

# 50s

## The Early years

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established by the United Nations General Assembly on 14 December 1950. Six months later, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was approved. The agency's first task was to help approximately one million refugees still displaced in the aftermath of World War II. In the following five decades, it helped approximately 50 million people restart their lives and won two Nobel Peace Prizes for its work. The new millennium, however, has brought fresh challenges.



UNHCR ARCHIVES

UNHCR was initially mandated to help mainly European refugees who remained homeless nearly five years after the end of the Second World War.



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The agency's first major emergency came when 200,000 Hungarians fled a Soviet crackdown in 1956, including these civilians who reached the safety of neighbouring Austria.



UNHCR / S. WRIGHT

UNHCR first became involved in Africa during the Algerian war of independence when tens of thousands fled to neighboring Tunisia and Morocco.

# 50 years of the executive committee



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1951

1951: With a small staff and an equally modest budget of \$300,000 annually, UNHCR begins work on 1 January 1951.



1954

UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

1959: The 1<sup>st</sup> session of the 25-member Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) convened from 26 to 30 January 1959 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Executive Committee in 1958 and the governing body formally came into existence on 1 January 1959. The newly-formed Committee succeeded the former UN Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee established in 1955, and its predecessor, the UNHCR Advisory Committee established in 1951. The 2<sup>nd</sup> session of ExCom was also held in 1959 from 6 to 9 October.



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1959

1960

\$ 300,000

\$ 2,994,108

\$ 3,436,174

\$ 13,084,344

\$ 8,224,924

\$ 6,679,141

\$ 16,045,974

UNHCR EXPENDITURES

# 60s

## Shift from Europe

With the end of colonial rule, UNHCR's focus in the 1960s moved away from Europe. The need to help Rwandan refugees was the organization's first exposure to problems in the Great Lakes region that remain unresolved until today. By the close of the decade, two-thirds of UNHCR's programme spending was in Africa.



UNHCR / W. MCGLOY

In the early 1960s Rwandan refugees were the focus of UNHCR's activities, as they would again become three decades later.



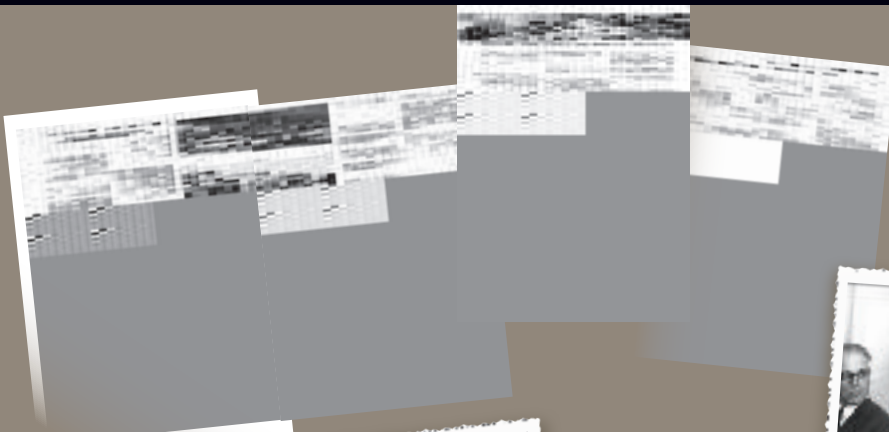
UNHCR / 88 / 196 / B. WHITNEY



UNHCR / 316 / S. WRIGHT / 1961

With the end of the Algerian war of independence, UNHCR assisted refugees to return from neighbouring Tunisia.

Some of the 203,000 Hungarians who fled the Soviet crushing of their 1956 uprising remained in Austria in the 1960s. UNHCR-funded housing projects improved living conditions for them.



1965: The 14<sup>th</sup> session of ExCom in October was held in Rome, at the invitation of the Government of Italy.



UNHCR PHOTO / 1966

1966: ExCom held its 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> plenary sessions at the Palais des Nations. By this time, the Executive Committee had 30 members.



UNHCR PHOTO / 1966

1960

1960: The Executive Committee met twice: the 3<sup>rd</sup> session was convened in April and the 4<sup>th</sup> session in October.

1965

1966

1970



\$ 16,045,974

UNHCR EXPENDITURES

\$ 12,608,437

# 70s

## The crisis spreads

As colonial empires crumbled in Africa, unrest and refugee crises spread throughout the continent. The contagion spread to Asia where an estimated 10 million people fled to India from troubles in East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). UNHCR expanded both the size and sophistication of its own operations to meet the challenge.



Six million Afghans fled their homeland starting in the late 1970s. Many parts of the country, including the capital, Kabul, were virtually destroyed in the fighting.



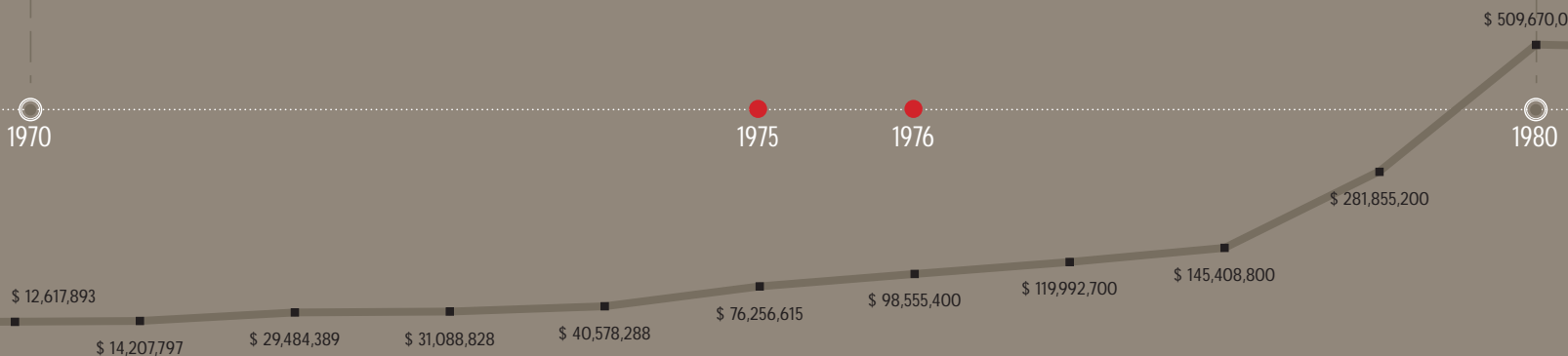
The exodus on the Indian subcontinent in the early 1970s was the largest single flight of civilians in modern history. The UN refugee agency subsequently organized a massive airlift to transport some of the refugees home.



1975: View of the podium at the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee at the Palais des Nations.



1976: Discussions at the podium during ExCom's 27<sup>th</sup> plenary session in Geneva.



# 80s

## The Cold War

Superpower cold war rivalries spawned their own crises during the 1970s and 1980s. In the wake of the conflict in Indochina, an estimated three million people fled the region. Two million persons were uprooted in Central America in a series of ideologically-inspired wars. In addition to its other problems, the Horn of Africa was hit by one of the worst droughts in history.



UNHCR used its mandate flexibly when it classed the survivors of one of the world's worst recorded droughts in the Horn of Africa as refugees, reasoning they had fled because of political actions rather than being merely victims of a natural disaster.

Some 2.5 million Indochinese who survived piracy, torture and incarceration eventually restarted their lives in new countries. A half million other persons who fled eventually went back to their old homes.



S. SALGADO



UNHCR / M. WAPPELHEIM

During a vicious cycle of repression pitting right-wing regimes against left-wing insurgent movements, innocent civilians including this Guatemalan woman, became the main victims.

1981: UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for carrying out work of major importance to assist refugees. This was the second Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Office, the previous award having been made in 1954. High Commissioner Poul Hartling accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the Office as well as refugees across the world.



UNHCR / A. DIAMOND / 1981



UNHCR / E. KRUSSET / 1987

1987: The Secretary of ExCom's 38<sup>th</sup> session was Sergio Vieira De Mello, who lost his life along with other United Nations colleagues in the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad on 19 August 2003.

09,670,000

\$ 487,840,000

\$ 420,172,000

\$ 411,597,000

\$ 459,431,200

\$ 473,945,000

\$ 457,469,000

\$ 479,337,000

\$ 565,070,000

\$ 587,397,000

1980

1981

1982

1983

1987



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1982

1982: The 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the Executive Committee was held in Geneva. Membership had reached 41.



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1983

1983: The current Assistant High Commissioner-Protection, Ms. Erika Feller, was Rapporteur of ExCom's 34<sup>th</sup> session.

# 90s

## The turbulent 1990s

Major emergencies followed one after the other in the 1990s—the aftermath of the Gulf war, the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc, the crisis in Africa's Great Lakes region. The number of people 'of concern' to UNHCR reached a record 27 million in 1995 and the formerly tiny agency operated with a staff of more than 5,000 in every area of the world.



© S. SALGADO

Nearly one million people fled or were forcibly evicted from the province of Kosovo in 1999, but within months the great majority had returned home after the intervention of NATO and other forces.



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The 1994 genocide in Rwanda produced a second human catastrophe when more than two million people fled to neighbouring countries.



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Hundreds of thousands of Kurds were trapped in northern Iraq in the wake of the Gulf war. Relief agencies had to work more closely than they had ever done before with allied military units to help these civilian victims.



UNHCR / T. BOBSTAD

Conflict and upheaval continued to grip many regions of the former Soviet Union throughout the decade and millions of people were uprooted, including these displaced civilians from the Russian republic of Chechnya who sought shelter in neighbouring Ingushetia.

1997: Pensive delegations at the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee consider some of the many challenges facing UNHCR.



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1997

1990: By ExCom's 41<sup>st</sup> session, membership had grown to 43.



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1990



UNHCR / A. HOPPER / 2000

2000: At its 50<sup>th</sup> session, the Executive Committee considered the Secretary-General's report on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. This year...



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1995

1995: The Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim addressed the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee as testimony of the close cooperation between the OAU and UNHCR.

1999: High Commissioner Sadako Ogata opened the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee, which by then numbered 54 members.



UNHCR / A. HOLLMANN / 1999

# 2000s

## End of 20<sup>th</sup> Century

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended the nature of many crises had changed to internal conflicts, which were often more violent and prolonged than earlier conventional wars. Humanitarian work became more



Sudanese refugees who fled from Darfur to Chad were forced from their temporary shelters as rain water flooded wadis along the Sudan-Chad border. They were moved to a new camp.



complex and dangerous as aid officials increasingly worked on the frontlines and tried to help not only refugees but other groups including persons internally displaced within their own countries. One thing remained constant... the joy of reaching safety or returning home.



After decades in exile, Afghan refugees were finally able to go home in 2002. During the first six months of the repatriation, more than 1.2 million Afghans returned to their homeland from Pakistan, more than three times the expected number.

## Challenges for New Millennium

In this new century, UNHCR has faced familiar challenges helping refugees fleeing conflict in places like Somalia and Sudan, or managing the mass repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan and Angola. But as the Office approaches its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010, UNHCR faces potential new challenges of displacement related to climate change.



In September 2009, Somali refugees continue to arrive at an overwhelming rate of 6,400 a month, adding more pressure on the already overstretched facilities and resources in Dadaab camps in northern Kenya, which currently host three times the population they were designed to hold.

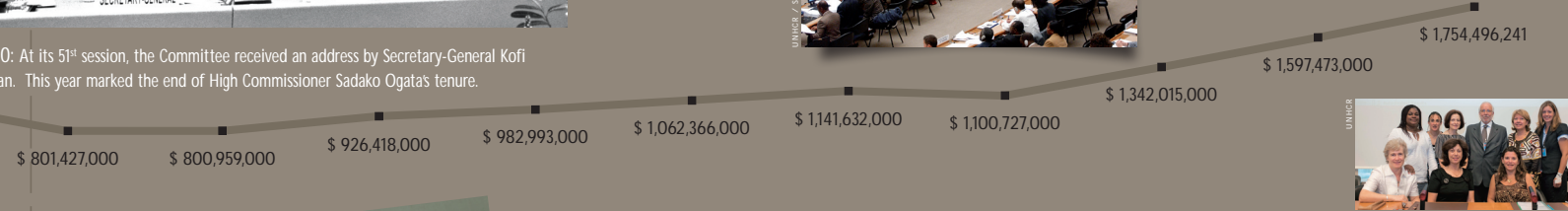


2000: At its 51<sup>st</sup> session, the Committee received an address by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. This year marked the end of High Commissioner Sadako Ogata's tenure.

2006: By the 57<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Executive Committee, membership had grown to 70.



2008: High Commissioner António Guterres with the Chairperson and Secretary of the Executive Committee and members of UNHCR's Executive Office at the close of the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee in October 2008.



2000



2004: High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers and members of UNHCR's Executive Office at the close of the 55<sup>th</sup> plenary session.

2004

2005

2006

2008

2009



2005: At the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the now 66-member Executive Committee, Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed the Committee as a guest speaker.

2009: The Chairperson, Secretary and Secretariat of the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Committee.