

REFUGEES

VOLUME 2 • NUMBER 131 • 2003

*“Millions of civilians
have been killed in the
flames of war..*

*But there is hope
too.. in places like
Sierra Leone,
Angola and in the
Horn of Africa.”*

–High Commissioner RUUD LUBBERS

Africa at a Crossroads



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Editor:
Ray Wilkinson

French editor:
Mounira Skandrani

Contributors:
Millicent Mutuli, Astrid Van Genderen Stort, Delphine Marie, Peter Kessler, Panos Moutzisz

Editorial assistant:
Virginia Zekrya

Photo department:
Suzy Hopper, Anne Kellner

Design:
Vincent Winter Associés

Production:
Françoise Jaccoud

Photo engraving:
Aloha Scan - Geneva

Distribution:
John O'Connor, Frédéric Tissot

Maps:
UNHCR Mapping Unit

Historical documents
UNHCR archives

Refugees is published by the Media Relations and Public Information Service of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of UNHCR. The designations and maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion or recognition on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

Refugees reserves the right to edit all articles before publication. Articles and photos not covered by copyright may be reprinted without prior permission. Please credit UNHCR and the photographer. Glossy prints and slide duplicates of photographs not covered by copyright may be made available for professional use only.

English and French editions printed in Italy by AMILCARE PIZZI S.p.A., Milan.
Circulation: 224,000 in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Chinese.

ISSN 0252-791 X

Cover:
Africa: an uncertain future.
UNHCR/R. WILKINSON/CS/CIV*2003

UNHCR
P.O. Box 2500
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
www.unhcr.org



UNHCR/M. CAVINATO/DP/BDI*2003

12 Africa is at another crossroads. There is plenty of good news as hundreds of thousands of persons returned to Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi (pictured) and the Horn of Africa. But wars continued in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and other areas, making it a very mixed picture for the continent.



UNHCR/P. KESSLER/DP/IRQ*2003

28 With the war in Iraq officially over, UNHCR has turned its attention to helping to return some of the estimated 500,000 longtime Iraqi refugees living across the globe who may now go back to that country.



UNHCR/E. PARSONS/DP/SOM*2003

30 Some people call her a new Mother Teresa. Italian doctor Annalena Tonelli has won the Nansen Refugee Award for decades of work among Somali civilians.

REFUGEES

N ° 1 3 1 - 2 0 0 3

2 EDITORIAL

Africa slips deeper into misery as the world focuses on Iraq.

4 AFRICAN IMAGES

A pictorial on the African continent.

12 COVER STORY

In an era of short wars and limited casualties, events in Africa are almost incomprehensible.
By Ray Wilkinson

Africa at a glance
A brief look at the continent.

17 Map

Refugee and internally displaced populations.

Military
Refugee camps are centers for military recruitment.

Burundi
A change of power in a troubled land.

Congo
The legacy of Africa's worst ever documented war.

Border
A typical hard day at an African frontier post.

Angola
A new start.

28 IRAQ

After the war, what now for Iraq?

30 PEOPLE

Africa's very own Mother Teresa.

The Iraq effect...

While the world was mesmerized by the war in Iraq, Africa's refugees have slipped a little bit deeper into misery and despair.

When coalition forces moved into Iraq, aid workers and journalists stood by in Jordan, Iran, Syria and Turkey, ready to receive hordes of Iraqi refugees who never came.

Meanwhile, nearly 100,000 civilians escaped from the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire into eastern Liberia, itself wracked by another conflict. On the outskirts of Liberia's capital, Monrovia, there were no embedded journalists to cover a rebel attack on a displaced persons camp in which hundreds of civilians were reportedly abducted or slaughtered. Remember Guinea, the West African country that was in the news when it was being courted for its vote on a Security Council resolution? More than 7,000 Liberian refugees, many with gunshot wounds, arrived there recently. Aid workers struggled to transport them to a safer area away from the border.

In southern Chad, more than 30,000 refugees from the Central African Republic sleep under trees, waiting to see what will happen at home following the overthrow of the Patassé government recently (not much was heard of the regime change there).

Of course, it was hard to mobilize interest in Africa's refugees even before the fighting started in Iraq. On Valentine's Day the U.N. Refugee Agency and the World Food Program warned lack of funding

would force a halt in food deliveries to refugee camps in Africa.

But within a week of issuing an appeal for \$1.3 billion to feed Iraq's hungry people (who had two months supply on hand), the World Food Program received pledges of \$315 million—nearly three times the amount called for in the African appeal.

In recent testimony before the U.S. Congress, even before news filtered out of another appalling massacre of nearly 300 civilians in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the advocacy group Refugees International pointed out that more people had died in the Congo in one week due to violence, malnutrition and disease than died in the war in Iraq to that date.

Editorial pages and talk shows have been abuzz with scenarios for the rehabilitation of Iraq. The first anniversary of the end of Angola's 27-year civil war passed virtually unnoticed, as did calls for the World Bank to extend the scope of its reintegration assistance to cover not just the former UNITA rebel soldiers, but also thousands of Angolan women abducted and forced to become 'wives' of rebel troops.

Opening a Model U.N. in Ottawa, Stephen Lewis, the U.N. Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, mused about what could happen if the Global Fund set up to fight AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis were fully funded, before telling 800 university students that the fund was nearly bankrupt.

So while Iraq dominates the world spotlight, spare a thought for Africa's silent emergencies and the hope of one African refugee: "If only a coalition would come to rescue us."

JUDITH KUMIN, *UNHCR's Representative in Canada*, first wrote this opinion piece for the *Montreal Gazette*.



Sudanese women flee rebel attack.

UNHCR/S.MANN/CS/UGA-2002

African images





HOPE:
After a decades-long war, Angola looks forward to a brighter future.

African images



© S. SALGADO/ZIRE

WAR:
The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been described as the worst in Africa's recorded history.



An estimated three million people perished.

African *images*





GOING HOME:

Some 240,000 Sierra Leoneans have returned home to try to patch the country together again, following a ten year-long war.

African *images*





THE FUTURE:
Even when refugees return home, the future may still be very tough, as in Eritrea.



UNHCR/AM KAMBER/DF/CIV-2003

AFRICA on the

The human toll has been appalling, but is the light at the end of

by Ray Wilkinson

Liberian refugees flee back to their own country after conflict erupted in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.

In an era of short wars, 'controlled' numbers of casualties and sanitized images such as those emerging from Iraq, events in Africa seem almost incomprehensible.

Deep in the heart of the Congo basin, some three million people, perhaps many more, perished during an ongoing war described as the deadliest documented conflict in Africa's history. And even as American marines mopped up last pockets of resistance in Baghdad in the full glare of thousands of television cam-

eras, hundreds of people were being slaughtered almost unnoticed in the latest atrocity in one remote corner of the Congo region.

During the course of the conflict which began in 1998 and which at times involved six armies from surrounding countries, countless militias and home-grown gangs of thugs, 2.5 million people were ripped from their homes and forced to seek shelter in steaming rain forests and neighboring states.

Angola suffered a similar fate. In a civil war lasting



EDGE

the tunnel a little brighter?

almost three decades, an estimated one million people were killed, and anywhere from three to five million were again uprooted from their ancestral villages and towns. They trudged across a destroyed landscape from one temporary sanctuary to another, often forced to eat berries and roots to survive and in constant danger of being killed or maimed, not only by the combatants, but also from millions of mines which made one of the continent's richest countries a vast and deadly booby trap.

Far to the north, Sudan has been destabilized by civil conflict virtually from independence in 1956, and once more the human toll was one of biblical proportions rather than the quick and limited conflicts the public in industrialized countries now expect. Two million people died, four million roam the northern desert wastes and southern savannah grasslands of the continent's largest country, and a half million refugees were forced to flee even further afield.

Those, of course, were only the largest and longest of a series of upheavals which wracked and then wrecked large swathes of Africa: Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Western Sahara, Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville and most recently Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic.

Then there was Rwanda: as many as one million people were slaughtered in the mid-1990s in the world's latest genocide. And again, images of endless flood tides of refugees shuffling along in billowing clouds of dust, buffeted mercilessly by the latest chaos.

A SCAR

These images are familiar to a global audience. So much so that British Prime Minister Tony Blair insisted in one keynote address that the anarchy could not continue and "The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world, but if the world focused on it, we could heal it."

So, two years after that clarion call, how is Africa doing?

Donor countries, aid agencies, national governments do provide large amounts of assistance to the continent. UNHCR's current annual budget for Africa, for instance, is nearly \$400 million.

And there is other good news. In 1995, UNHCR assisted seven million refugees. Today, that figure is less than half (though the refugee agency does now also help some other classes of distressed civilians, including victims of war and persecution living in their own countries. The overall number of uprooted people throughout Africa is still a staggering 15 million).

The West African nation of Sierra Leone suffered through a decade of civil war in the 1990s where the severing of the arms and limbs of civilian victims became a loathsome signature of that brutal conflict. Today, the country is enjoying a fragile peace.

Anywhere between one million and 1.5 million internally displaced Angolans and another 100,000 refugees from one of the world's longest wars have returned home 'spontaneously' following a peace accord signed last year. Hundreds of thousands will follow suit this year if the guns remain silent.

In a vast swirl of peoples constantly on the move across the length and breadth of the continent, around 440,000 longtime refugees returned to their former homes in the Horn of Africa in the last couple of years.

Nearly two million refugees from Burundi, Sudan, Somalia and the Congo region are pinning their own hopes of seeing their homes again in the near future on various peace negotiations currently underway. ►

IN 1995,
UNHCR
ASSISTED
SEVEN MILLION
REFUGEES.
TODAY, THAT
FIGURE IS LESS
THAN HALF.

DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE CONGO BASIN, AN ESTIMATED THREE MILLION PEOPLE PERISHED DURING AN ONGOING WAR DESCRIBED AS THE DEADLIEST DOCUMENTED CONFLICT IN AFRICA'S HISTORY.

Countries such as the United States which traditionally offer to resettle particularly vulnerable refugees, are paying increasing attention to Africa (though Washington's overall resettlement program has still to recover from the aftereffects of the terrorist attacks there in September, 2001).

A project called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which aims to promote continental peace and stability through sustainable development has received an enthusiastic global response. In any new era of calm, a majority of displaced persons would also be able to restart their lives.

A CROSSROADS

But Africa undoubtedly remains on a knife-edge.

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said: "Africa is again at a crossroads." While "millions of civilians have literally been killed in the flames of war, there is hope too...in places like Sierra Leone, Angola and in the Horn of Africa."

David Lambo, the head of UNHCR's Africa Bureau, insists that on purely humanitarian issues, "We are a little further down the road than six months ago. The light is getting a little brighter at the end of the tunnel. But it is equally true that the continent is at a new divide."

Why, when an increasingly smaller world can lavish such attention and assistance—at least short-term—on places like Afghanistan and latterly Iraq, does Africa still seem so desperate and so ignored?

The continent continues to produce its own despots and misguided policies, but the malaise goes deeper than that. Africa is still viewed as far away, humanitarian crises are 'over there', both donor capitals and refugee hosting countries suffer from 'refugee fatigue', what help is provided simply is not enough and



Algerians: Africa's first refugees.

UNHCR/S. WRIGHT/524

the continent is apparently no longer strategically important.

Only a few years ago, such places as Zaire and Angola were prized for their oil and minerals. But Cuban and white South African troops—proxies for the big powers—have long since departed Angola. This outside involvement was a catalyst for many of the continent's problems, but when the foreigners walked away, Africa was left to suffer largely in silence and without the help necessary to clean up the mess.

Economies, which could be self-sustaining, are short-circuited by rules made in distant capitals. African farmers could help feed the world, but agricultural subsidies granted to producers in the world's industrialized countries undercut one of the few viable options the continent has to break out of its cycle of deprivation and poverty which in turn help to fuel wars and refugee flight.

Wealthy donors and international institutions have spent millions of dollars on short-term humanitarian relief, especially when thousands of people were dying in front of the television cameras as happened in Rwanda, but they have little appetite to help underwrite long-term development.

Health, education and social services crumble. HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions in many African countries and more than two million people died from the disease there in 2001 alone. Another eight million succumbed to other easily treated ailments such as malaria, measles and diarrhea. At that rate of mortality, the population of a modestly sized European country such as Britain or France would be totally wiped out in less than a decade.

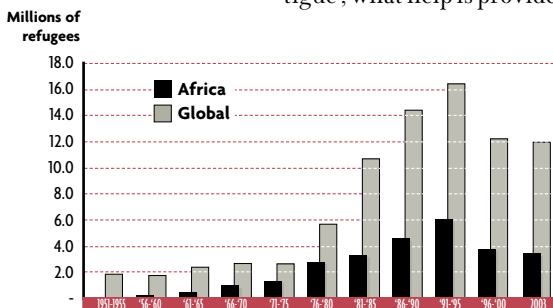
But some of the above assumptions may be wrong.

Africa is no longer 'far away.' Tens of thousands of Africans trudge thousands of miles each year to the northern shores of the continent where they embark on leaky boats to try to gate-crash Europe. Warns David Lambo: "There is a sense of total desperation among many Africans and these kind of people will literally fight their way" into Europe and other prosperous regions.

Africa may also turn out to be the soft underbelly in the industrialized world's fight against global terrorism. Refugee camps and the chaos of such places as Somalia provide not only effective shelter for existing terrorists such as Al Qaida, but are breeding grounds for future gunmen. East Africa has already been scarred by lethal attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and against Israeli tourists in Kenya.

THE DOUBLE STANDARD

And then there is the reputed double standard: up ►



Africa at a glance

■ There are an **estimated 15 million refugees**, internally displaced and other uprooted persons throughout the African continent. UNHCR cares for **nearly 4.6 million of them** with a regular 2003 **budget of nearly \$400 million**.

■ Overall, this was a slight increase **compared with 4.2 million people the previous year**. The agency's assistance **peaked in 1994** when it helped **seven million refugees**, many of whom had fled the Rwandan genocide of that year.

■ In 2002, **more than one million people** fled their homes, while an estimated **600,000 refugees and IDPs returned** with UNHCR assistance. However, in Angola alone between **one million and 1.5 million** internally displaced persons also returned home spontaneously.

■ Africa's **largest refugee populations** came from the following countries: Burundi 570,000; Sudan 490,000; Angola 421,000; Democratic Republic of Congo 395,000; and Somalia 357,000.

■ African countries **hosting the largest refugee populations** include: Tanzania 690,000; Democratic Republic of Congo 330,000; Sudan 328,000; Zambia 247,000; Kenya 234,000; and Uganda 217,000.

■ Since the end of the colonial era, Africa has been **the scene of some of the longest and worst global conflicts**. Sudan was wracked by civil war between the mainly Muslim north and Animist and Christian south virtually since independence in 1956. **An estimated two million people were killed**, four million people displaced internally and half a million people fled to neighboring countries.



Temporary shelter in Chad.

■ Angola suffered a similar war starting in the 1960s. At least **one million persons were killed, four million were displaced internally** and another **half million fled as refugees**.

■ Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo starting in 1998 was described as **Africa's first 'World War'**. It involved a half dozen armies, **reputedly killing between three and five million people** either as a direct result of war or because of disease and malnutrition. **Two million people fled** to nearby neighborhoods and 300,000 civilians became refugees.

■ The entire West African region was destabilized after civil war erupted once more in Liberia in 1989. Nearly 70 percent of that country's population, an estimated **2.4 million people, were displaced and 150,000 killed**. Neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, once one of the continent's most stable nations, toppled into civil war in late 2002, **displacing up to 800,000 people and forcing 400,000 more to flee the country**.

■ Burundi is one of the world's poorest and smallest countries, but a decade-long conflict there **killed more than 200,000 people and produced nearly one million uprooted persons**, or nearly 14 percent of the total population

■ Politically, there were encouraging developments. Following the signing of a peace accord in early 2002, **civilians began returning to their homes in Angola** and the pace of return was expected to increase in coming months. Tenuous peace deals were signed in Burundi and Congo. Following a decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone, that country continued to stabilize.

■ Wars and displacement have been fueled by economic and social upheaval. The number of people **living in absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to rise from 315 to 404 million** in the next 15 years, making the continent the world's poorest region.

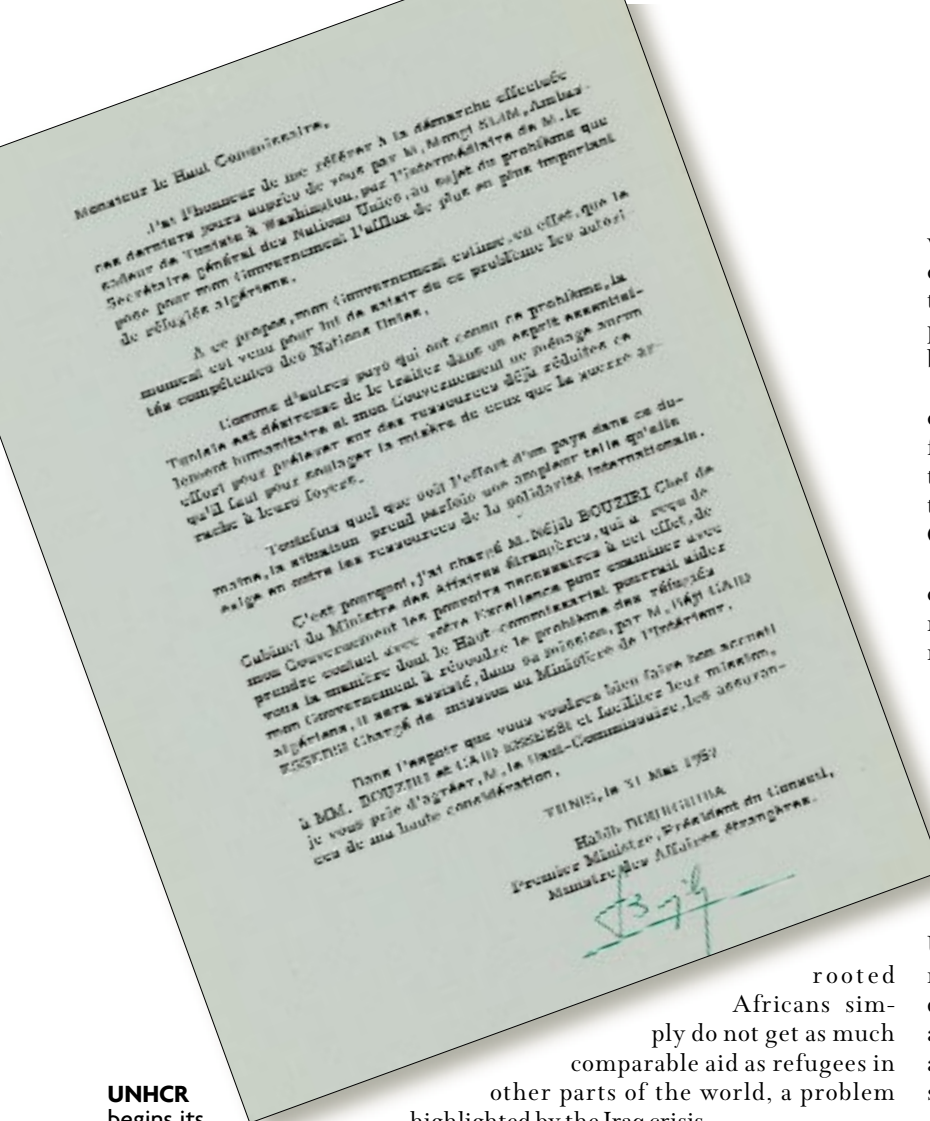
■ Half the population survives on **less than one dollar a day**, more than 50 percent has no

access to clean drinking water and more than **two million infants die annually** before reaching their first birthday

■ HIV/AIDS reached epidemic proportions in many countries and in 2001 more than **two million died from the disease**. Eight million others died from malaria, measles, tuberculosis and diarrheal diseases.

■ An estimated **40 million Africans** in Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Sahel and West Africa **face starvation** according to the World Food Program.

■ *Refugees are people who have fled their country in search of safety from war and repression. Internally displaced persons left for similar reasons, but remain in their own countries. UNHCR assists all refugees globally. It began to help some, but not all, internally displaced persons in the 1990s. Thus, statistics in the charts and tables accompanying articles in this issue are sometimes available for only one of these groups during certain time periods.*



UNHCR
begins its
involvement
in Africa in 1957.

“THE LIGHT
IS GETTING
A LITTLE
BRIGHTER AT
THE END OF
THE TUNNEL.
BUT IT IS
EQUALLY TRUE
THAT THE
CONTINENT IS
AT A DIVIDE.”

rooted
Africans simply
do not get as much
comparable aid as refugees in
other parts of the world, a problem
highlighted by the Iraq crisis.

As that war loomed, Afghan President Hamid Karzai pleaded with Washington: “Don’t forget us if Iraq happens.”

His country had seen a Soviet invasion and a subsequent big power struggle, virtual abandonment for years by a disinterested global community, another foreign intervention and, finally, renewed pledges that the past would not be repeated and the industrialized world this time would stand by Kabul.

Realpolitik being what it is, Karzai was not convinced.

For critics of the current global humanitarian setup too, the Iraq conflict has been a litmus test. For them, it vividly underlined the so-called double standard: the willingness to commit massive military, economic and financial resources in the Middle East in support of goals which could equally apply in Africa—supporting freedom and democracy, providing humanitarian assistance to a desperate population, uprooting terrorism.

The United Nations system launched its biggest ever appeal for \$2.2 billion in humanitarian assistance in Iraq, a target which undoubtedly would have been met had the conflict been a prolonged one.

In the same period, fund raisers trying to find cash for Africa uniformly reported that early in the year traditional donors ‘sat on their hands’, refusing to commit to other goals until it was clear which way the

war in Iraq would go. One European delegation pointedly remarked that “Angola is a country rich enough to fund its own repatriation” this year to which a desperate aid official asked aloud if the same rules would be applied to Iraqi refugees.

African commentators pointed to the huge but empty tent cities on the desert fringes of Iraq waiting for refugees who never arrived and compared that to the low level of interest and media coverage as tens of thousands of people fled the West African state of Côte d’Ivoire.

High Commissioner Lubbers insisted: “I am concerned that the interest being shown in Iraq has diminished the interest in Africa. Whenever money is needed for Africa, the funding is going down, not up.”

Projections suggest that the refugee agency’s Africa budget this year will fall at least 15 percent short, an amount Lubbers called “less than the cost of an hour’s war in Iraq”—but which nevertheless will necessitate painful cuts in education, self-sufficiency and other basic programs.

The World Food Program estimated 40 million Africans faced starvation and James Morris, WFP’s Executive Director recently told the U.N. Security Council: “As much as I don’t like it, I cannot escape the thought that we have a double standard. How is it we routinely accept a level of suffering and hopelessness in Africa we would never accept in any other part of the world? We simply cannot let this stand.”

Noting that at the start of the Iraq war each family there had one month’s supply of food, Morris said the Africans facing hunger “most of them women and children, would find it an immeasurable blessing to have a month’s worth of food.”

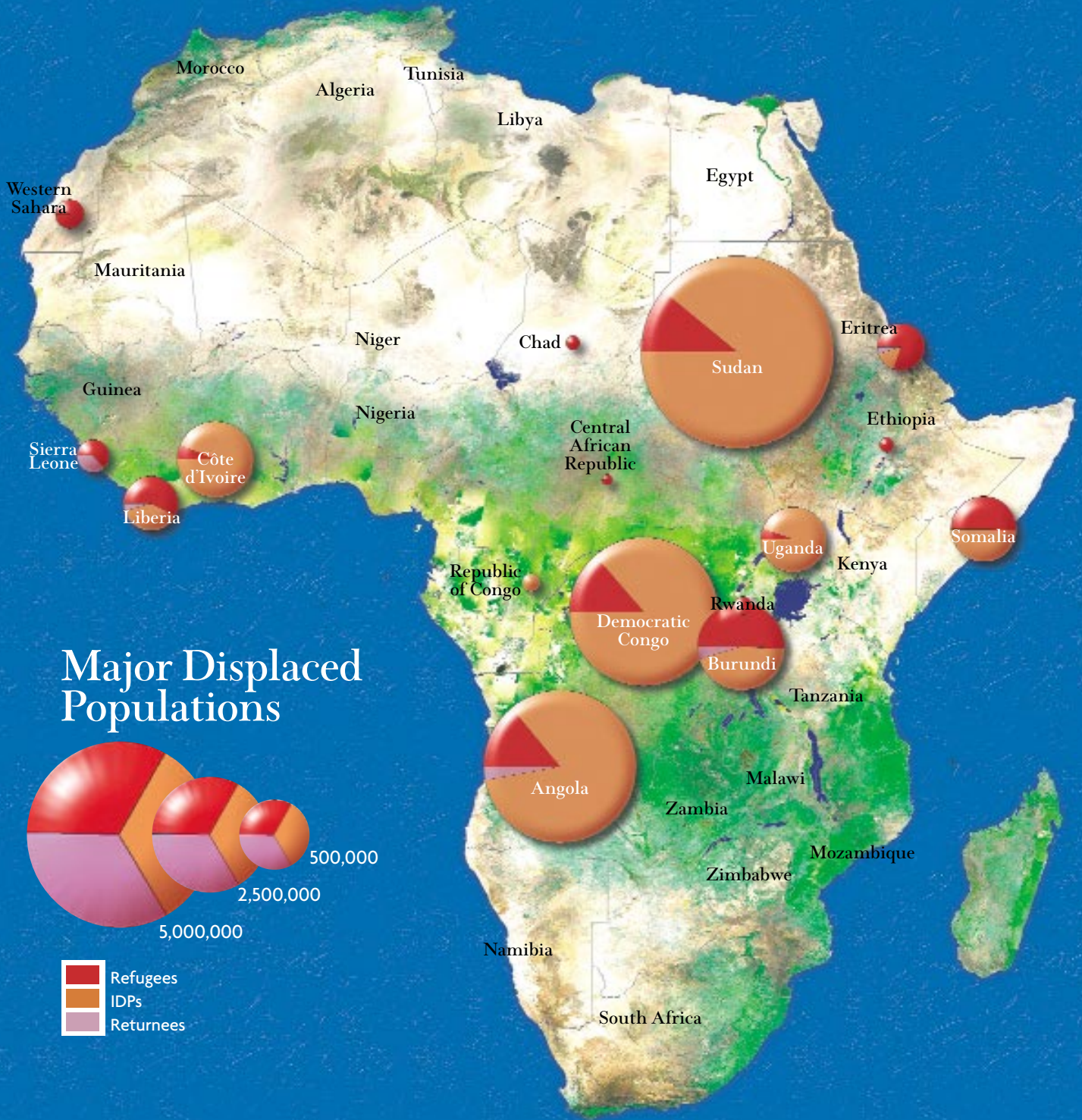
SHORTCHANGED

So are Africans being shortchanged? Comparing how much money is spent on each refugee in different parts of the world can be a slippery business and may not necessarily reflect the ‘effective’ amount of help each person receives. The cost of building shelters in the Balkans, for instance, may be higher than in Africa and would undoubtedly distort any direct dollar-per-refugee comparison.

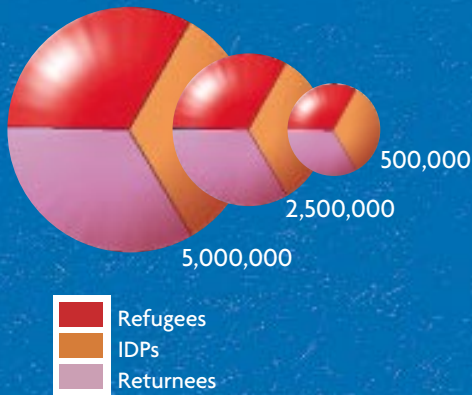
But UNHCR has approved a minimum standard of assistance every refugee should receive and even these basic benchmarks covering such necessities as food, water and shelter are regularly breached in Africa because of lack of adequate financial and manpower resources.

The World Food Program reduced already borderline rations to some refugee camps by half. Displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, one of the most inhospitable places on earth in the sweltering summer months, should receive a minimum 20 liters of water per day, but in the 1990s emergency some were forced to survive on less than three liters. Similar shortages are common today. In some camps only around 30 per-

Africa's Uprooted Peoples



Major Displaced Populations



Major Refugee-Hosting Countries

Tanzania	690,000	Uganda	217,000
Democratic Congo	330,000	Guinea	182,000
Sudan	328,000	Algeria	169,000
Zambia	247,000	Ethiopia	133,000
Kenya	234,000	Republic of Congo	109,000

Turning refugees into gunmen

Power and adventure versus poverty, boredom and isolation in a battle for the hearts and minds of the young

The recruiters came at sundown with fistfuls of cash and promises of adventure, power and women. Within three hours, 150 young Liberian men at the Nicla refugee camp in western Côte d'Ivoire had signed up to become government mercenaries in a unit nicknamed the Lima force.

They each pocketed 10,000 local CFA francs (\$17), jumped aboard two trucks and, led by a fighter wearing a red bandana and brandishing a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on the back of a jeep, roared out of the camp telling other refugees who witnessed the incident, "We want money. Here we are nothing and we have nothing."

After training, these new guns for hire were expected to fight on behalf of the government against other Liberians in several invading rebel groups who were operating in and around the highly volatile border area between the two West African countries.

Nicla had been a sleepy backwater kind of place, a rural village similar to surrounding Ivorian hamlets, offering sanctuary to just a small pocket of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled neighboring Liberia 35 kms to the west following more than a decade of renewed turmoil in that country.

The great majority of the Liberians integrated easily into Ivorian villages rather than moving into refugee camps, but when Côte d'Ivoire itself was wracked by civil conflict in September 2002, many of these uprooted civilians were forced to flee again. Between 6,000 and 8,000 packed into Nicla, seeking the safety of an international sponsored camp rather than run the risk of a tide of xenophobia sweeping through the countryside.



Nicla camp—military recruits take heed.

Unsurprisingly, however, given its proximity to a highly volatile border, nearby conflict and a ready pool of able-bodied male and female refugees, the camp became instead a hotbed for recruitment.

There have been regular confrontations between humanitarian ideals and military imperatives for many years, Nicla being just one of the latest and most blatant examples.

An estimated 300,000 underage child soldiers, 3,000 in Côte d'Ivoire itself, are

currently serving in armies and militias around the world, some of them plucked straight from refugee camps. Untold numbers of older, but still vulnerable youths, have also been recruited. Girls are particularly vulnerable, becoming foot soldiers or sexual slaves, or both.

National governments, not humanitarian agencies, are responsible for the security of refugee camps, but when they cannot or will not enforce proper security, organizations such as UNHCR or Caritas, which is present in Nicla, face difficult choices.

When more than one million Rwandans fled from that country's genocide in the mid-1990s, the dreaded *Interahamwe* militias used camps in then eastern Zaire not only to recruit, but also to launch raids back into Rwanda. With the national security apparatus disintegrating, UNHCR unsuccessfully appealed to U.N. member states for military assistance and then paid for its own security force—with limited results.

Effectively, it took the controversial decision to continue caring for hundreds of thousands of genuine refugees, knowing at the same time that the gunmen were also benefiting from the aid and international humanitarian presence.

For months the agency has been working on 'solutions' for Nicla, ranging from local programs to promote education and small self-help projects to trying to relocate the camp away from the immediate fighting zone and asking other countries to accept the most vulnerable Liberians for resettlement.

WILD WEST

But though the site was named Peace

THERE IS NO WORK, NO MONEY, SPREADING POVERTY, LITTLE EDUCATION AND FEW OTHER ACTIVITIES FOR THE REFUGEES—ONLY STIFLING BOREDOM AND GROWING RESENTMENT AND FEAR.

Town by the refugees, it has more the appearance of the Wild West.

A recent visitor was startled to see dozens of wildly cheering youths, accompanied by the inevitable machine gunner and his red bandana, careening through the camp on trucks in broad daylight (similar military activities in other refugee camps are often carried out more surreptitiously under the cover of darkness).

Bursts of gunfire often rupture daily routine when the 'soldiers' return to camp to visit their families. One group of school children tumbled out through both doors and windows in panic when bullets whizzed past their school house recently.

Refugees said they lived their lives on a knife-edge in such conditions. "Just talking to you like this could get me killed," one refugee said in refusing to be identified. "It is like a huge cattle barn here," another complained to a camp official. "What happens when there is a massacre? You will come back in the morning (UNHCR workers do not live in the camp overnight) to collect the dead bodies. And that will be our bodies."

It is easy to understand the military lure for young refugees. Ivorians, often with the same tribal background, who once welcomed them, now look on most Liberians as 'rebels' and areas surrounding Nicla have become 'no go' areas. Cooped up in their camp, there is no work, no money, spreading poverty, little education and few other activities for the refugees—only stifling boredom and growing resentment and fear.

In such circumstances many feel they have no alternative but to 'join up.' Others are attracted to the excitement and the raw power afforded to anyone with a gun.

Young girls have been recruited and are affected in other less direct ways. Some can now earn money through a flourishing prostitution racket, servicing the newly affluent young fighters. There is sexual harassment (a 12-year-old who was being ritually abused by men was recently moved to new foster parents), but other young girls, who should be in school, willingly become drinking partners in the camp's six or seven bars and then girlfriends of the gunmen.

Jette Isaksen has worked in Rwanda, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Liberia, but her current job as a field officer visiting Nicla daily is different to those other frontline assignments. "I've never been so scared as here," she said walking around the camp. "I don't like the mood." ■

UNHCR/A. HOLLMANN/CS/DZ/1998



Saharan refugees in Algeria.

cent of children receive any type of education.

Jeff Crisp, the head of UNHCR's evaluation unit, said that desperate conditions in some camps deteriorated the longer they remained in existence, reflecting general 'fatigue' with protracted crises and the diversion of scarce resources to other projects.

The agency has now begun to compile a comprehensive 'gap analysis' between the minimum established targets and the reality on the ground.

Continent wide, conditions vary and the survey covered only refugees in established camps or transit centers and not those living in local communities.

And the shortfalls are hardly the stuff of international headlines, but do underscore the point made by WFP's James Morris that the daily living conditions of many uprooted peoples are unacceptable by any international norm.

Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab camps are among the largest in Africa, sheltering between them 180,000 people. The survey showed even such mundane items as blankets, jerrycans and kitchen utensils were last distributed on a large scale seven years ago and those items have probably long since perished. The report warned: "The non-renewal of (such items) will aggravate the already precarious situation in camps. This will result in the outbreak of a number of diseases associated with cold, lack of hygienic facilities, etc."

In Dadaab, where summer temperatures can reach above 40 degrees Celsius, refugees currently receive 17 liters of water per day, but they are also expected to feed their livestock from this amount. There is only one toilet available for every 275 students at school compared with a target of one for every 20; there are 144 children for every classroom and one teacher for every 60 children. Because of funding constraints, the gap will not be bridged in the near term and the report said the agency "will not have fulfilled its duty of addressing the basic rights of ►

ABIGAIL IS LIVING THE ULTIMATE REFUGEE NIGHTMARE. SINCE THE AGE OF 13 SHE HAS BEEN ON THE RUN SEEKING A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE... HOWEVER, SHE JUST KEEPS BUMPING INTO AFRICA'S LATEST WAR.

the child to primary education.”

Seventy-five percent of pregnant women are anaemic. The space available to each refugee is less than three square meters—minimum standard is 3.5 square meters—and “shelters are in pathetic conditions.” The report added that “failure to upgrade living conditions of the refugees... would hinder their

protection from respiratory and other associated diseases, privacy and emotional security.”

FIGHTING FOR FUNDS

Except for high profile emergencies such as Iraq, money for any of the nearly 22 million people UNHCR helps is increasingly difficult to obtain from tra-

Violence and upheaval since independence

But Burundi is again at a crossroads



Seeking safety in neighboring Tanzania.

UNHCR/L. TAYLOR/CS/7E42/002

Tanzania, while there are several hundred thousand others who have lived abroad for several decades and are not officially counted.

In the bizarre climate of central Africa, even as negotiations and fighting continued side by side, so an estimated 40,000 Burundians returned to peaceful parts of the country while a similar number fled the ongoing fighting elsewhere to seek refuge in a neighboring state.

“I feel deeply that I had to come home,” Nduwimana, a 25-year-old mother of one child said, reflecting the optimism of the returnees looking forward to a more peaceful future. “I saw that other people from my area were coming home and I didn’t want to miss the chance,” she said after hitching a ride on a twice-weekly UNHCR convoy from Tanzania, organized to help anyone wanting to take a chance on peace.

The refugee agency has tried to bolster the long-term chances of a successful outcome by also building schools and health centers for both refugees and local communities, assisting the vulnerable and elderly and even helping to launch a ‘judicial clinic’ that travels through northern Burundi trying to settle disputes between local residents and returning refugees.

At the presidential handover, UNHCR’s senior regional official, Wairimu Karago said the move was “very welcome and raises hopes for a solution for the refugees. It may mean they can come back home and end many years spent outside of Burundi. I would like to see this saga come to an end.”

The country has been here before, however, and the future continues to hang in the balance. ■

It has been convulsed by violent conflict for 30 years. Though it is one of Africa’s smallest countries, in the last decade alone around 150,000 civilians were killed and 1.5 million more uprooted in the landlocked state of Burundi. The world at large paid little attention.

And like the continent as a whole, Burundi is again at a crossroads. After years of patient diplomacy, first by Tanzania’s late President Julius Nyerere and latterly by former South African President Nelson Mandela, the country in early May reached the mid-way point in the life of a three-year transitional national government.

To mark that occasion, President Pierre Buyoya, an ethnic Tutsi, handed over the office he seized in a coup in 1996 to his Vice President, Domitien Ndayizeye, an ethnic

Hutu.

The two populations have competed for power virtually since national independence in 1962 and a peaceful transfer of power was a rare event. The future of the country and its six million population will now depend on the success of this latest attempt to forge a lasting peace.

Even during the transition, there have been mixed signals. Clashes between the Tutsi dominated army and two major Hutu rebel groups, the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) and the National Liberation Forces continued in parts of the country.

LARGEST REFUGEE POPULATION

Burundians comprise the largest single refugee population in Africa. Some 570,000 civilians are officially recognized refugees, the great bulk of them living in neighboring



On the move in Sudan.

ditional donors in the industrialized world.

Some critics charge humanitarian agencies themselves have contributed to Africa's funding problems by anticipating what donors are prepared to offer rather than realistically assessing actual needs on the ground—effectively self-censoring requirements.

That may be a good, levelheaded business approach. A massive and 'unreasonable' increase in demand for 'regular' African funding from levels the lenders have come to expect, might have the opposite effect and could conceivably trigger a backlash affecting other global programs.

But three years ago, Julia Taft, then the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, effectively America's top refugee official, told REFUGEES: "The dichotomy of how refugees were treated in say, Guinea, versus how those from Kosovo were treated, was totally unacceptable for all of us; unacceptable to spend less than \$20 million on 500,000 refugees from Sierra Leone and then ask for \$240 million for an equivalent number of refugees in Kosovo. It is not fair and it is not right."

Taft then outlined an approach Washington has urged ever since in funding discussions on Africa: "If necessary, the donors should be the bad guys—UNHCR ought to tell us what is really needed and force the donors to say 'We can't afford that' rather than settling on the standard to what you think donors will be willing to give."

Despite that rejoinder, little has changed and overall funding levels have continued to shrink. Regional offices throughout the world are forced to fight and barter for every scarce dollar available in a bruising annual process. One recent arrival in West Africa, unused to this cut and thrust, came away from his first budget session literally shellshocked. "The field office originally had targeted around \$185 for every displaced person to be helped," he recalled. "This was cut

down to \$70. Eventually we settled on something in between. I felt I was in a bazaar in Istanbul bargaining for a carpet rather than trying to save people's lives."

HOPE AND DESPAIR

West Africa is a microcosm of both the hope and despair gripping the entire continent. It offers a warning that things in even the most seemingly stable of societies can quickly spin out of control or conversely, that with the right help, countries can be patched back together again.

In 1998 a village tailor and father of seven children called Alie K. was captured by rebels in Sierra Leone and in a gruesome ritual which became commonplace in a decade-long civil war, the guerrillas slashed off his left hand. "Three of them did it, one pointing a gun, the others cutting," Alie said. They also slashed his right hand and whipped him before he fled into the bush. Because of profuse bleeding, "I ripped away the rest of my left hand and threw it away because I could not hold it together while running," he said.

Such atrocities became commonplace, but today, in a remarkable turnabout, Sierra Leone is enjoying a fragile recovery after a 10-year-long civil war ended in 2002. A civilian government has been elected, the police and military are being rebuilt, some 14,000 United Nations troops help to keep the peace. UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies have assisted more than 220,000 refugees and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons return home in the last two years, including around 26,000 refugees thus far in 2003.

A so-called 4Rs pilot project was launched. High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers described the 4Rs initiative as an attempt to create a 'seamless' flow of assistance from governments, humanitarian and development agencies during the four major phases of a refugee return—repatriation, reintegration, rehabili- ▶

TWO MILLION PEOPLE DIED FROM HIV/AIDS IN 2001. ANOTHER EIGHT MILLION SUCCUMBED TO OTHER EASILY TREATABLE AILMENTS. AT THAT RATE THE POPULATION OF A MODESTLY SIZED EUROPEAN COUNTRY WOULD BE WIPED OUT IN LESS THAN A DECADE.



© S. SALGADO/IRE

UNHCR HAS APPROVED A MINIMUM STANDARD OF ASSISTANCE EVERY REFUGEE SHOULD RECEIVE BUT EVEN THOSE BASIC BENCHMARKS COVERING SUCH NECESSITIES AS FOOD, WATER AND SHELTER ARE REGULARLY BREACHED IN AFRICA.

tation and reconstruction. Some earlier refugee operations were blighted by breakdowns in the chain of aid, creating an infamous ‘gap’ in assistance and threatening to undermine the entire peace process and create new waves of refugees.

As UNHCR phases out its own participation in Sierra Leone by 2005, having spent between \$80 and \$100 million there, development agencies such as the World Bank will take over, accelerating long-term reconstruction of increasing numbers of schools, clinics and other infrastructure.

Sierra Leone recently opened a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, similar to the panel South Africa created to help that country overcome the trauma and crimes of the apartheid era. President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah said this commission would offer “a therapeutic contribution to the peace process, the healing of trauma and the removal of the emotional scars of the armed conflict.”

The first witness, Tamba Finnoh, described how he had been abducted and had his right arm severed, but then added, “I have put everything behind me and I am ready to forgive.”

ULTIMATE NIGHTMARE

In comparison, 26-year-old Abigail is continuing to live the ultimate refugee nightmare, a symbol of just how quickly things can go wrong in the most unlikely of places.

Since the age of 13, she has been constantly on the run, seeking a safe place to live. That refuge, however, has eluded her and she just keeps bumping into Africa’s latest war.

As a teenager she fled Liberia in 1990 as that country plunged into its latest round of civil war. She trekked on foot along the disease-ridden coastline of the Guinea Gulf and eventually reached the capital of neighboring Côte d’Ivoire. A decade ago, Abidjan was the epitome of the post-colonial African dream, a city of gleaming office towers, sophisticated French restaurants, dapper diplomats, thriving business and black Africa’s only iceskating rink overlooking ancient mangrove swamps.

Liberian refugees and hundreds of thousands of guest workers from neighboring states fueled the economic expansion but lived in somewhat less salubrious circumstances, in a chain of Abidjan slums.

Abigail managed to complete her education and became a teacher in the town of Tabou, near the border of the two countries, but late last year the Ivorian dream, which had been slowly unravelling for several years, imploded into civil war between the government and military rebels.

The unthinkable happened. Panic-stricken Liberian refugees, Ivorian citizens and guest workers fled the country, nearly 100,000 of them to Liberia, itself still in the grip of that same conflict Abigail had fled 13 years earlier. The Liberian teacher was again among the civilian flood tide on the move, undertaking what the New York Times called a journey from “one bank of hell to another... a darkly absurd and what may prove to be an ultimately futile voyage for safety.”

And so it turned out for Abigail. A UNHCR protection unit spot-checking the border region recently came across her at a checkpoint inside Côte d’Ivoire.

“I knew the horror that I was returning to in



UNHCR/R. CHALASANI/CS/YUG-2001

Refugee conditions can be very different in Africa compared with Europe.

Liberia,” she said quietly sitting beside an ancient bus with 26 other passengers as nervous but belligerent Ivorian soldiers poked through their belongings and debated her immediate fate. “My father and most of my family were killed in the last few years,” she said. “But the radio said things were quiet in Liberia, better than here” where all Liberians increasingly were being labelled as rebels or dope smugglers.

She walked for two days in Liberia to reach the village where her mother lived, but the war there was steadily engulfing eastern as well as western parts of

the country. “There was no food. There was no law and order,” she said. “Men with guns took anything they wanted. The whole country was in a panic.”

For a second time she decided to do the unthinkable—escape from one war for the ‘safety’ of another, retracing her steps once again. Carrying one small nylon bag containing two sets of clothing and a few cosmetics, she again walked to the frontier, crossed and hitched the bus to her old ‘home’ in the coastal town of Tabou before the soldiers stopped her.

Having escaped possible death, she now faced the prospect of rape. One of the soldiers took away her refugee identity card and said he might return it the next morning—but only if she slept with him.

“I will do it,” the woman, single, attractive and totally vulnerable to such coercion, told UNHCR protection officer Chiara Cardoletti. “What is one night of misery compared with a whole life of degradation?”

Negotiations, phone calls, threats and bluster. Abigail was eventually released unharmed. A small but important protection victory was achieved amid widespread misery and suffering.

CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

Panos Moutziz, a veteran of earlier refugee emer-

Africa’s worst war

It may be ‘mission impossible’ to help all the uprooted civilians in the heart of the continent

A brightly colored United Nations map tells the story of the Congo. It is a crazy patchwork of yellows, greens, blues, pinks and even soft pinks and is a vivid representation of the reality on the ground—areas controlled by the government and various rebel splinter groups. A diagonal slash—a so-called demilitarized zone—divides the territory officially known as the Democratic Republic of Congo which has been riven by war for nearly five years.

The Washington based International Rescue Committee recently put a price tag on the conflict: an estimated 3.3 million people perished in a war which at times sucked in six armies from surrounding countries in what the advocacy group called “the deadliest documented conflict in African history.”

But like many of Africa’s long-running wars, and despite being among the most deadly in recent history, this one, too, was largely ig-

nored in the world at large as the bloodletting continued unabated.

The combatants have now signed a series of peace pacts, most foreign troops withdrew and the United Nations dispatched a tiny 4,300 garrison to reinforce the fragile peace.

THE HUMAN COST

Some two million Congolese civilians were internally uprooted in the latest conflagration and another 400,000 left the country entirely, seeking sanctuary in surrounding countries.

But some of those ‘host’ nations were also in a state of war. In a tragic cross fertilization of misery, 330,000 civilians from Angola, Uganda, the neighboring Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and the Central African Republic made the trek into Democratic Congo—searching for assistance in a country so many others were trying to leave.

On the humanitarian front, UNHCR established a network of 10 offices across Demo-

cratic Congo. Field staff there and colleagues in surrounding states were charged with trying to assist all the hapless civilians repeatedly criss-crossing each others tracks and national frontiers and eventually returning the majority to their home villages.

Clumps of refugees are spread across tens of thousands of square miles of often impenetrable rain forest and savannah grassland. There are virtually no roads, basic security is often nonexistent and periodic massacres continue. Nearly nine years after they first retreated into these forests, the remnants of an army of Rwandan refugees who escaped that country’s genocide, are still emerging every week from the eerie heart of the continent.

A major operation to repatriate thousands of Angolans is getting underway this year, but in the face of such enormous difficulties, the overall humanitarian rescue mission for many refugees could turn out to be a ‘mission impossible.’ ■

Crossing the border

A wall of fear and major consequences for millions of people

It is the last and most difficult obstacle between fear and chaos and possible salvation. Every one of the more than 50 million refugees UNHCR has helped since 1951 has undergone the ordeal. Untold numbers of others have tried and failed.

The immense tide of 'normal' global travelers and tourists who cross frontiers each day with minimal inconvenience have little sense of the immense barrier of worry fraught with unimaginable consequences the same process presents to the would-be refugee. A negative response may mean renewed persecution, starvation or even death in the country they are trying to escape; a 'yes' the chance of refuge and a new start to life.

Today, fleeing civilians may traverse borders in gleaming aircraft, sleek trains, by car or by truck. Human traffickers have turned the business of transporting people on the run into a multi-billion dollar enterprise straddling the globe.

Africans often take the old fashioned route, walking or hitching rides on ramshackle buses for days to reach a crossing—a small hut with a single pole slung across the road, or a forbidding natural river barrier—where they can be greeted with remarkable friendship or subject to an official gauntlet of interminable delay and financial and sexual harassment.

They move in small groups or, as in the case of the exodus from Rwanda in 1994, flooding into then eastern Zaire, hundreds of thousands each day for several days.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Nero is a nondescript border point on the Cavally River between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, several hours off the main tarmac road through a maze of oil palm plantations and rain forest. It is a difficult place to find even when someone is looking for it. A bamboo flag pole, an open-sided lean-to and a reception area of beaten earth mark the spot. One hundred meters across the sluggish river, the Liberian flag hangs limply in the heat.

Several months ago, tens of thousands of Liberians, Ivoirians and guest workers fled the chaos enveloping Côte d'Ivoire for the equally dangerous territory of Liberia. Caught in the



Shakedown at the Ivorian border.

middle of two wars, some are now beginning to return.

The situation is confused. One Ivorian said the border was sealed; another said it was open. 'Officialdom' is represented by several unsavory Young Patriots, a government militia thrown together to man road and river barricades. They are armed with ancient rifles, machetes and knives. One wears a woman's black evening gown.

Liberian representatives use a dugout canoe to cross the 100 meter barrier to discuss the situation. The Liberian side is also closed though 50-60 civilians are gathered there, fleeing a war edging closer to the frontier each day. They may have no alternative but to return to the conflict.

Edward Moore, the Liberian Collector of Customs explains in perfect English: "We have had instructions that no one can cross." But then he adds, "But we will let them go. We

must honor the 1951 Geneva Convention."

A passing UNHCR group is delighted to discover support for the Refugee Convention in such an unlikely place, even if it may be just a calculated gesture to the visitors.

CUTOFF

Life can be tough, not just for the refugees, but also for the locals here. Moore has not seen or heard from his family in Monrovia, the cutoff and distant Liberian capital, for two years. He has been paid only fitfully. He is eager to talk to strangers. "Why are we Africans killing each other all the time?" he asks. "There should be peace here. We are from the same tribe. But they are killing each other in Iraq, too," he adds.

The refugees begin to cross, eight to a single dugout canoe, their few remaining possessions piled high around them. A 'dash' (bribe) here and there, a huge fare for the dugout canoe is common to speed the process.

One woman has delivered a baby in the bush and her five-year-old sister cradles the newly born girl. Another woman has walked for five days with her daughter to reach this spot. The four-year-old youngster is named Promise.

And now the ritual humiliation. The Patriots, enjoying their unaccustomed power, simply tip the arrivals belongings onto the ground. The cross-dresser in the black evening gown is particularly vigorous. 'Suspicious' items such as radios and torches are examined minutely. A few things are confiscated and thrown into a pile. Civilians are interrogated.

They have virtually no money left, little food, few possessions and once they move inland will again face the hostility of Ivoirians who have seen their own country pulled apart.

Despite that, the crossing has been relatively benign; completed in one day and everyone allowed to enter.

Now, from somewhere deep in the bush they must find a bus... or start walking again. ■

gencies including the aftermath of the first Gulf War, Somalia and Africa's Great Lakes crisis in the mid-1990s, had been looking forward to his transfer to Abidjan as something different in the refugee experience. "I had such a positive feeling. For once, amidst so much misery, this would be a happy project."

Along the coast in Tabou, the new head of that office, Anne Dolan, another old hand at 'normal' refugee emergencies, had that same hope.

"Surprise, surprise," Dolan said later.

At one point, Côte d'Ivoire hosted some 200,000 Liberian refugees. Many had been welcomed "as brothers and sisters in distress" by the country's founding father, President Felix Houphouët-Boigny and had integrated into local communities. There was only one small refugee camp called Niela for around 3,000 people.

In such a seemingly benign atmosphere, Moutzis and Dolan expected to concentrate on projects to promote integration, education and self-help "something really positive and more satisfying than seeing so much suffering and death all the time in other crises."

In the capital, on the night of September 18-19 last year, Moutzis woke to the rattle of gunfire—the start of a conflict which sent the once stable country into a tailspin and change the lives of not only the refugees sheltering there, but also many tens of thousands of locals and guest workers from surrounding countries.

"Virtually overnight, there was a 180-degree turn in UNHCR operations," Moutzis said. "Building schools, clinics, infrastructure, helping refugees to continue to integrate was out. We moved into normal emergency mode—trying to provide people with a safe place to stay, getting them out of dangerous situations. Xenophobia and nationalism destroyed the brotherhood and good neighborliness."

As Dolan helped a sad procession of people to cross into Liberia she recalled: "Everyone was faced with this awful dilemma. 'Should I stay here where I might well be killed, or should I go to Liberia where I might also be killed, but maybe less quickly?' It was so dreadful to watch."

In April, some of the civilians who fled to Liberia began to return. With virtually no aid officials present in eastern Liberia, UNHCR monitored the common border, providing assistance where it could, trying to help several thousand refugees move into several hastily established transit centers for their own safety, asking neighboring countries to take some of the threatened Liberians. There were few offers.

"It is a sad reality that what might take decades to build up can be destroyed almost overnight," Moutzis said.

ROGUE ELEPHANT

Long suffering Liberian refugees have become



UNHCR protection officers interview fleeing Liberian refugees.

pariahs in neighboring states, branded as trouble makers or worse—rebels, gun runners, drug dealers. Conditions inside the country, sandwiched between the hope of Sierra Leone and despair of Côte d'Ivoire, have continued to deteriorate.

On a recent visit High Commissioner Lubbers said flatly: "The picture is pretty clear: it's a disaster" and he went on to accuse the Liberian government of "killing your own people." One senior aid official described Liberia as the 'rogue elephant' of West Africa, a country at war with itself since 1989, but also exporting chaos and anarchy to its neighbors like a 'cancer.'

Much of the country is now off limits. Aid workers withdrew from eastern Liberia following the brutal murder of three officials from the American Adventist group ADRA earlier this year. In a general state of anarchy several weeks later, just across the border in Côte d'Ivoire, four local Red Cross workers were also deliberately killed.

The World Food Program reduced food rations to recipients for April and May. By spring, wary donors had provided just two percent of the \$42.6 million funding requested in a U.N. humanitarian appeal for this year.

At a high-level strategy meeting in Geneva, humanitarian officials debated the possible options available to help Liberia's stricken civilian population: establish safe corridors for aid convoys; air-drops; physical safe havens; an international peace force; cross-border operations. Each was examined and put aside as unworkable without a political solution also being implemented.

THE FIRST CONTACT

UNHCR began operations in 1951, principally to help refugees in Europe in the aftermath of World War II, but several years later, the agency began its long association with Africa. On 31 May 1957, the then Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Bourguiba asked UNHCR to "examine the way in which the High Commissioner will be able to help my govern- ►

WEST AFRICA IS A MICROCOSM OF BOTH THE HOPE AND DESPAIR GRIPPING THE CONTINENT. IT OFFERS A WARNING THAT THINGS IN EVEN THE MOST STABLE OF SOCIETIES CAN QUICKLY SPIN OUT OF CONTROL OR, CONVERSELY, COUNTRIES CAN BE PATCHED TOGETHER AGAIN.



A massive refugee camp for Rwandans in Tanzania.

ment resolve the problem of Algerian refugees” who were fleeing to neighboring states from that country’s war of independence against France.

The agency responded and during the same crisis it became involved for the first time in so-called post-conflict situations—helping former refugees once they had returned home. “The fate of repatriated ex-refugees can no longer be disassociated from that of the Algerian population as a whole without seriously endangering the country’s social stability,” High Commissioner Felix Schnyder wrote at the time, establishing an important benchmark for UNHCR’s future protection work.

In 1969, Africa made another important contribution towards overall refugee protection when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted its own convention which, for the first time extended refugee recognition to people fleeing in large groups and escaping such things as external aggression, occupation or foreign domination. It included the now universally accepted principle of ‘voluntary’ repatriation.

During those early, post-colonial days, many civilians seeking safety in African countries simply moved into established communities—in official parlance they became locally integrated.

In succeeding decades, however, this pattern changed and more and more refugees were housed in sprawling camps—sparking lively and often acrimonious debate among governments and humanitarians about who was responsible for spreading this ‘camp culture’ and the advantages or disadvantages of the system.

Jeff Crisp of UNHCR’s evaluation unit traced the beginning of a ‘deteriorating climate’ towards refugees and their increasing incarceration in camps to the mid-1980s. Western countries had, he said, begun to toughen their legislation towards asylum seekers, encouraging African countries to follow suit; refugee numbers increased dramatically at the same time as African economies deteriorated; and conversely the spread of democracy allowed an increasing number of politicians to use refugee issues as political footballs.

Today, an estimated 2.4 million people live in 267 camps worldwide, 170 of these sites being in Africa.

Images of tents and huts sprawling seemingly forever across the African landscape have become synonymous with the plight of refugees and video footage has dramatically captured the often squalid conditions of tens or hundreds of thousands of people packed tightly together, spawning disease and crime, damaging the local environment and becoming natural recruiting centers or hiding places for bands of armed militias.

Increasingly, however, African governments who are ultimately responsible for deciding where refugees should be located, decided that for security reasons, to protect the interest of local communities threatened by a large influx and to more easily ‘show case’ large concentrations of refugees to visiting journalists and politicians in a search for international funding, camps were the preferred option despite their obvious drawbacks.

According to Jeff Crisp these camps can have other useful purposes. Some refugees may prefer to integrate locally if their new neighbors are from the same ethnic background. But they may cling to camps for safety reasons if they find themselves in a different ethnic environment. Too, the compounds may serve as the safety net component of a larger survival strate-

“IT IS A SAD REALITY THAT WHAT MIGHT TAKE DECADES TO BUILD UP CAN BE DESTROYED ALMOST OVERNIGHT.”

Hope replaces ‘misery and desperation’

Angola contemplates a brighter future, but will need help for a long time.

“**T**his is the nightmare. The dead already number in the hundreds of thousands, the mutilated more than 100,000 and the displaced well into the millions. Because of the killings, kidnaps, land mines and disease it is the worst place in the world for children to grow up in, and should they survive, they will inherit a vast plain of scorched earth.”

That was the assessment four years ago of Catherine Bertini, then head of the World Food Program, talking of Angola.

Earlier this year, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a report on the same country, concluded that “Angolans can live without fear of a recurrent and devastating war.”

Three decades of murderous civil conflict effectively ended in April last year following the death of Jonas Savimbi, the head of the

country’s rebel movement, UNITA, and Angola has undergone a remarkable transformation.

The shooting stopped, fighters were demobilized, as many as 1.5 million of the country’s four million persons displaced within the country returned home ‘spontaneously’, as did around 100,000 of some 470,600 refugees who were living in surrounding countries.



© S. SALGADO/ALGO

gy—younger and stronger refugees venture further afield to seek work while women and children remain in a camp where they are assured a degree of safety and at least minimum humanitarian supplies.

To try to balance conflicting interests, humanitarian groups such as UNHCR developed a range of more flexible programs. Increasing attention has been paid to assisting both refugee and local communities in the construction of schools, clinics or roads.

While camps will always be necessary in some circumstances, the refugee agency has encouraged expanded local integration whenever possible. In Zambia, for instance, one recently launched project will assist some of the 247,000 refugees in that country to

establish themselves in nearby villages and towns, find jobs and, hopefully, become productive members of Zambian society.

Iraq, and Afghanistan before it, suggested that the international community focuses on one major crisis at a time. Africa, however, remains in permanent crisis and UNHCR's David Lambo worried that "We are fighting for space on the world stage. But we cannot give up on Africa."

For his part, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers insisted he would continue to "raise the issue with developed countries that they must focus more on African refugees" whatever the situation in other parts of the world. ■

Education is the key to successful refugee reintegration.

An organized repatriation of other refugees gets underway this summer by UNHCR, which has opened several offices in border regions as partner agencies busily rehabilitated schools, clinics and water points in anticipation of an ongoing return.

DIFFICULT FUTURE

Encouraging though those developments have been, Angola faces a very difficult future.

Much of the country was off limits to the outside world during the conflict and when aid officials began investigating they found "a world of misery and desperation," according to UNHCR's Lucia Teoli. "A large part of the population was close to starvation," she

said. They often survived on berries and roots. "Many were found in the bush where they were born and where they grew up and many didn't even know the war had finished."

The country's entire infrastructure—roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, the environment—was destroyed, making it difficult and often impossible for people to return to their old villages and begin life again, and for humanitarian agencies to reach and help them. It remains one of the most booby-trapped countries in the world with unimaginable numbers of mines buried in the fertile earth.

Civilians face a jolting return home. Many have been dependent for years on food handouts, and it will be a difficult transition

to begin farming or work again, even if given the opportunity. Food supplies may begin appearing in marketplaces, but most people are too poor to buy anything. Schools may reopen but many children don't even speak Portuguese, the official language. Families have been split up and out of touch, often for decades. Malnutrition and early death from easily treatable diseases are huge.

Potentially rich though it may be in minerals and oil, faced with such overwhelming difficulties Angola will need international support for many years to complete the transition from war to stability, but it remains unclear whether such assistance will be forthcoming. ■

IRAQ: What happened?

The recent war did not produce a flood of refugees,

They were among the most anticipated crises in modern humanitarian history. Millions of refugees, were expected to flood across porous borders to escape the impending military onslaught.

Appeals for funds were launched. Emergency supplies were stockpiled amid predictions of catastrophe. Teams were dispatched to mountain and desert outposts.

The global media, which has become an integral part of all major crises, dispatched its own formidable legion of hundreds of reporters, photographers and cameramen to cover the unfolding dramas.

But first, on the borders of Afghanistan two years ago, and early this year with Iraq, the horizon remained largely empty and the anticipated flood tides of fleeing civilians were little more than a trickle. Aid officials waited. Journalists became frustrated that the action was passing them by.

So what happened?

Predicting refugee outflows is an inexact science at best. Planners review a situation, especially if war is likely, the history of the region, earlier civilian exoduses, reports from their own regional field offices and any government and military intelligence they can glean in reaching an assessment of how events may unfold and the assistance that will be needed.

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

It is a historical truism that the best laid

military plans rarely survive the first few days of any war. The same is true in trying to plan humanitarian crises. Surprise is the only non-surprise in any emergency.

At the beginning of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, not even the most sophisticated government intelligence agencies predicted that Serbian forces would deliberately empty the region of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians at the point of a gun. In those circumstances, even if humanitarian organizations had anticipated the ethnic cleansing—which they did not—they would have been powerless to mobilize major resources in the face of big power scepticism.

This time, there were conflicting conclusions. There were many solid reasons to plan for a major civilian exodus from Iraq once American-led forces began their assault. Several million Iraqis had abandoned the country in previous decades. Following the first Gulf War in 1991, an estimated two million people fled from their homes. In anticipation of this ‘medium case’ scenario, UNHCR drew up plans to assist as many as 600,000 refugees. At the same time, however, senior spokesman Ron Redmond publicly cautioned that, depending on developments in the war itself, few if any refugees might try to leave.

In the event, of course, few did. The International Institute for Strategic Studies in London said the nonappearance of refugees was tied directly to the tactics used

by the coalition forces: “It seems that the early allied military strategy of bypassing major cities, selective bombing of military targets and warnings to civilians to stay at home and off the main roads limited the number of civilians on the move.”

Sten Bronee, UNHCR’s Representative in Jordan said: “People had property and they didn’t want to leave. Fatigue set in. The conflict was *déjà vu* for the Iraqis.” And British journalist Jonathan Steele added: “People developed a nonchalance about the bombing. By the time water and power shortages began to hit, the fact that Saddam was already gone cancelled things out.”

THE FUTURE

Now what?

In reviewing events, Ron Redmond said: “It was imperative that we prepared the necessary programs based on unfolding events. We did that and were satisfied with our planning. We were not unhappy that hundreds of thousands of new refugees were not created, adding to the nearly 22 million people we are already trying to help around the world.”

In the aftermath of the short, American-led war in Afghanistan, UNHCR switched plans from dealing with a potential exodus, to helping long exiled refugees go the other way, back into the country. More than two million people returned the first year and that repatriation is ongoing.



What next?

but many longtime exiles may now go home

Though the international spotlight has been turned down somewhat on Iraq, the refugee agency is now putting some of the manpower, financial and stockpile resources already in place to similar uses in that country.

The situation inside Iraq remains uncertain. Fragile religious and ethnic tensions could yet spark a future civilian outflow, especially since the roads have become comparatively safe for civilian travel.

Stockpiled emergency items such as tents, stoves, cooking pots, blankets and plastic sheeting will remain in place for the time being and eventually will be used inside Iraq or elsewhere.

And there is now an ambitious new program to help not the anticipated new refugees created by the latest war, but as many as 500,000 of an untold number of Iraqis who had fled their country in earlier years, but who may now wish to go home and restart their lives there.

The budget for preliminary repatriation and reintegration is \$118 million over eight months, which would mean the agency working within the levels of the previous Iraq emergency budget of \$154 million.

Several million Iraqis probably left during Saddam Hussein's rule. Of those, the U.N. refugee agency estimated some 900,000 were asylum seekers, refugees or other civilians living in refugee-like situations. Preliminary estimates suggested

around one half of this group may need help in going home.

From the above group, Iran hosts half of the 400,000 Iraqi refugees living in places as far flung as Sri Lanka, South Africa and Argentina, and around 165,000 people from this group may eventually return.

A further 183,000 refugees are solidly integrated in industrialized nations and a small number, perhaps 35,000, may opt to go back to their ancestral homeland.

Of the 84,000 Iraqis currently seeking asylum, primarily in developed nations, some 60,000, are expected to repatriate.

Of the 450,000 Iraqis living in 'refugee-like' situations, primarily in Jordan and Syria where they work illegally, as many as 240,000 may return.

EXPANSION

To oversee this mass return, UNHCR plans to expand its current Middle East network, mobilizing 250 mostly Iraqi staff to open 15 offices around the country and man six mobile monitoring teams.

All returns will be screened to ensure that they are 'voluntary' and that the Iraqis are not harried or ousted from their host countries. A series of benchmarks are being established "to provide for the physical, material and legal safety and well-being of the returnees," Redmond said.

"This includes an end to violence and insecurity and the establishment of opera-

tional law enforcement institutions," the spokesman added. "Material safety includes access to basic services, things like potable water, food and health services.

"Over the longer term, we need to see measures to ensure sustainable reintegration. Legal safety includes the redress of human rights violations, non-discrimination and unhindered access to justice."

The returnees, like the population at large, will face a series of other daunting practical difficulties, ranging from an estimated eight million land mines strewn across the northern part of the country, to a barely functioning infrastructure and the large-scale destruction of public property records, citizenship papers and other important documentation.

Two-thirds of returning refugees are expected to go back to urban areas in central and southern Iraq and the others to rural areas, primarily ethnic Kurds to Iraq's three northern provinces.

Other unfinished humanitarian business includes the future of some thousands of civilians displaced within Iraq itself, so-called internally displaced persons.

UNHCR's mandate does not directly cover IDPs, but since their experience and situations are often similar to refugees, UNHCR has often helped both groups as it did in the Balkans.

It may do the same again in Iraq if called upon to do so by the United Nations. ■



A NEW MOTHER TERESA

An Italian doctor is honored for decades of lonely work to combat disease and prejudice in a forgotten corner of the world

by Kitty McKinsey

SHE HAS BRAVED BEATINGS, KIDNAPPING, BANDITRY AND DEATH THREATS TO WAGE A 33-YEAR-LONG ONE-WOMAN BATTLE AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS, AIDS, ILLITERACY, BLINDNESS AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.

A five-year-old boy, his hunchback spine testifying to his battle with tuberculosis, picks up his aluminum walking frame and determinedly weaves between the hospital beds just to show that he can. A 39-year-old woman whose arms and legs contracted into a fetal position a year ago, takes a few steps from her own metal bed to show that she has regained her health. The face of Marian Hassan Duale, a 60-year-old woman who was brought to hospital in a coma, lights up as she described the “miracle” of her own recovery.

Their ‘savior’ is a 60-year-old Italian doctor named Annalena Tonelli, who has braved beatings, kidnapping, banditry and death threats to wage a 33-year-long, one-woman battle against tuberculosis, AIDS, illiteracy, blindness, malnutrition and female genital mutilation in the middle of nowhere in the Horn of Africa.

In recognition of her lifelong and lonely crusade, Dr. Tonelli was recently awarded the 2003 Nansen Refugee Award, a prize created in 1954 to honor individuals or organizations that have distinguished themselves in work on behalf of refugees. The Award was named after Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian polar explorer and the world’s first High Commissioner for refugees and includes \$100,000 to be donated to a refugee project of the recipient’s choice.

Dr. Tonelli, Annalena to her patients and a new Mother Teresa to some visitors, works alone, personally raising the \$20,000 cash needed every month to fund medical projects and pay a staff of 75 at her hospital. She broke her vow to ‘stay hidden’ and avoid publicity to accept the Nansen Award in the hope it would refocus the international spotlight on the chronic problems of Somalia, long since overshadowed by other world hotspots.

GRUELING DAYS

A slim woman with grey hair pulled into a bun and covered modestly with a shawl in the manner of the local women, Dr. Tonelli has trained herself to sleep only four hours a night.

She begins her workday at 7 a.m. consulting with her foreign-trained Somali physicians. As she then makes her daily rounds, Dr. Tonelli chats with her pa-

tients in fluent Somali. Children call her ‘grandmother’ and snuggle close as she explains that these now thriving toddlers were brought in as severely malnourished babies, weighing—at six months old—less than a newborn should. She ends her rigorous routine in the early hours of the next day, writing letters of thanks to private benefactors.

Almost seven years ago she made her home in Borama, an arid town where a fierce wind funnels desert sand into tornado-like formations, a place with far more goats and camels than cars. Her hospital treats some 200 inpatients and another 200 outpatients. Eight of the wards were built for her by UNHCR, including the only two-storey building in town, still under construction.

She spurns the comfortable life and repeatedly emphasizes her lifelong passion to a visitor. “I am desperately in love with TB patients” she says at one point and adds later “I want to be poor up to the last day of my life.”

She lives simply, eating the same food—meat only twice a week, more often maize meal or rice and beans—that she feeds her patients. Her home has a television so that deaf children can watch videos in sign language, but she never watches it herself. She learned about the war in Iraq only from the Somali doctors on her staff.

The doctor owns just two modest caftans. Her sandals were given to her by a patient, and her headscarf was a gift from her staff. She feels her poverty is essential to breaking down walls between herself and the people she serves. “I would never be able to render service if I had clothes and furniture and all the things which are normal for our society,” she says.

INEVITABLE CLASH

But don’t talk to her about sacrifice—it’s a word that makes her laugh. A devout Roman Catholic, she says: “The word ‘sacrifice’ has no meaning in my life. I don’t hide it has been a very hard life in many senses, but it has been a life of joy, a life of happiness, gratification, a privilege.”

It’s the life she wanted from the age of five: “My longing, my yearning, my pining from the time I was so small was to serve people who are suffering.”



“Mother Teresa” and patient.

She has found plenty of them in her long years in Africa. Fresh out of law school at 26, she moved to northeastern Kenya to teach Somali nomads and it was there in 1970 that she became aware of the plight of people stricken with tuberculosis. She was touched not only by their physical suffering, but also by the emotional pain they underwent at being outcasts because of their disease, one that flourishes in conditions of poverty, overcrowding and malnutrition.

In addition to her law degree, she went on to earn diplomas in tropical medicine, community medicine, and control of tuberculosis and leprosy though she is

not a fully qualified physician.

In the 1970s, a new drug reduced TB treatment to six months, rather than 12 to 18, which had been standard before. Dr. Tonelli pioneered the “short-course” TB treatment in Africa, an approach that since has been adopted as a model by the World Health Organization (WHO). What makes her treatment so effective—she claims a cure rate of 96 percent—is that she forces many of the Somali nomads to live in her compound until they are truly cured. Outpatients are tracked diligently.

Since 1986, she has made her home in Somalia, first in the capital, Mogadishu, where she supplied food to thousands of starving residents, and later Merca, in southern Somalia, again treating tuberculosis patients. After being repeatedly beaten up, and kidnapped once, she fled; the woman doctor she trained to replace her was killed a year later. She then responded to a request by WHO to continue her fight against tuberculosis, this time in relatively peaceful Somaliland.

She expanded her activities, helping to treat and prevent HIV/AIDS, an opportunistic disease which preys on

weakened TB sufferers. She set up a school for deaf and disabled children and sponsors the visit twice a year of surgeons from a German charity who have restored the vision to 3,700 people suffering from cataracts. She is also passionate about the fight against female genital mutilation and says she has persuaded nearly all the traditional circumcision practitioners in Borama to give up the practice and join her campaign.

Even at 60, Dr. Tonelli shows no signs of slowing down. If she’s ever forced to leave Somalia, “I will help people who suffer somewhere else,” she says quietly. “The world is full of people who suffer.” ■

Sadrudin Aga Khan

FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER PRINCE SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN died in Boston in early May after a long illness. Prince Sadrudin, the uncle of Karim Aga Khan, spiritual leader of 12 million Ismaili Muslims, devoted his entire adult life to humanitarian work before his death at the age of 70. He became the youngest person ever to lead UNHCR when he became High Commissioner in 1966 at the age of 33, having served the previous three years as Deputy High Commissioner. He guided the refugee agency

for 12 years through one of its most turbulent periods. This included the 1971 Bangladesh crisis in which 10 million people were uprooted, the 1972 exodus of hundreds of thousands of Hutus from Burundi and the exodus of the Indochinese boat people in the mid-1970s.

After leaving UNHCR in 1977, he continued his humanitarian work on behalf of the U.N. in various parts of the world including Afghanistan and Iraq. He published several books and



Sadrudin Aga Khan, in 1974.

received international recognition including the French Légion d’honneur and the United Nations Human Rights Award.