already enrolled in local school, but the family will return once things calm down across the frontier.

They agree they will now visit each other regularly, hopefully for a vacation and not as the result of another round of fighting. ■

Rarely does war allow kindness to be returned in such spectacular and symmetrical fashion.

Welcome

In 1994, Gorazde

10/1/94

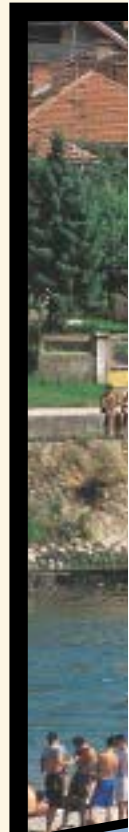
PA. After the 421st Airborne's 60,000th deployment...

...military engineers...
...the last two days here...
...I want to give a picture of the daily lives of the...
...residents and refugees are...
...waiting for the next...
...one such victims in each building is a...
...family.

The wounded...
...the price of the...
...there is no...
...batter down the walls...
...people were...
...institutions...
...the loss...
...about yesterday...
...from the hospital...
...killed than...
...The dead are...
...Level 2...
...diseases.

...one...
...with...
...own...
...the...
...children...
...on...
...they...
...for...
...of...
...women's...
...a...
...workers...
...residents...
...bosnia...
...corpses...
...high...
...and...
...with...

IN: 850



UNHCR/V

order and 3 others to death on the same night.
residents Clinton and yelsie want to hold talks
bosnia next month. there will be little left in
corpses and rubble.

back to the “living hell”

became known as a “city where only the dead are lucky.” Today is different

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS/10/02/2001



Today, civilians swim in the Drina River in downtown Gorazde.

ON A HOT SUMMER'S DAY hundreds of people laze on a spit of pebble and sand in the middle of the Drina River, the forested hills which once rained death and destruction on the town towering above. A rickety footbridge erected underneath the main road bridge across the river to allow pedestrians to shelter from snipers still swings lazily but now empty in the breeze. Sidewalk cafés have sprouted around the downtown building where desperate cables from trapped humanitarian workers daily recorded the destruction of this town.

Gorazde almost died from the onslaught of Serbian forces during the war in Bosnia. The U.N. had declared the region a protected enclave, but the besieging forces contemptuously ignored the international community and came within a hair of overrunning it before peace finally prevailed.

Today, the town, set among stunning gorges, rolling hills and forests, is still picking up the pieces. Unlike another infamous en-

clave, Srebrenica to the north, Gorazde was never overrun and its Muslim, or Bosniak, majority never left.

PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

The town represents a mirror of both the progress and problems encountered across Bosnia since the Dayton Peace Accord was signed nearly six years ago.

The guns are silent and people again enjoy the small pleasures of life such as swimming in the river or sipping coffee in a café. Buildings have been patched up and there are even two traffic lights working. Some of the land which yielded rich harvests of plums, apples and pears is being cultivated for the first time in five or six years.

There are few security incidents and families have been steadily trickling back to the region.

But there are major problems, too, in Gorazde. Factories which made spare parts, ammunition and chemicals before the war are



M. VACCA/CS/8/11/1998



Ethnic Albanian and Serb families learning to live together again.

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CORBIS-OUTLINE

greetings from a city where only the dead are lucky. The last two days here are a living hell. I am sure you have all the casualty figures and do not want instead to give a picture of the daily

shuttered. Unemployment is as high as 80 percent and virtually the only work available is with international organizations. On the outskirts of town, private homes lie gutted and abandoned.

Prewar Gorazde had been multiethnic, but the town today is principally Moslem. Serb leaders initially attempted to keep the status quo of divided communities and to block ethnic Serbs returning to downtown Bosniak areas.

THE LAST BUS

But that has begun to change as all sides have become increasingly impatient for further progress and have realized that under toughened property laws there may not be much more time to either reclaim, sell or barter prewar properties.

“The more they wait the more they lose,” one UNHCR official said of the increased impetus to return. “More and more people have decided to catch the last bus.”

The village of Bukve Miljanovici perches high in the hills. Gorazde snuggles far below in a natural bowl. The old frontlines are only a few yards away and from here it was child’s play to accurately lob shells into the town.

“Welcome to the first multiethnic tent settlement in Bosnia,” Muhamed Bukva expansively welcomes a recent visitor to the village. As reconstruction continues across the country, many returnees are living in UNHCR-supplied tents next to

their destroyed homes and the term ‘tent settlement’ has become synonymous with progress.

Before the war this was a mixed village and though the entire population fled during the fighting, eight Serb families, seven Bosniak families and two Albanian families have returned.

Muhamed Bukva’s father was gunned down by automatic weapons fire 100 yards away from his rebuilt house but he insists: “This was not the doing of my neighbors and we can succeed in rebuilding both our friendship and our village.”

He added, “Even if we receive one piece of chocolate, we share it.” Serb neighbors nodded in agreement.

Against the backdrop of ongoing suffering throughout the Balkans, Bukve Miljanovici could easily be overlooked, but such neighbor-to-neighbor attempts to overcome the legacy of a bitter war carry perhaps the only realistic hope for genuine reconciliation. ■

“The more they wait the more they lose. More and more people have decided to catch the last bus.”

The wheel that never squeaks...

Reintegrating minorities is slow work and has met with only limited success so far

WHEN NATO TROOPS CAME INTO KOSOVO, I thought the nightmare was over," Ragip Kovaqi said with a slow shake of his head. "But things move only very slowly for us in Kosovo. I am rebuilding my home, but I can still only eat once a day if my children are to get enough food."

Ragip is a member of the minority Ashkalijas sect which is closely related to the Roma and Egyptian groups. During the 1999 Kosovo conflict, his clan was forced to flee into the mountains and their homes in the village of Batlava were razed.

Last year, they were encouraged to return and begin rebuilding their houses as part of the international effort to stitch Kosovo back together again. Grainna O'Hara, a protection officer for UNHCR, cautiously terms the project "a return in progress" a remark which could apply to much of the Balkans.

Not all of the families have gone home. Rebuilding has been slow and there are no guarantees it will be finished. Ragip was turned down for the police force, apparently because of gossip from hostile neighbors.

And proof of the deep divisions still splitting the entire region lie as a dark reminder only a few feet away from the building site. Ragip's brother had also fled to the mountains during the conflict, but when he attempted to return to the village he was executed by Serb police on the spot. His grave is now covered with freshly cut flowers.

"I am not at all certain about the future," says Ragip.

REGULAR VICTIMS

These minority communities are part of the fabric of the Balkans. But they have also been victimized for centuries, as they were again during the

upheavals in the 1990s, in Bosnia, in Croatia and in Kosovo.

The latest efforts at reintegration have been very slow and have met with limited results thus far.

The Roma community in the Kosovo town of Mitrovica was one of the most prosperous in the region. Six thousand people lived in modern two and three-storey homes before they were literally burned out and forced to flee in June 1999 to escape vengeful ethnic Albanians who accused them of siding with the Serbian authorities.

Roma Makalla remains a smouldering, empty ruin even today. Structures were firebombed. Others were dismantled brick by brick, by marauders who carted the materials away for their own homes and at the same time denied the owners a chance to rebuild their properties.

When the idea was recently mooted for a Roma return to Mitrovica, it was decided that security considerations were still too high risk for such an operation.

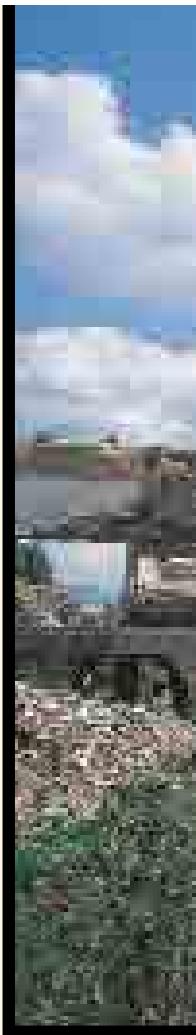
Other Roma homes escaped destruction in towns like Gnjilane in Kosovo but they remain occupied by Serbs or Albanians who were themselves thrown out of their own properties.

In this seemingly never ending game of musical chairs, some Gnjilane Roma ended up at the Salvatore camp in southern Serbia. The 'lucky' 145 Roma live in a series of rust-colored converted containers. One family of 10 occupies one 'room' measuring 18 feet by 18 feet and share one bed and space on the floor covered by pieces of carpet. A woven tapestry of Elvis Presley adorns one wall of the container "a hero when I was younger" according to the mother.



UNICEF/R. CHALASANI/CSVI02001

Minority communities have been victimized for centuries, as they were again in the 1990s.





UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CSYUGP2001

A once thriving Roma community in Mitrovica lies in ruins. Thousands of Roma live in collective centers and camps, waiting for the day to go home.

The ‘unlucky’ ones survive in flimsy constructions of plastic sheeting and cardboard, often without doors and which flood during the rains.

There is no work and one piece of firewood costs the equivalent of two dollars.

Visitors are blitzed with complaints. “We have no work, no food, no future. My daughter is dying, I will try to look after her, but if not I will dump her in your office,” one young man says. “There is peace, but still no hope,” another adds.

One unusual incident intrudes on this depressing scene. In one corner of the compound, a well-dressed local collecting fees is surrounded by Roma. When queried he said he was from the local mobile phone company and virtually everyone in the gathering agreed they had phones. The elders use them to keep in touch with events in Kosovo, the youngsters simply to call each other across the camp which has been home for so long.

These are people without voices and with no leaders to look to, the so-called ‘wheel that never squeaks’ and which is never heard, according to one Roma official.

SLOW AND HESITANT

Pristina was full of Roma in its prewar days, but the majority fled or were forced to leave to Serbia or temporary sites such as the Plemetina camp, a former barracks for electricity workers, on the

These are people without voices and with no leaders, the so-called ‘wheel that never squeaks’ and which is never heard.

outskirts of the city.

“If they are dark skinned then they are afraid to be in the city,” one aid worker said.

But moves are underway to bring the Roma back. Houses are being rehabilitated, a playground, sewage project and proposed road for the entire community, not just the Roma, are planned.

Some Albanian leaders have begun to reach out to the minority communities and their own leaders have begun to appear on local television for interviews.

But rehabilitation is a painstaking operation. The return of one family may take at least a year of preparatory work, which can be blown away in a matter of seconds.

It had taken that long to prepare the ground for Roma families to agree to return to the Drenica Valley last year. Two days after three men and one teenager returned, their bodies were discovered next to their tents sending a chill through all minority groups throughout the Balkans.

“This was a model return project, but it only needed an instant to destroy it,” said Grainna O’Hara. “We’re conscious of these risks, but people want to go home. We can’t simply freeze everything, even after incidents like that, can we?”

That remains one of the most difficult dilemmas in today’s Balkans. ■

THE BALKANS 2001

GERMANY

BOSNIA



1 As war spread throughout the Balkans in the 1990s, millions of civilians were uprooted. Many sought shelter in their own countries. Others fled to neighboring states or became refugees, principally in Europe. The Bosnian capital of Sarajevo survived, but only with the longest humanitarian airlift in history.

UNHCR/R. HOLLMANN/CS-IRH/1994

SWITZERLAND

SLOVENIA

LJUBLJANA

ZAGREB

ITALY

CROATIA

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

9

1

SARAJEVO

MONTE

TIRA

ROME

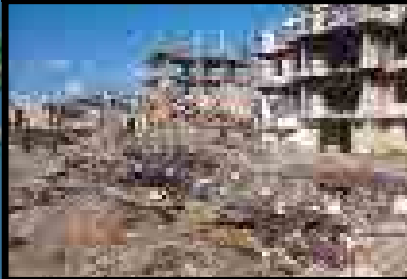
BOSNIA



9 The pace of minority returns in Bosnia has accelerated in the last two years. These ethnic Serbian farmers have moved back to a majority Bosniak region and like many returnees are living in UNHCR-supplied tents until their homes can be rebuilt.

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS-IRH/2001

HOUSING



8 The lack of housing because of widespread destruction during the war and efforts to regain possession of old homes is one of the biggest problems to overcome.

UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS-IRH/2001

PROTECTION



7 Minorities of whatever ethnicity, still need protection in Kosovo. Albanians living in the Serb-dominated northern section of Mitrovica are guarded by French troops and reach the Albanian southern section of the city via a closely guarded footbridge across a river.

UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS-IRH/2001

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA



UNHCR/R. CAUX/DP/MD/2001

2 The latest fighting occurred in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) between government forces and ethnic Albanian guerrillas. Around 150,000 civilians fled their homes.

UKRAINE

YUGOSLAVIA



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS/YUG-2001

3 An estimated 1.3 million people remain displaced from their own homes within the region. The largest concentrations

are 390,000 refugees and 230,000 displaced Kosovars in Yugoslavia, including these elderly Croat women, and nearly 560,000 people in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

HUNGARY

ROMANIA

SERBIA



UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS/YUG-2001

4 Many refugees from Croatia said they would like to settle permanently in Serbia and they are gradually being permanently housed or building their own homes with international assistance like this refugee living just outside Belgrade.

4 ● BELGRADE

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

8

3

5

6 ● PRISTINA

● SOFIA

7

E NEGRO

KOSOVO

BULGARIA

2

● SKOPJE

FYR OF MACEDONIA

NA

ALBANIA

KOSOVO



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS/YUG-2001

5 A few ethnic Serbs have returned to selected safe areas in Kosovo, including these farmers in the village of Slivovo. But conditions are still not safe enough for the great majority to go back.

GREECE

ROMA



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS/YUG-2001

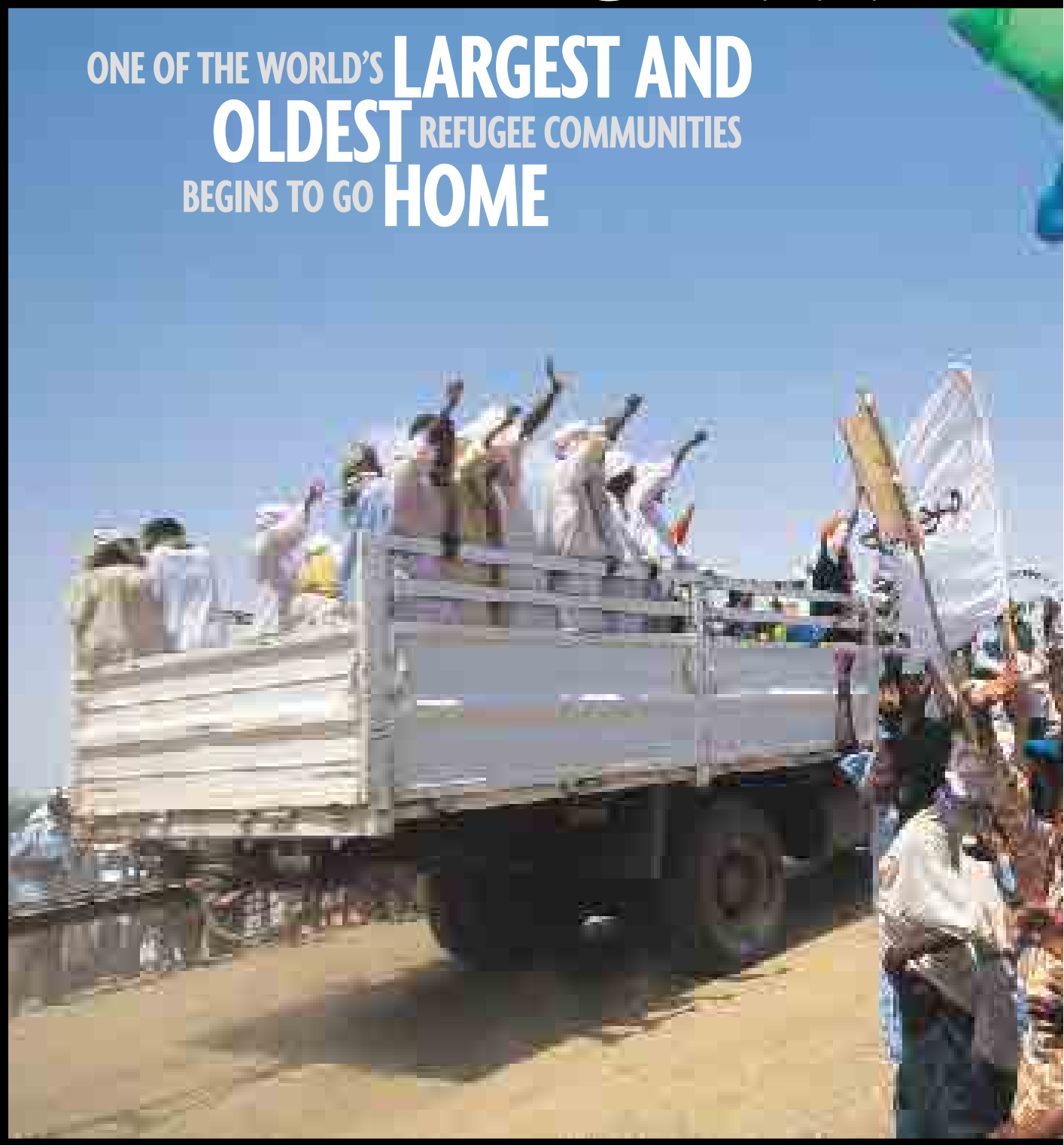
6 The Roma and other minority communities were particularly traumatized during the various conflicts. Thousands continue to wait for a chance to return home, but a few like these Ashkalijas in Kosovo have gone back and have begun to rebuild their communities.

TURKEY

AT LAST...

ONE OF THE WORLD'S **LARGEST AND OLDEST** REFUGEE COMMUNITIES
BEGINS TO GO **HOME**

UNHCR/S. BONESS/CSERI/2001



by Newton Kanhema
and Wendy Rappoport

MZILAL KIDANE MAASHO hugged and kissed her longtime neighbors as grandchildren wailed around her and tears ran down her cheeks. Her husband, Kidane Maasho, also sobbed uncontrollably, as he defiantly insisted, “I have been waiting for this day for 20 years and I am not afraid of returning home. It is sad that I am leaving my friends behind, but I am going back to the land that God gave the Eritreans.”

It was a bittersweet moment for the elderly couple, ending deep friendships born in the harshest physical and emotional conditions imaginable, but looking forward to returning to a homeland that has changed dramatically but which they have never forgotten.

As many as 500,000 civilians fled to Sudan during a bitter 30-year war that followed Ethiopia’s annexation of Eritrea in the Horn of Africa in 1962.

The Maashos fled two decades ago after their village was bombed incessantly by Ethiopian warplanes, and 13 neighbors were murdered by soldiers.

They escaped through the desert, pushing a tiny herd of 20 cattle, donkeys and goats ahead of them. Some collapsed because of the dreadful heat before the family reached the comparative safety of Sudan where they joined what eventually became one of the largest and oldest refugee communities in the world.

Life in this part of Africa is harsh. Winds sweep off the desert, across an unforgiving landscape virtually devoid of trees or even shrubs. It is one of the hottest places on earth during the day with temperatures soaring regularly into the 40s followed by bitterly cold nights.

Initially, Maasho took a job as a builder’s assistant in the frontier town of Kassala, earning the equivalent of \$2



After three decades, en route home.

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AS WE HAVE LIVED HERE.”

per week. One by one, he sold his remaining cattle to help his family survive. Eventually, they were forced to move by local authorities into one of the scores of refugee camps which had taken root in the area.

A few basics such as survival rations

refugee camp which is always prone to hardship and violence such as rape.

There was no work, simply a life of numbing boredom and waiting. The Maashos made friends and raised seven children in these forbidding surroundings.

or seek a new life in other countries.

As political conditions improved in the region, UNHCR began registering refugees, some of whom had been away for more than 30 years, to go home. The Maashos were among the first to sign up.



UNHCR/W. RAPPEPORT/CS+ERI+2001

The journey home begins with prayer



Arrival in Tesseney

and a small plot of land were provided in the Wad Sherife camp. But it was always a life lived on the edge. There was no land to grow crops and not even any firewood to collect from the empty landscape, compelling them to buy tiny amounts of charcoal for cooking whenever they had saved a few cents.

A NEW LIFE

They built two mud huts and an outside toilet on a small plot. Small sticks were gathered slowly and painfully to construct a makeshift picket fence around their homestead. Privacy and security are essential in the noisy sprawl of a huge

As they grew older, the children drifted away—into the Eritrean army, to Kenya and Saudi Arabia, sometimes losing contact with their parents as they disappeared into a widening refugee diaspora. One returned ‘home’ to Eritrea earlier this year. Another died only a few months ago. The Maashos drifted into old age in their exile, having to rely on the largesse of one of two married daughters living in a nearby town for the cents to buy their charcoal and food.

While life in such camps is reduced to one thing, survival, events on the ‘outside’ moved on. Eritrea peacefully seceded from Ethiopia in 1993. Refugees abandoned the camps to return home

But war again intervened and new floods of exiles arrived. The repatriation was put on hold when Ethiopia and Eritrea fought each other to a standstill in a conflict which finally ended in June last year. Tens of thousands of persons were killed in a conflict where deaths became so indiscriminate and widespread, it resembled at times the mass slaughter of World War I battles.

In May, UNHCR eventually began the repatriation of at least some of the more than 170,000 Eritreans still in Sudan. Despite anticipated interruptions during the rainy season, the refugee agency planned to return home by arduous road convoy

more than 60,000 Eritreans this year and continue road convoys until the end of 2002.

“We have always wanted to return. We have been waiting for this opportunity for as long as we have lived here,” Kidane Maasho said in the last remaining minutes before heading home. Other Eritreans married locally, obtained jobs or remained skeptical about retracing their steps across the African Horn and returning to a country they now know little about.

None of the Maasho children were on hand for the farewells though three grandchildren arrived to squeal their goodbyes.

GOING HOME

The Eritrean town of Tesseney serves as a staging point for many of the returnees. Their welcome is often festive, but they face a difficult future. Eritrea is one of the world’s poorest countries and there is little spare money to help people returning with nothing. In addition to the harsh climate, years of war have wrecked the infrastructure. Many refugees have no homes, water, electricity or land to go back to.

While the refugees return from Sudan, an estimated 1.1 million people displaced by

old and weak, but I have finally made it home.” His wife added, “We are old and we want to rest. We have done our part.”

A nephew jetted in from the United States with his children and the Maashos made the 10 hour road trip to the Eritrean capital of Asmara to be reunited after 17 years. Other friends and relatives visited.

The couple moved into a room on the site of a church overlooking spring waters with reported healing properties. Both suffer from failing eyesight and each morning the couple join other pilgrims to bathe and pray for a cure in the spring.



Processing

Starting life afresh

“Sudan has been very good to me and my family,” the old man said through an interpreter. And his final words: “When I came to Sudan (a strictly Islamic country where alcohol is forbidden) I used to drink

the war with Ethiopia are also beginning to go home, creating further headaches.

But for the moment these uncertainties are forgotten. Unlike their departure from Sudan, a daughter was on hand to greet the

A repatriation grant of 2,000 nakfa (\$180) has almost been spent and the couple will move back to the west after Mzital Kidane Maasho undergoes surgery. But despite this uncertain future, the couple

IT WAS ALWAYS A LIFE LIVED ON THE EDGE. THERE WAS NO LAND TO GROW CROPS AND NOT EVEN ANY FIREWOOD TO COLLECT FROM THE EMPTY LANDSCAPE.

beer and for the past 20 years I have not had a single one. I think it will be nice to enjoy my beer again when I return.”

Maashos and rented two rooms for them. “I thank my God to have kept me this long to see this day,” Kidane Maasho said. “I am

is optimistic and happy.

And, yes, Kidane says, “I’ve finally also had that beer—it was cold and delicious.” ■



Pavarotti 'and friends' at his annual concert in Modena which raised \$2 million for Afghan refugee children in Pakistan.

Pavarotti's Nansen Award

ITALIAN TENOR LUCIANO PAVAROTTI has been awarded the 2001 Nansen Refugee Award for his work to focus international attention on the plight of uprooted Afghans living in Pakistan. The award, named after Norwegian polar explorer and the world's first refugee High Commissioner Fridtjof Nansen, has been

given annually since 1954 to individuals or organizations that have distinguished themselves in work on behalf of refugees. Previous recipients include Eleanor Roosevelt, King Juan Carlos I of Spain, Médecins Sans Frontières, the late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere and the people of Canada. ■

Boat person to high office

AS A 10-YEAR-OLD HE SPENT 12 days aboard an overcrowded and leaking boat with virtually no food or water. As the craft reached Malaysia it was met with a fusillade of gunfire and turned back into the South China Sea. Even when the Vietnamese youth and his family eventually made it to the United States, misfortune followed. They survived by picking strawberries, but when Mount St. Helens volcano erupted in

1980, it wiped out their livelihood yet again. Recently, 33-year-old Viet D.Dinh was sworn in on a 96-1 Senate vote as the United States Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Policy, charged with the planning, development and coordination of major legal policy initiatives. "He will bring invaluable perspective and intellect to our pursuit of justice," Attorney General John Ashcroft said of the former Vietnamese refugee.

New leadership

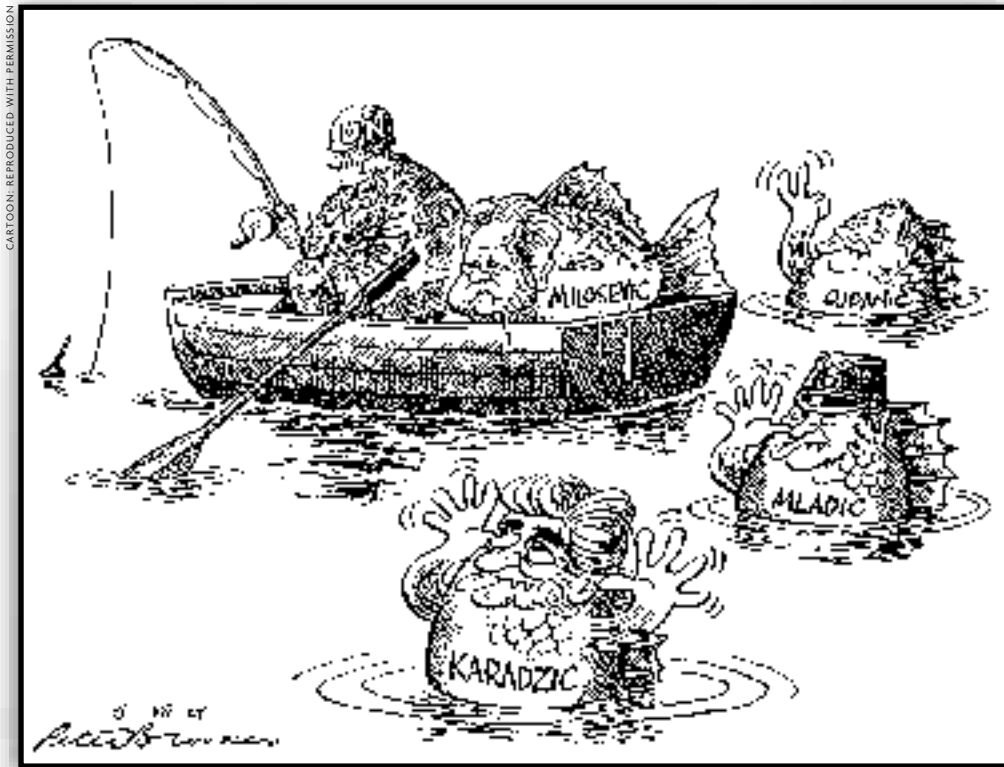
VETERAN TUNISIAN CIVIL SERVANT and diplomat Kamel Morjane has been named as UNHCR's new Assistant High Commissioner. Morjane spent nearly 20 years with the agency before serving as Tunisia's representative to the U.N. in Geneva and latterly as the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His appointment completes the restructuring of the organization's leadership. At the beginning of the year former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers began work as the new High Commissioner and Ms. Mary Ann Wyrsh, acting U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner, became Deputy High Commissioner. ■

Refugee World Cup



The Somali winners of the first Refugee World Cup.

IT WAS BILLED AS PROBABLY the first Refugee World Cup in soccer. Fourteen teams composed of asylum seekers and refugees from countries as far flung as Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Ethiopia took part in the eight-week long competition in London. "Football is such an amazing international healer," John Barnes, one of England's most distinguished soccer stars and a supporter of the competition said. "I have seen from overseas trips how football is used with street children and former child soldiers to help instill a sense of personal worth." Some of the teams will now be able to compete in local leagues on a permanent basis. The Somali Horn Stars won the final, 4-3, against the Angolan Cascais on a penalty shootout extensively covered by the media including BBC and CNN. ■



CARTOON: REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION

had stayed with the Macedonians when they were refugees two years earlier.



“The more they wait the more they lose. More and more people have decided to catch the last bus.”

A refugee official in Bosnia describing an increasing number of people wanting to return and claim their former properties.



“A new century is beginning, but we are lighting fires like Indians. The food we get, we throw to the pigs.”

An uprooted ethnic Serb from Kosovo who lives in a collective center in Serbia.



“For us, time stopped that day.”

A woman who lost 22 male members of her family, at ceremonies to mark the massacre at Srebrenica, Bosnia, the worst atrocity in Europe since World War II.



“We are the wheel that never squeaks.”

A Roma leader bemoaning the fact that his minority is never heard in powerful government circles.



“More than one million people in the Balkans remain displaced from the conflicts of the past decade. The last thing the region needs is more refugees.”

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers on the conflict in FYROM.

“The old Balkan story of violence and ethnic cleansing is not yet over.”

Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica to a recent summit meeting.

“The shark has gone, but there are still some piranhas in the water.”

Bosnian Foreign Minister, Zlatko Lagumdzija, after hearing news of the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic to The Hague.



“At first I had a feeling everything was spinning out of control. And then I saw the sky and the sun. It was beautiful.”

The reaction of an elderly Kosovar woman on going out-

side her darkened apartment for the first time in a year.



“It is a day few had imagined, but many had hoped for. It is a day that will be remembered not for vengeance, but for justice. It is a victory for accountability over impunity.”

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, on Milosevic’s handover to the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.



“We came in together, and we will leave together.”

U.S. President George Bush, visiting Kosovo, reaffirms Washington’s continued military involvement in the region.



“We didn’t know they were coming until there was a knock on the door and there they were.”

A Kosovar family describing the arrival of a second family fleeing recent troubles in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The Kosovars