

Foreword

Foreword by the High Commissioner for Refugees

The year 2002 saw some big steps forward as well as a number of setbacks. One of the most important steps forward was the Afghan repatriation – the largest refugee return in three decades. In all, more than 2 million Afghans went home in 2002, including 1.8 million refugees. Another 1.5 million could return in 2003, assuming donors come forward with the necessary funds.

Afghanistan illustrates how the resolution of refugee problems is inextricably linked to the achievement of political solutions and subsequent stability in countries of origin. The challenge now is to ensure the security and effective reintegration of those who return. If they are to stay home – and if others are to follow – continued international investment in rehabilitation and reconstruction is vital.

In Africa, there were both positive and negative developments. On the plus side, tens of thousands of Angolan refugees returned spontaneously as peace was finally restored after decades of civil war. Large numbers of refugees also returned to Eritrea, northern Somalia and Sierra Leone. On the negative side, new outbreaks of violence caused further displacement, particularly in West Africa where Liberia once again plunged into turmoil. In September, Côte d'Ivoire erupted into civil war, prompting refugees to flee to neighbouring countries and resulting in the emergency repatriation of some Liberian refugees who had sought safety in what until then had been a centre of regional stability.

There were also some difficult challenges in Europe, particularly in the Caucasus region. In South-Eastern Europe, the final meeting of the Humanitarian Issues Working Group in June 2002 agreed that UNHCR would phase down its work in the Balkans. As we do, there remains an urgent need for even more long-term development assistance in the region.

In Asia, there were also positive developments. In Timor-Leste, most of the refugees who fled in 1999 have now returned. In Sri Lanka, the cease-fire signed in February 2002 led to the spontaneous return of over 300,000 internally displaced persons. A priority now is to find durable solutions for other protracted refugee situations, including Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh and Bhutanese in Nepal.

We continue to face major challenges in Colombia. Here, as in other operations, we work closely with OCHA, sister UN agencies, ICRC, NGOs and other partners.

We also continued to face a major challenge in trying to ensure that the global fight against terrorism does not weaken the refugee protection regime. While supporting measures to combat misuse of asylum systems, we struggled to prevent the vilification of refugees and asylum-seekers by some politicians and media.

2002 was also a year for new initiatives and planning for the future. In October, the Global Consultations on International Protection ended with the adoption by UNHCR's Executive Committee of the landmark Agenda for Protection. This strategic policy document serves as a guide for concrete action by UNHCR, governments, NGOs and other partners. Its three main themes are the need for better protection, more durable solutions, and improved burden-sharing.

I gave the ideas contained in the Agenda further shape by launching the "Convention Plus" initiative. This involves building on the Convention framework through new special agreements with and between States. These will help to more effectively address the challenges that we face today. Progress was also made on the "UNHCR 2004" process, aimed at proposing ways to strengthen UNHCR as a multilateral institution before 2004, when UNHCR's current mandate is up for renewal.



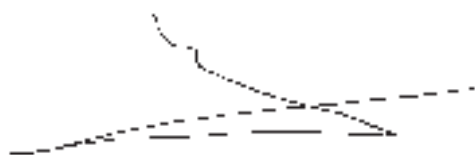
Colombia: The High Commissioner's visit with IDPs at a school in Barrancabermeja in November 2002. *UNHCR / P. Smith*

Related new initiatives included the “4-Rs” (for an integrated approach to repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations) and the “DLI” initiative (Development Through Local Integration). The “4-Rs” initiative brings together humanitarian and development actors and funds. During 2002, pilot “4-Rs” programmes were initiated in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, with UNHCR working in close partnership with the World Bank, UNDP and other key UN agencies, particularly UNICEF and WFP. Central to the DLI initiative is the belief that refugees not be viewed simply as a burden by host governments and the international community, but as real agents of development. A first programme under the DLI initiative is being implemented in Zambia, and I hope that more will soon follow in other countries.

In West Africa, UNHCR’s remedial and preventive actions strengthened the protection of refugee women and children against the threat of sexual exploitation and abuse. Indeed, there is now a heightened awareness of this issue globally. UNHCR also issued a new Code of Conduct for staff.

Throughout 2002, our operations continued to be constrained by funding shortfalls. In October 2001 the Executive Committee approved an Annual Programme budget of USD 828.6 million. However, even though Supplementary Programmes of over USD 200 million were well funded, there was a shortfall of some USD 100 million for the Annual Programme budget (taking into consideration recorded fresh contributions and other related income). This shortfall led to a further downward adjustment of programmes, many of which had already been affected by limited resources.

I hope this Global Report will contribute to a better understanding of UNHCR’s work, and that it will encourage donors and partners to continue supporting us in meeting the needs of some 20 million people around the world.


 Ruud Lubbers