

REFUGEES

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Starting a new life

THE Americas



The Hemisphere's worst crisis



The debate over asylum in the U.S. and Canada



UNHCR
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees

Asylum, resettlement and money...

In the last quarter century more than two million refugees were resettled in the United States. Canada was equally welcoming in proportion to the size of its population. The North American neighbors are two of around a dozen countries worldwide which regularly accept refugees through organized and well financed resettlement programs.

Washington and Ottawa are also important global humanitarian players. They help underwrite the operations of agencies such as UNHCR, shape refugee policies and provide personnel and logistical expertise, including military backup if necessary, during major crises. These are admirable achievements. But for years there has also been heated domestic

debate in both countries, not only on resettlement and global problems, but also about domestic asylum policies. In a package of stories, REFUGEES spotlights some of these issues.

Critics agree, for instance, that the resettlement programs are generous as far as they go—but insist greater numbers of refugees could be invited each year and those with the most urgent need of

protection should be the first to come. The United States and Canada are addressing some of these problems.

Asylum procedures are often dominated by concerns about 'enforcement' rather than 'protection', according to refugee advocates, and some applicants can relate horror stories either about the conditions in which they are detained or peculiar vagaries of immigration policy. The United States said there is

a comprehensive safety net in place and very few genuine applicants fall 'through the cracks.' Canada's parliament is currently debating a new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which, the government has said, will offer asylum applicants greater protection.

Internationally, Canada has made itself the advocate of civilians caught up in conflict situations, and has promoted high-level dialogue on human security issues. The United States is at the center of a debate on how the humanitarian community can best help millions of internally displaced persons who currently enjoy little assistance or legal protection. Washington's U.N. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke has suggested funds could be found once a new, effective system is in place to aid these dispossessed people. In an interview with REFUGEES (pages 16-17) Assistant Secretary of State Julia Taft also deplored the wide discrepancy in the amount of support refugees from Kosovo received last year in comparison to refugees in, for example, Guinea. She suggested that agencies such as UNHCR should demand from donor countries 'realistic' amounts of aid to fund less popular emergencies, rather than asking for the lesser amounts the agencies think countries will actually pay—making the donors 'bad guys' if they refuse.

The refugees in Guinea and other parts of Africa will need all the help they can get. Only a few months ago UNHCR prepared contingency plans to help return several hundred thousand Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea. Across the continent, a program was prepared to help 160,000 long-term refugees in Sudan go back to neighboring Eritrea. Instead, hundreds of thousands of additional civilians were displaced by renewed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and Guinea braced for the arrival of even more refugees, as Sierra Leone underwent a new bout of nationwide anarchy.

To borrow a phrase, a few weeks is a long time in the refugee business.

UNHCR / H.J. DAVIES



People fleeing the Rwandan genocide cross into neighboring Zaire in 1994. After some optimism that the continent's fortunes were improving, Africa is again faced with widespread conflict and renewed flight of huge numbers of people.



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Cover photos: (clockwise) A newly arrived resettlement family from Sierra Leone at their new Toronto home (PHOTO: TORONTO STAR/K. FAUGHT). A Chinese asylum seeker at Krome detention center in Miami (PHOTO: UNHCR/B. PRESS). Paramilitary forces on patrol in Colombia's Bolivar state (PHOTO: AP/R. MAZALAN). The United States air force takes part in Operation Provide Promise for Bosnians during the Balkan conflict (PHOTO: UNHCR/A. HOLLMANN). U.S. Coast Guards intercept a boatload of Haitians (PHOTO: U.S. COAST GUARD).

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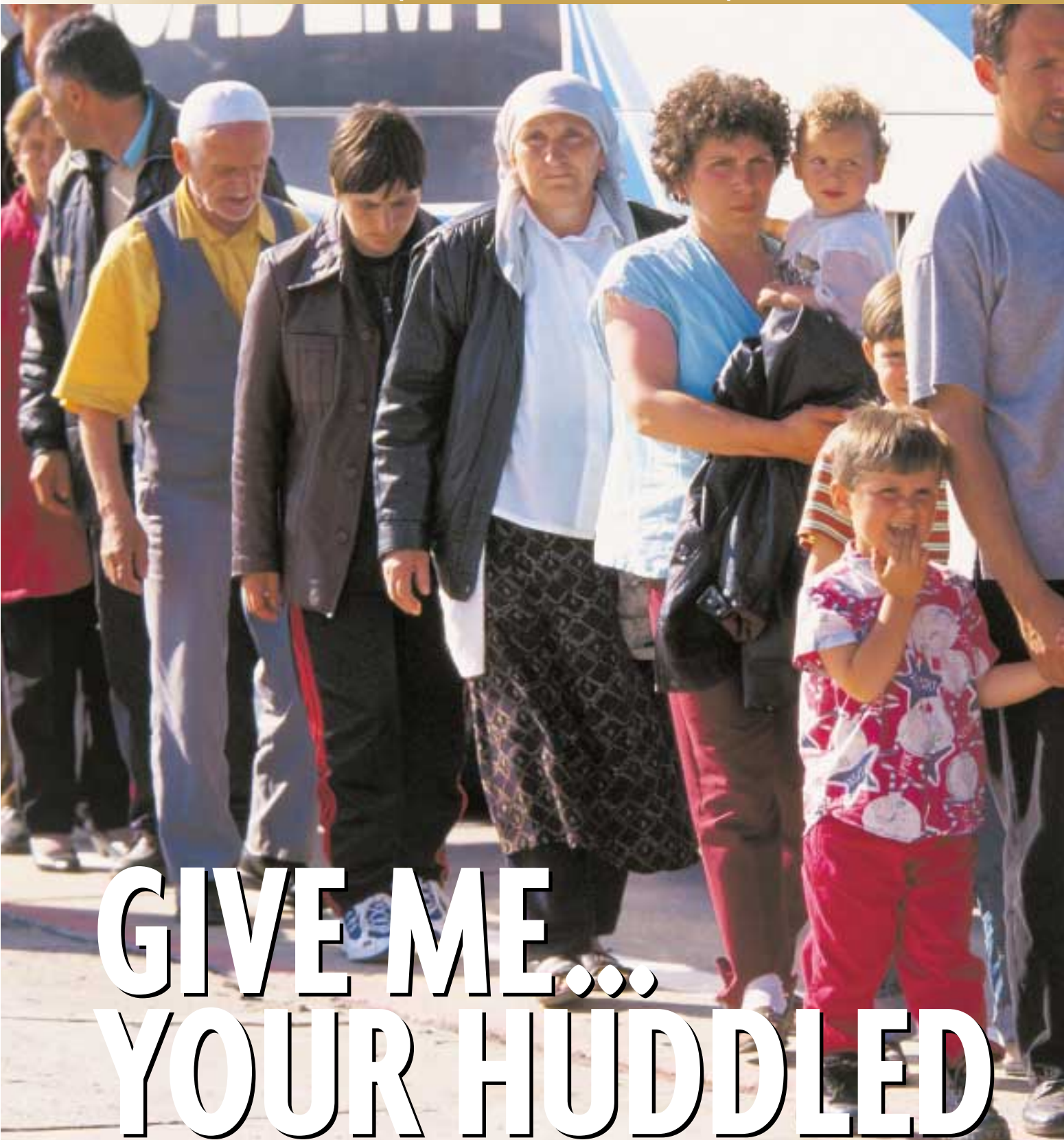
4 Knocking on the door. The United States and Canada welcome nearly 100,000 resettlement refugees each year and hundreds of thousands of other official immigrants. But others have a more difficult time in starting a new life.



8 The two North American neighbors are among only a dozen countries around the world who accept refugees for resettlement on a regular basis. These children from various countries are starting a new life in Jacksonville, Florida.



22 Hundreds of thousands of Colombians have been displaced by years of conflict, producing the Hemisphere's worst humanitarian crisis. These displaced people use a floating river platform as toilet, laundry and dining room.



GIVE ME... YOUR HUDDLED MASSES...



The United States and Canada support global humanitarian causes and resettle tens of thousands of refugees annually... but some asylum seekers find a more chilly welcome...

by Ray Wilkinson

When American General James R. Helmley, a Viet Nam war veteran, went on one of his nightly visits to recently arrived refugee children from the Kosovo crisis, one six-year-old girl asked him to bend down. She whispered ‘God Bless You.’ “I had to go sit under a tree, go through a handkerchief and come back to the office for a moment,” he told the New York Times later. “I’m just really blessed to be a part of this operation.” Gen. Helmley was commander of a task force at Fort Dix in New Jersey looking after many of the more than 10,000 Kosovars the United States flew to the country at the height of the 1999 conflict in the Balkans.

Canada was equally welcoming. The government, humanitarian organizations and private citizens threw open their doors for more than 7,000 Kosovar refugees. “The next best thing to motherhood and apple pie was to have a Kosovar in your spare bedroom,” one Canadian immigration officer now recalls of those heady days. The Americans and Canadians were doing what they do best: being generous to the victims of the world’s latest crisis, feeling good about themselves and being in charge of the situation.

Two months after the first Kosovars arrived, the mood swiftly changed when the first of four ships crammed

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS LODGED IN CANADA AND THE USA

Year	CANADA	UNITED STATES*
1995	26,070	166,590
1996	26,120	118,170
1997	22,580	60,470
1998	23,840	43,660
1999	30,120	41,860

* The U.S. fiscal year is 1 October–30 September. Figures reflect first instance asylum applications submitted to the INS and the immigration courts. UNHCR estimates that each application averages 1.45 persons.



Kosovar refugees (left) being welcomed at Fort Dix, New Jersey in 1999. The Coast Guard intercepts Haitian boat people before they can reach the U.S. (right).

© U.S. COAST GUARD.

Kids learning from kids...

Fifteen years ago children's author Pat Kibbe saw a newspaper photograph of a Cambodian refugee boy holding a postcard of New York's Empire State Building and the caption "His only possession in the world."

When one of Pat's students in Vermont later asked if he could write to the boy, the mother of five pointed out that they spoke different languages.

The class came up with an obvious solution: a picture book.

Within a couple of weeks the entire Vermont class had created box loads of handmade books and, courtesy of the humanitarian organization Refugees International, Pat Kibbe was en route to the Thai-Cambodian border with some unexpected gifts for the unsuspecting Cambodian refugee.

Khao-I-Dang camp was home to 35,000 children at the time, so how to find one solitary boy? It took less than 30 minutes. Everyone knew Mong-Kheam, the boy



Somali girls in Kenya's Dadaab camp prepare a picture book.

who owned the postcard from America.

Pat Kibbe learned an invaluable lesson herself during the border visit—refugee kids often literally have no personal possessions which is what makes such things as books and education so valued by them.

She established Kids to Kids International and since then the organization has helped nearly 300 American schools to establish links with children in 49 countries, sending them individually created picture

books with illustrations ranging from family portraits, pets and cartoons, art supplies and disposable cameras.

The Americans paste their own picture and write a brief biography on the back. Sometimes refugee children use their new supplies to create their own books for their pen pals.

"Before your books arrived, the children had only one book to look at," a teacher in Senegal wrote to students at Highcrest Middle School. "Everyone benefits," said Kibbe. "The

refugee children feel special and enjoy the craft supplies. The American children have the chance to make a difference and learn about other countries and cultures."

When Pat Kibbe first met Mong-Kheam, his mother begged her to take him to the United States. She thought Kids to Kids was a better solution and she continued to send Mong-Kheam dictionaries and 'teach yourself' English guides. Today he is a monk in Cambodia teaching English.

▶ with migrants from China's Fujian province, en route to the United States via Canada arrived along that country's western coastline. A lone bugler playing 'O Canada' in defense of his country's shores greeted

these latest arrivals and a blizzard of hostile media headlines helped re-ignite a long-running debate on Canada's asylum laws.

The situation was exacerbated a few months later around Christmas when a rejected Algerian asylum seeker named Ahmed Ressay was arrested trying to enter the U.S. from Canada with a carload of explosives. In the heat of the moment

"It is ironic. The United States is such a champion of the persecuted abroad, while at the same time treating its own asylum applicants so roughly."

touch' for foreigners simply wanting to better themselves or those with more evil designs.

The contrasting attitudes to the two situations underlined the ambiguity—some critics use harsher terms—of Washington and Ottawa towards what are perceived as 'real' refugees and more dubious asylum seekers.

U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, labeled Canada a 'Club Med for terrorists.' In some quarters at least, there was the palpable sense that both countries had become a 'soft

GIVING GENEROUSLY

The United States and Canada both give generously to humanitarian emergencies overseas—Washington is the largest single contributor to UNHCR, underwriting the agency's approximately \$1 billion budget by 25 percent or more. Both countries supplement funding with expertise including civilian personnel and, at times, military units including cargo aircraft which helped feed the people of the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo during four winters and later helped sustain the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled the bloodbath that was Rwanda.

They help shape critical humanitarian policy—Canada was particularly instrumental in pushing through the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and Their Destruction

which was signed in Ottawa in December 1997. Both countries regularly intercede with other states to support humanitarian causes.

The United States accepts more refugees for permanent resettlement than all other countries combined—an estimated 75,000 this year—and spends a massive \$500 million bringing them to the country and helping them begin new lives. With a population only one-tenth the size of the U.S., Ottawa accepts a proportionate number of refugees. Around 7,300 will arrive this year with government support and several thousand others are likely to come under private sponsorships. The Kosovars who arrived last year were given the choice of either staying permanently or returning home, unlike those in Europe, most of whom have been told they must go back now the crisis has ended.

Advocacy groups say despite this record both capitals could do better. As a percentage of a country's annual wealth other states, especially the Scandinavians, contribute proportionately far more to hu-

TOP TEN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

In Canada and in the USA in 1999 as percentage of total*

CANADA		USA **	
Sri Lanka	10%	China	10%
China	8%	Somalia	8%
Pakistan	8%	Haiti	6%
Hungary	5%	Indonesia	6%
India	4%	Mexico	5%
Mexico	4%	El Salvador	4%
DRC	3%	India	3%
Russia	3%	Ethiopia	3%
Iran	3%	Guatemala	2%
Colombia	2%	FR Yugoslavia	2%
Others	50%	Others	49%

* All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

**U.S. figures reflect the fiscal year 1 October 1998-30 September 1999, and refer to first instance claims filed with the INS only.

manitarian causes than Washington and Ottawa. And, proponents said, North America could accept more refugees for resettlement, from more parts of the

world, who are in greater need of protection than some 'political' groups accepted in the past.

But the debate over asylum procedures is the thorniest and most controversial problem where outspoken advocates and lawmakers and government officials who run the systems, lock horns.

The United States, critics say, operates a double standard toward refugees and asylum seekers. "It is ironic," says Eleanor Acer of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights based in San Francisco. "The United States is such a champion of the persecuted abroad, while at the same time treating its own asylum applicants so roughly." After five years of asylum reform, Doris Meissner, Commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) dismissed much of this domestic criticism. In a recent interview, she told REFUGEES her agency today "is far more professional than just a few years ago" and handles applications "faster, more equitably and more humanely than at any other time." ▶



Evelyn Rengifo came to the U.S. from Colombia in 1979. She served an eight month prison term in 1984 on drug related charges. However, despite having served time and then been released, under toughened 1996 legislation the INS took her into custody and began deportation proceedings when she came to the attention of the agency. She did not see any of her five children, all American citizens, for eight months until she was released shortly before Christmas (above) after a judge ruled she faced the likelihood of torture if she was forcibly returned to Colombia.

From Sudan to North Dakota

The United States accepts more refugees for resettlement than the rest of the world combined

by LARRY YUNGK

When Foni Silvestro and her family escaped the seemingly unending civil war in their native Sudan, they had apparently left one hell only to reach another. They spent years in refugee camps in neighboring Kenya. Scorching heat, sandstorms and uncertainty were constant companions. When they flew to New York after being accepted for permanent resettlement in the U.S. yet another shock awaited them; they were going to one of the most remote areas of the country, a town they had never heard of called Fargo, North Dakota. "Are there other Sudanese living in Fargo?" they asked nervously as they waited to board their flight into the unknown. "Not many" came the discouraging reply.

The culture shock was mutual. Barry Nelson, executive director of an agency called Center for New Americans which helped the Silvestro family, recalls the sur-

prise of the North Dakotans: "Well, at first it was somewhat of a surprise for local people to see very tall Africans walking down the streets."

In fact, Fargo provides a microcosm for America's resettlement program. Sudan is a world removed from North Dakota. Both regions may be dominated by breathtaking sweeps of unending plains or savannah grasslands, but there is little other similarity. In summer, southern Sudan can be among the hottest places on earth. The Dakotan winters are among the most severe with temperatures regularly dipping to minus twenty degrees.

Still, in the last six years more than 250 Sudanese families from 15 different tribes have begun their lives anew in Fargo, a place which catapulted to fame recently and

ended decades of international obscurity when a film of the same name, a black comedy about kidnap and murder, captured the imagination of a global cinema-going audience. Refugees from Somalia, Bosnia, Viet Nam and the former Soviet Union have also settled here. Last year nearly 600 refugees moved in.

ACCEPTING REFUGEES

The United States is one of only around a dozen countries which accepts annual quotas of refugees for permanent resettlement. Since 1975 more than two million refugees have settled in the U.S. and a further 75,000 will arrive this year. This figure represents more resettled refugees than all other countries combined.

A web of federal, state, local government and non-governmental agencies spend an estimated \$500 million annually on resettlement—a massive amount compared with global refugee expenditure. UNHCR's annual budget, for instance, to help an estimated 22 million people globally, is only twice that.

Still, despite such largesse, the Ameri-

Since 1975 more than two million refugees have resettled in the U.S. and a further 75,000 will arrive this year.

► North of the border, "There is a perception among some Canadian immigration officials and the public that the only real refugees are those one sees on television languishing in squalid camps 'over there'" says a Canadian lawyer. "And this attitude sometimes shows through when people arrive here under their own steam to seek asylum."

CHANGING TIMES

The United States and Canada were largely built on immigration. But because of their geographical isolation, protected by the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, it was not until the last two decades that asylum seekers—as opposed to refugees specifically chosen for resettlement or regular immigrants—began arriving in large numbers in North America, pressuring public opinion, lawmakers and systems designed to

deal with relatively small numbers of 'free-lance' refugee applicants.

The widely reported arrival of the Chinese boat people, including many unaccompanied teenage minors, and the Christmas-time 'terrorist' incident, propelled Canada into a renewed months-long roller coaster debate on the merits of asylum.

Changes in the system were already underway at the time, but the renewed furor increased pressure on the politicians for action. A draft Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is now before parliament and that, like the events which helped prompt it, has fueled even further controversy.

It promises severe penalties for people or groups trying to abuse the system, including fines of up to C\$1 million and life in prison for human traffickers and bars anyone convicted of a serious crime from

seeking asylum. "Closing the back door to those who would abuse the system allows us to ensure that the front door will remain open," Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Elinor Caplan said, "both to genuine refugees and to the immigrants our country will need to grow and prosper in the years ahead." One of the stated objectives of the Act is to "grant... fair consideration to those who come to Canada claiming persecution."

UNHCR noted last year that Canada's refugee status determination procedure was already "in many ways a model of fairness and due process" though there was still room for improvement. Its main concern at that time was the lack of an appeal mechanism for rejected applicants among the estimated 30,000 people seeking asylum every year. The Act addresses that issue by proposing to establish a Refugee

can program is not without its critics. Some have charged that especially during the cold war era, resettlement was dominated by political rather than humanitarian concerns when, for instance, huge numbers of persons were admitted from the former Soviet bloc while African and other refugees were overlooked.

That has begun to change. As Washington places more emphasis on people in immediate need of finding a new, permanent home, resettlement from places like the Middle East and Africa is growing. This year, nearly 18,000 Africans from 25 countries are expected to come to America, the fastest growing refugee population, compared with fewer than 7,000 only two years ago.

Overall, however, the number of refugee admissions to the U.S. dropped from 207,000 in 1980 to 132,000 in 1993 and to a proposed 76,000 target for next year, according to Mark Franken, the executive director of Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Catholic Conference, one of the major agencies assisting new arrivals.

LACK OF WILL

In evidence before a congressional subcommittee earlier this year, Franken said the decline represented a "lack of political will to meet fully our humanitarian responsibilities" and undermined Washington's "global moral leadership" in the humanitarian field. He urged the government

to increase both funding and numbers of admissions.

But Julia Taft, Assistant Secretary of State in charge of refugee issues, says numbers tell only part of the story. In an interview with REFUGEES she said the government had responded to challenges that it should spread its net far wider than in the past in seeking out and helping the most desperate of the world's refugees.

"We're being more selective, working with UNHCR and others to find people who are really at risk, who need to be moved more quickly," she said.

But this does not come without a cost. In Africa, for instance, the United States was screening "something like 24 different African nationalities from over 40 countries" Julia Taft said.

The organization and infrastructure needed for such an effort was far more complex and costly, she said, than during earlier times when resettlement refugees were selected from only a few specific areas of the world.

"There is a huge public support for refugees and refugee admissions in this country," Julia Taft said. "When these people arrive here, they help form a positive attitude in their communities. They are making a major contribution to the country. And that gets translated into congressional support, which not only reflects a willingness to bring more people here but also to support refugee assistance overseas."

SPREADING THE LOAD

Fargo would probably not be the first choice for many new arrivals, but in recent years the United States has sought to 'spread the load' away from traditional resettlement areas in California, Texas and New York to other regions of the country.

When they do arrive here, most are pleasantly surprised—despite the harsh winters—by a good work environment and schools, affordable housing and one of the lowest crime rates in the country. If, as Barry Nelson said, people were initially surprised by seeing tall Africans in the community, today "diversity is seen as a value, rather than something to be feared." Refugees have added a valuable contribution to the region's labor base and have started new enterprises including small business and ethnic restaurants.

A Sudanese church provides a spiritual and social center for new arrivals. Self help, or mutual assistance agencies, promote language and cultural services. Sudanese, Vietnamese, Somali and Sierra Leonean families have been officially licensed as foster parents.

They include Zacharia Reng and his wife, Theresa who are currently taking care of Theresa's 13-year-old Sudanese brother. Similar homes may soon provide care for unaccompanied refugee minors expected to arrive from camps in Kenya as Fargo's resettlement population continues to grow. ■

Appeal Division within the country's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) to review negative decisions.

Under another proposed innovation, the Board will handle all aspects of an individual's claim in future, looking at both the need for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1984 Convention Against Torture. "This will enhance the fairness and efficiency" of the system, according to Judith Kumin, UNHCR's Representative in Canada.

The Board itself, enlightenedly, is a specialized independent quasi-judicial body, whereas in most other major asylum receiving nations, government officials who often have an 'enforcement' orientation rather than one of 'protection' make the initial asylum decisions. Some critics believe that in the past the IRB was too liberal in granting asylum to 'virtually any-

one who applied' and the acceptance rate has dropped from around 75 percent a few years ago to 45 percent currently.

STREAMLINING

Another aim of the new legislation is to cut the time taken to reach decisions on asylum claims, Peter Showler, the Chairman of the IRB told REFUGEES. Although exceptionally difficult cases can take years to decide, the 'average' processing time was reduced from 13 months in 1998 to 9.3 months last year. The eventual goal is six months and an additional three months for appeal.

The decision-making process will be streamlined, Showler said, by placing cases

in the hands of a single IRB member. Most adjudicating panels now consist of two members with a split decision going in favor of the asylum applicant. Though some lawyers worried the new single-member panel might tilt the odds against claimants, ►



A young Vietnamese refugee comes to grips with the world of computers at school in Jacksonville, Florida.

UNHCR / B. PRESS

► one high-ranking official insisted “the combination of a single board member, plus an appeal will be light years ahead of the old system.”

But there are other concerns. Kumin worried the new Act could make it more difficult for arrivals to enter the asylum system or, once there, they could face an increased threat of detention because of lack of proper documentation or security considerations—issues which the U.S. system is also grappling with. Applicants also face the prospect in the near future of a cut in legal aid provided by the country’s provinces.

And like his American counterparts, Francisco Rico-Martinez, president of the Canadian Council for Refugees, said the new law could end up criminalizing people trying to escape persecution. “They’re getting tough on the wrong people,” he said.

“The pendulum is constantly in motion between enforcement of the law and refugee protection,” Kumin said. “Everyone here wants to do right, but it’s not always easy to know what ‘right’ is.”

Says Gerry Van Kessel, Director General of the Refugees Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration, “The bottom line is the system must be fair. But to get the right balance between fairness, a speedy process where genuine refugees are not vic-

timized by being caught in limbo for years, and handling increased volumes of asylum seekers is extremely complex.”

UNTRAINED AND UNDERSTAFFED

When boatloads of Cubans and Haitians arrived in the U.S. in the 1980s the system was unprepared to deal with such huge ‘spontaneous’ influxes. The new arrivals were met by a corps of largely untrained, understaffed and under-equipped INS personnel, officials now concede. Examiners with no training in international refugee law or knowledge of conditions in countries of origin judged asylum claims. The system was politically biased and emphasized ‘control’ and ‘enforcement’ rather than ‘fairness.’

New regulations were introduced in 1990, including the establishment of a professionally trained corps of asylum officers. But even as these improvements were implemented the global refugee landscape was undergoing a profound change. In 1993 Germany, unable to get its European partners to agree on a policy of burden sharing after absorbing hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the Balkan conflict or taking advantage of the collapse of the iron curtain, decided effectively to go it alone.

It created a de facto *cordon sanitaire* around the country declaring all of its immediate neighbors ‘safe’ countries, and therefore people transiting those regions to make an asylum claim in Germany could be returned there with a clear conscience. “The rest of the world has been playing catch-up ever since,” said one international humanitarian official.

The U.S. Coast Guard began a controversial policy of stopping America-bound ‘illegals’ on the high seas, creating what one lawyer termed ‘A floating Berlin Wall’ around the United States. (The Canadians adopted a different approach, stationing immigration officers in key cities around the world to try to detect and deter ‘bogus’ asylum seekers before they could reach North America. Both methods have been heavily criticized by human rights

The Immigration Service has tried to create a safety net that no one falls through.

activists, but the two governments say they will continue).

American lawmakers responded to what they perceived as an increasing and widespread abuse of their asylum system and fears of new floods of foreigners, an increased terrorist threat in the wake of the bombing of the World Trade Center and an uncertain economic climate, by

REFUGEES RESETTLED IN CANADA AND IN THE USA IN 1999: TOP 12 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

USA*		CANADA**	
Bosnia:	22,697	Kosovo:	7,300
Kosovo:	14,156	Bosnia:	3,333
Viet Nam:	9,863	Afghanistan:	1,728
Ukraine:	8,563	Croatia:	1,566
Somalia:	4,317	Iraq:	755
Russia:	4,256	Sudan:	555
Liberia:	2,495	Iran:	469
Sudan:	2,392	Somalia:	298
Cuba:	2,018	Ethiopia:	179
Iraq:	1,955	Burundi:	113
Iran:	1,739	Colombia:	106
Croatia:	1,660	Congo, DR:	86
Others:	8,895	Others:	589
TOTAL:	85,006	TOTAL:	17,077

*Figures for the USA reflect fiscal year, 1 October 1998 – 30 September 1999.

**Breakdown by country of origin for Canada is estimated based on government supplied information reflecting country of last permanent residence.



Canada and the United States help shape humanitarian law, particularly instrumental in shaping a 1997 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects the rights of children who have suffered by these Angolan civilians.

adopting the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA).

Advocates and opposition members of Congress have been battling ever since to undo the most restrictive parts of that 1996 legislation and other asylum measures.

Persons arriving in the United States without any documentation or with false identification—often the only way genuine asylum seekers can escape a repressive situation—are automatically detained and placed into a fast-track process called ‘ex-

Spreading the word....

QUESTION: What do the employees of a postal distribution center in Newburgh, New York, the bishop of a major African American church in Los Angeles and a chief executive of one of the world's

largest communications companies have in common?

ANSWER: They all made private donations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees within the last year to

help uprooted persons throughout the world via an organization called USA for UNHCR.

During the first decades of UNHCR's work (it marks its 50th anniversary this year) the organization helped several million people each year. Those figures exploded in the 1980s and 1990s reaching an all-time high of 27 million people in 1995 and dropping slightly to more than 22 million last year.

To help such huge numbers of people, UNHCR relies almost exclusively on voluntary donations as do private charities. Until recently, the bulk of those funds were provided by governments and institutions such as the European Union, but as national budgets became tighter, UNHCR explored other ways of both raising money and explaining to the public the ways in which the organization helps refugees and its own particular needs.

USA for UNHCR was established in 1989, one of 15 national committees around the world dedicated to this

work. It has a volunteer board of directors, interns and around 6,000 supporters countrywide and as Executive Director Jeffrey Meer said, "We run a national organization with a local-sized budget."

It raised more than \$3 million privately last year for operations in Kosovo, Bosnia and Africa and as Meer said, "Americans love to donate to causes they believe in." Requests for photographs and other information on Chechnya has thus far dominated American interest this year.

Fund raising and 'getting the message out' are among the most competitive businesses around and USA for UNHCR has followed the tech trend with its own website (www.usaforunhcr.org) and a site for corporate donations (www.peaceforall.com). Later this year it will launch a direct mail campaign and a national program to provide educational materials on refugees for schoolchildren.

*USA for UNHCR,
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Sanitarian policies worldwide. Ottawa was the first nation to outlaw land mines and halt the kind of

pedited removal' and can be ordered deported by an INS inspector.

If they ask for asylum a screening interview determines whether they have a 'credible fear' of persecution in their home countries and should be allowed into the full asylum procedure. In many cases they stay in detention until the end of that asylum procedure which can take months.

FACING DEPORTATION

The 1996 Act expanded the definition of 'aggravated felony' to include offenses which

by international standards might be considered minor (an 'aggravated felony' in the Immigration Act may also include crimes which are not necessarily 'felonies' under U.S. criminal law). The INS is required to detain 'convicted felons' who cannot then apply for asylum whatever the underlying circumstances of the case—except in a few very limited circumstances. The law was applied retroactively and caught people who had already been convicted, served their sentences and released, but have now been 're-detained' and face deportation.

Michael J. Creppy, the Chief Immigration Judge in the Executive Office for Immigration Review, said progress in introducing better asylum procedures had been made in some areas, but he personally deplored this particular provision. In an interview with REFUGEES he related the story of one woman from South America who was adopted by an American family and initially thought that she had been naturalized. She proceeded to vote in an election, but when she subsequently discovered she was not in fact a citizen she went to the ►

The Long March

Thousands of Sudanese youngsters walked for months and years to freedom... and for some, a new life

by JUDITH KUMIN

Vancouver: a city of tomorrow, a beautiful place of sleek buildings reaching gracefully into a pristine sky, of snow-capped mountains and sparkling Pacific waves. Southern Sudan: a place of constant suffering and death, of gaunt, sticklike figures silhouetted endlessly in single file against huge African skies—images which are seared deeply into the annals of African refugee folklore.

Trying to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable; 23-year-old William Kolong Pioth who, along with tens of thousands of other Sudanese youngsters, spent years wandering, seemingly forever, like biblical nomads across the East African savannah. And then, by a million-to-one chance, by an inexplicable stroke of luck which occasionally intrudes into the lives of some of the world's most desperate people, rescue and a flight to an undreamed-of future in the North American west.

William's story began when his parents and elders of Su-

dan's Dinka tribe decided that he had to be rescued from the civil war then ravaging parts of Africa's largest nation in 1983. The youngster and 300 other Dinka boys, the oldest aged 16, embarked on The Long March to safety. It took him and his companions precisely two months and 24 days to walk 1,000 kilometers to a refugee camp in neighboring western Ethiopia.

Across the vast plains, similar armies of youngsters, Sudan's 'Lost Boys', roamed the countryside, sometimes being recruited by the guerrillas as child soldiers and porters, always searching for a place of safety. Their saga became one of the most infamous stories in refugee history, at the same time a tragedy of huge proportions and a heroic tale of survival.

ANOTHER LONG MARCH

William was forced to undergo two further Long Marches—"I took my clothes off and walked naked," he remembers. "There were people

killing boys just for their clothes"—until he reached the Kakuma refugee camp in the harsh, semi-arid northern corner of Kenya.

He learned English in a mud-walled refugee school, worked for the Lutheran World Federation, first as a volunteer and later as a social worker earning the equivalent of around \$10 a month until 1997 when a visit by a delegation from the International Olympic Committee and a new pair of Nike shoes changed his life.

He was asked to help organize volleyball and basketball events in the camp and after the visit one delegate sent him a pair of Nikes. "The day those shoes arrived," he recalls, "I was the King."

More good fortune followed. The following year he was chosen by



UNHCR / W. STONE
Some of the many thousands of Sudanese boys on their Long March across the country.

a visiting Canadian immigration official for permanent resettlement and arrived on July 21, 1998.

By any standards, Canada's resettlement program is excellent. The country accepts approximately 7,300 refugees each year, one of only a dozen states to resettle refugees on a regular basis. Thousands of others are sponsored privately. A web of official and private agencies help new arrivals find temporary and then perma-

The Immigration Service today is "far more professional than just a few years ago, handling applications faster, more equitably and more humanely than at any other time."

predicament of all. Rounded up for various crimes, they cannot be deported because their home countries, principally Cuba, Laos, Viet Nam and states of the for-

► INS to regularize her position. She was promptly detained as a 'felon' and faces deportation.

"I have been involved in immigration law for 23 years and I have never seen a provision so sweeping," he said. "In my personal opinion, it is absolutely wrong. They are going to have to modify that provision."

There are other alarming individual stories. The New York Times reported the case of Esta Pierre who entered the U.S. on a doctored passport in 1993 from the terror

that was then Haiti and now faces deportation for entering the country with a false ID. Her two children were born in the United States and cannot be deported. Esta Pierre, according to the Times, is one of around 3,000 Haitians faced with the prospect of abandoning their kids if they are deported or taking them along to a very uncertain future.

An estimated 3,000 foreigners find themselves in perhaps the most bizarre



A new home in Vancouver for William.

UNHCR / B. EWART

ment accommodation, schooling and jobs.

William flew immediately to Vancouver and moved into a small room at the Welcome House reception center run by the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia. The group was established in the early 1970s, initially to help Ugandan Asian refugees who had been expelled by Idi Amin, but has continued its work with successive groups of refugee arrivals. From a budget of C\$7 million, provided mainly by the federal and provincial governments, and like other groups across the country, the Society sponsors English language training, child care for mothers attending the classes, job counselling and other services.

Staff helped William find permanent lodging with another Sudanese refugee, but obtaining work is another matter. New arrivals often complain of the 'Canadian Experience' conundrum—employers demand this 'experience' before they will hire, but refugees can't get the experience if they can't get a job. William set to work stocking supermarket shelves to get the 'Canadian Experience.'

There are other criticisms. Nancy Worsfold, Director of the Ottawa-Carlton Immigrant Services Organization, a local group which helps newly arrived refugees, acknowledges that Canada has a good overall record toward refugees compared with other countries, but

lamenting what she considers the authorities' enforcement mentality. As a nation founded on immigration, she believes, Ottawa could increase its resettlement quota. Refugees themselves complain that because of the way the system is structured family reunion is often painfully slow.

The authorities have taken steps to address the concern that Canada has been both extremely slow and selective in choosing resettlement candi-

dates, often going for people with good education or language skills, rather than those in the most immediate need. But starting January 1, 2000, Canada launched an 'urgent protection pilot project' to test its ability to process urgent cases within five days of submission by UNHCR. "We have to respond quickly to refugees overseas who are in most desperate need of protection," Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Elinor Caplan said in launching the project. And the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act tabled in parliament in April proposes to facilitate family reunion and reduce significantly the traditional emphasis placed on a refugee's ability to settle quickly in Canada, in favor of protection considerations.

Back in Vancouver, William is using the toughness bred on those long marches through the African bush and interminable years in refugee camps to smooth his way through his new life. "Some refugees in Canada don't find it easy," he said. "I'm not worried about myself. I'm at my highest standard (of life) yet. I worry about the others in Kakuma."

And his parents? He has tried unsuccessfully through the Red Cross to find them but "I can't tell you anything about my family," he said. "Even if my mom were sitting right here, I wouldn't recognize her." ■

mer Soviet Union, will not accept them back. Effectively, under current detention policy, they could be detained until they die and have become known as 'the lifers.'

Kathleen Newland of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington said: "Congress had no idea what it was doing in 1996 with things like mandatory detention." The problem is that while the provision remains law, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said her agency had little discretion in alleviating the situation.

Even when the INS has flexibility, the system is unpredictable according to human rights activists. Regional INS offices retain a large degree of independence and while some directors actively encourage the release of detainees whenever possible, others are known to vigorously discourage the practice.

RELEASE DETAINEES

UNHCR urged that detainees who are asylum seekers should be released when-

ever possible. Karen AbuZayd, the agency's Regional Representative in Washington, said it was "concerned by the erosion of basic refugee protection principles in the United States because of the 1996 laws" especially detention and lack of access to asylum procedures. "Asylum seekers who are not a threat to society should not be detained and should not be treated like criminals," she said.

When aliens are incarcerated, and their numbers grew rapidly after passage of the ▶

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Detect, detain, deter, deport

by MATTHEW WILCH

Eventually, I made it to America ... where instead of finding safety, I'd found a jail cell... I had been beaten, tear-gassed, kept in isolation until I nearly lost my mind, trussed up in chains like a dangerous animal, strip-searched repeatedly, and forced to live with criminals, even murderers... How could I explain... to anyone who has never experienced them, the daily indignities and humiliations of prison life?... How could I ex-

plain what it is like to be counted like cattle every day, to eat when you were told to eat, to sleep when you were told to sleep? How could I explain the mind-numbing, soul-deadening feeling... day after day, week after week, month after month?

—FAUZIYA KASSINDJA,
a Togolese asylum seeker fleeing forced genital mutilation,
from her book *Do They Hear You
When You Cry?*

I first toured a U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention center in the 1980s when our country had just begun to build up its culture of detention and deterrence. Our government guide explained that the agency's mission could be described by the four "D's": "detect, detain, deter, deport." The missing verb was "protect."

The fastest growing prison system in the United States is not one for criminals. It is one for immigrants and asylum seekers like Ms. Kassindja. The U.S. Congress passed draconian legislation in 1996 making detention the keystone of immigration enforcement policy. Sub-

sequently, the INS nearly doubled its bed space in three years to over 16,000 beds, or an estimated 182,000 occupancy spaces annually.

Just over 40% of detainees are located in 17 federally run or prison industry sites. The other 60% are in often

remote, rented cells in an estimated 800 jails nationwide. By 2001, INS projects the number of beds will be almost 24,000, or over 270,000 spaces annually. U.S. taxpayers pay an average of \$58 per day per detainee. In 1998, the INS spent \$692 million on detention and deporta-

tion alone.

Approximately 5% of detainees are asylum seekers, or an estimated 9,100 annually. Too many of them suffer in the ways Ms. Kassindja described. As recently as March, the INS removed 65 detainees from a New Hampshire county jail in the wake of repeated allegations of sexual abuse, inadequate medical treatment, and two unexplained detainee deaths.

Following the 1996 law and ongoing detention abuses, the NGO community formed the U.S. Detention Watch Network (DWN). It now includes over 100 legal, social, medical, and pastoral service NGOs, religious groups, and human and civil rights advocacy groups. We urge these more humane and cost effective means of achieving fair and efficient processing and community safety:

- **Avoid the use of detention whenever possible.**
- **If detention is used, it should be in the least restrictive manner and setting.**
- **Develop and implement alternatives to detention, including release, reasonable bond, supervised release accompanied by comprehensive legal, social and integration services, and use of group housing/shelters/loving foster care.**
- **Release vulnerable populations, including but not limited to asylum seekers, survivors of torture, children, women, the mentally and physically ill, gays and lesbians, and victims of domestic violence.**
- **Strictly comply with humane standards governing detention conditions.**

■ Disseminate rights materials and provide for rights presentations for all INS detainees.

INS headquarters has been receptive to some of these recommendations. For example, the INS Commissioner repeatedly stated that asylum seekers should be released if not a flight risk or danger. She commissioned the Appearance Assistance Project of the Vera Institute of Justice in New York City to conduct an alternative to detention pilot program for the INS. Ninety-one percent of pilot participants appeared for their immigration hearings.

Unfortunately, despite the Commissioner's clear statement of national parole policy, many of the 33 local INS districts appear to have local no-parole practice. This apparent disregard of national policy demonstrates the deep roots in the field of the 4-D culture of "detect, detain, deter, deport."

U.S. detention practice stands in stark contrast to U.S. leadership in protecting refugees worldwide. As the 50th anniversary of the Refugee Convention approaches, we urge the U.S. community—the public, Congress and INS—to protect asylum seekers fleeing to our shores. The first step is to stop building immigrant prisons and to replace "mind-numbing, soul-deadening" detention with more humane, cost-effective alternatives.

.....
MATTHEW WILCH is Director of
Asylum and Immigration Concerns,
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

"The fastest growing prison system in the United States is not one for criminals."

► 1996 law, they face an uncertain future. The INS doubled bed space in its own facilities to 16,000, but around 60 percent of detainees are housed in regular county jails or other facilities where the immigration authorities have little direct influence on conditions.

These are where abuses occur, humanitarian workers claim. Vulnerable women and as many as 1,000 unaccompanied minors last year were put in these jails. "Detention in these circumstances is an undeserved punishment that is costly to the United States government and can be avoided with appropriate alternatives," UNHCR's Karen AbuZayd said.

Asylum seekers are often housed with criminals solely as a matter of convenience, but once inside the deliberate jail policy is to 'treat everyone the same.' Detainees can be transferred across the country from one facility to another, at a moment's notice and without informing an applicant's lawyer. One advocate said he did not even know his client had died until the man's wife, living in Canada, telephoned to tell him so.

One facility refused to allow as 'unacceptable' literature on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and another cancelled Bible classes for detainees.

In a scathing 1999 report, Amnesty International said: "Asylum seekers have often been treated like criminals, stripped and searched, shackled and chained, sometimes verbally or physically abused. Many are denied access to their families, lawyers and NGOs. Such treatment violates international treaties and U.N. standards."

"We all harbor our deepest suspicions about detention and the process of expedited removal, something we are not able to observe," said Kathleen Newland of the Carnegie Foundation. "But we have to also keep the numbers in perspective." For instance, she said, nearly 96 percent of arrivals claiming 'credible fear' were admit-

ted to the asylum procedure.

Joseph Langlois, acting director of the INS asylum division said the immigration service had tried to create a "safety net that no one falls through" in which applicants have the opportunity to appeal not only through immigration courts, but also in federal court and, in extremis, the U.S. Supreme Court.

ASYLUM CLAIMS SLUMP

In addition to developing a more professional corps of asylum officers, Commissioner Doris Meissner and her officers said reforms in the last five years led to a ►

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"The pendulum is constantly in motion in Canada between enforcement of the law and the protection of asylum seekers. Everyone wants to do right, but no one really knows what 'right' is."

MAKE THEM LAUGH, MAKE THEM LAUGH

Two of the worst problems in refugee camps are boredom and depression.

Once sites have been created, shelter, food and medical facilities provided, newly arrived civilians have little to do except wait—perhaps for weeks or even years as someone else decides their fate.

During the height of the Kosovo crisis, New York film producer Caroline Baron wondered how her profession could fill that gap. Film Aid International was born. Actors such as Robert de Niro, Susan Sarandon and Julia Ormond joined its founding committee. Contributions including movies, screens, projectors, volunteer technicians and air transport were donated by Miramax, Universal Studios, Warner Brothers, Tower Air, actor Tom Hanks, director Steven Soderbergh and the George Soros Open Society Foundation.

A travelling picture show toured camps in Macedonia and followed the refugees home to Kosovo, showing cartoons and movie classics on a screen slung



FILM AID INTERNATIONAL / C. BARON

from the side of a truck. The group plans to take its show on the road again soon, touring West African camps where team members will help train local technicians, disseminate information on such issues as health and land

mines and later, highlight the plight of refugees among the film community and the general public. Caroline Baron recalled one of the inspirations for her idea of Film Aid International came from a scene in an old movie. In a makeshift movie

house in an impoverished southern church the audience is laughing at a cartoon. One character says: "There's a lot to be said for making people laugh. Did you know that's all some people have?" Most refugees would agree.

“How refugees from Kosovo with, say, those in Guinea,

JULIA TAFT has worked in humanitarian affairs for more than a quarter century. Currently, she is the senior United States official for refugee issues in her position as Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. She recently sat down with REFUGEES in her Washington office to discuss domestic and international humanitarian challenges.



Refugees Magazine:

What are the major challenges as this new millennium begins for America's domestic asylum and international refugee policies?

Julia Taft: My hope is that we will develop

a broader international conscience and capability to receive people, even on a temporary basis, who are in really bad situations—that we do more burden sharing as happened with the Kosovar Albanians. My second hope is that we will be able to study more conditions in countries of origin which produce refugees and work with development agencies, banks and others to get at the root causes of crises. This takes political will, diplomatic involvement within the U.N. and within governments. We've got to find more and better ways to work together to tackle these root causes.

Q. *A persistent problem in international crises is the so-called gap, the void between the end of emergency assistance to refugees and the start of long-term development aid. How can this problem be tackled?*

A. All donors until now have invested heavily in the 'front end' of a crisis, helping in emergency relief. We've never really had a system of coordinated aid when it comes to putting the pieces back together again in a country. We need to pinpoint which agencies have the expertise in specific areas—water, sanitation, demobilization, justice—to help countries rebuild shattered infrastructures. From lessons learned in Kosovo and East Timor we should have very good road maps that will probably tell

us that from day one of a crisis, the development agencies must be on the ground at the same time as relief agencies. The planning for different stages of a crisis will take different periods of time, but you've got to get started at the same time to produce a more seamless transition.

Q. *What did you and your Bureau learn from the Kosovo crisis?*

A. Even though I have been in this field for more than 25 years, I never could have predicted how rapid the exodus would be and how rapid the return has been. I got it all wrong, so it's been a humbling experience. Trying to provide relief in an environment such as Kosovo where there is very little infrastructure, we have to provide more technical support for the local population and government. In Macedonia the government wasn't sure what it was supposed to do or how it was supposed to cope with the influx that came. We need a cadre of senior advisers who can be deployed to work with the ministries. I have recommended this to UNHCR.

Q. *What about when refugees return home as they did so quickly in Kosovo?*

A. We need to make sure that our 'follow-on' systems actually follow the lead of what these people want. We have to consult better and develop much leaner response mechanisms, particularly among

NGOs. In 1998 there were about 25 international organizations working inside Kosovo. During the return in 1999 there were 300 NGOs. This is unbelievable. I'm very respectful of the contributions NGOs can make. But where you get a situation where the international community needs so much assistance just for them to function that you drain the capacity of the indigenous ministries to help the refugees—craziness. We need to do a post mortem among NGOs to think how we can help them organize in a more efficient way.

Q. *The plight of the world's internally displaced persons (IDPs) and how to more effectively help them has recently become an issue.*

What is the United States' position?

A. We are (still) struggling with this. The basic problem has been the lack of real institutional backbone to carve out how various agencies should respond to IDPs and

we've (all) been running around trying to figure out what we're doing. There are two main elements: defining which internally displaced persons are of concern to the international community and looking at the core competencies of various agencies—what does the Red Cross do universally, where is there overlap with refugees in similar situations? What are the protection and assistance requirements? What are the international community's requirements of countries which generate IDPs and are un-

“From day one development agencies must be on the ground at the same time as relief agencies.”

were treated compared is totally unacceptable...”

able or unwilling to protect these people? This is a political issue that needs to be referred to the Security Council and I do not believe it is going to be solved by any one U.N. agency being designated as the ‘lead agency’ on this issue.

Q. *There is criticism of America’s domestic asylum policies. What are your comments on the immigration system and how this criticism affects the country’s international role in refugee issues?*

A. It is quite striking how proportionately few refugees we take in compared to our normal immigrations—around 85,000 annually or eight percent. Some of the criticisms of our immigration law are about the treatment of people who are summarily deported for illegal entry or who have not been able to have asylum claims dealt with quickly. Most of the problems with the law have been identified and the administration is trying to do amendments which would soften the provisions of the 1996 Act which we think are overdue. But I don’t sense that our country is ungenerous in its immigration, asylum or refugee admissions. Maybe that’s because the economy is so good. Now if the economy tanks, there will probably be a backlash.

Q. *But what about overseas backlash? The perception that Washington may be preaching to others about fairness, but its own house is not in order?*

A. I think this comes up with the Cubans and Haitians (the more generous policy the United States has adopted towards Cubans than people from Haiti). We still have some problems here. We don’t try to preach to Europe, but it is quite striking if you look at the number of refugees we brought in last year and this year, including quite a lot of Bosnians and Croatians from Germany. It does seem odd that this wonderful country of Germany is having us process some of their refugees, but we believe our immigration policies have created a dynamic environment here. We just think they’re missing out and they ought to

consider a more forward leaning immigration policy.

Q. *The United States has the world’s largest resettlement program for refugees, but figures have been falling in recent years.*

A. You cannot judge the program on numbers alone. When the numbers were very high we had hundreds of thousands of boat people from South-East Asia and then evangelicals and Jews from the former Soviet Union. These large caseloads have been declining. What we have today are many more nationalities involved, for instance something like 24 different African nationalities from over 40 countries. We’re being more selective, working with UNHCR and others to find people who are really at risk who need to be moved more quickly. But it’s more difficult to have a network that processes refugees from so many different locations than one that just processes from two or three areas.

Q. *You are passionately involved in the plight of refugee women.*

A. I once did a study on refugee women which absolutely blew my mind because all of a sudden I realised that refugees are (overwhelmingly) women and children. I sometimes think our refugee programs should be for women and then we can have a satellite program for men and a special coordinator for men. But the mainstream should be for women and children. I still believe this! We keep prodding UNHCR

to do more, it should be mainstreamed, no question. The other way we have approached the issue is to have special women’s initiatives such as we have launched in Bosnia, Timor and Kosovo.

Q. *But all of this takes extra money at a time of reduced budgets.*



American soldiers establish a water pumping station by Lake Kivu during the 1994 Rwandan exodus.

UNHCR / P. DELOEHE

A. The dichotomy of how refugees were treated in, say, Guinea, versus how those from Kosovo were treated was totally unacceptable to 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’s not right. 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 setting the standard to what you think donors will be willing to give.

Q. *But isn’t that just reality? In Africa even many of these ‘reduced’ demands are not even met.*

A. I think there will be more funding if we (the donors) are sure the funding is actually buying a level of assistance that is adequate. ■

A multi-billion dollar trade in humans



Illegal Chinese immigrants in Seattle.

Countries try to stem the global trafficking and smuggling of people desperately seeking a new life

by JUDITH KUMIN

NUMBER OF REFUGEES RESETTLED IN CANADA AND IN THE USA BY YEAR

Year	CANADA*	USA**
1990	31,889	122,066
1991	24,998	113,389
1992	14,726	132,531
1993	11,527	119,448
1994	10,105	112,981
1995	10,919	99,974
1996	10,609	76,403
1997	10,193	70,488
1998	8,698	77,080
1999	17,077*	85,006
TOTAL	150,741	1,009,366

*The 1999 figure for Canada includes 9,777 refugees resettled under the annual program, and 7,300 Kosovars admitted under UNHCR's Humanitarian Evacuation Program from the FYR of Macedonia (5,051 persons) or under Canada's special needs and family reunification program for Kosovars (2,249 persons).

**For the USA, the year means the fiscal year, 1 October - 30 September.

When the Liberian-registered cargo ship California Jupiter docked unexpectedly in the Canadian city of Vancouver a few days into the new millennium, 25 Chinese stowaways were discovered hidden in a 12-meter container. That same week, a dozen dazed Chinese men were found wandering around the American port of Seattle 170 kilometers to the south, after crossing the Pacific Ocean on another cargo ship. And across

the continent, several thousand miles to the east, Ontario police picked up 10 Chinese teenage girls from the back of a van en route to an Indian reservation from where they hoped to make their way to the United States.

Those were only a few of many recent incidents which helped turn the spotlight on the burgeoning international trafficking trade in humans and sparked heated debates in both the U.S. and Canada on how those countries could or should respond to what some officials and media headlines

► drop of 26 percent to around 341,600 in the backlog of pending cases. There was a modest increase to 38.2 percent of the number of cases approved by INS officers and, most dramatically, a 75 percent decline in the number of persons applying for asylum since 1993 to 41,860 last year.

That sharp drop was partly attributable to removing the right for asylum seekers to work immediately upon arrival—effec-

tively a deterrent to persons seeking quick and easy employment in the United States. Thus while Canada and European countries grant either work eligibility or assistance, asylum seekers in America receive neither government welfare nor have the ability to support themselves by working legally. "While you wait for asylum, America says 'We won't give you food, or shelter, or a lawyer or let you earn money to pay



KEYSTONE / H. SOUTES

described as a veritable flood of people seeking new lives here.

To be sure, trafficking is hardly a new phenomenon, but experts believe it has ballooned into a \$7 billion annual global business with links to the worldwide arms trade, drugs, prostitution and child abuse. The poor, the vulnerable, refugees and asylum seekers are all targeted, both by hardline ‘traffickers’ who often recruit and move victims across national boundaries and then coerce them into activities which amount to little more than modern-day slavery, or by somewhat more benign ‘smugglers’ who promise to transport desperate ‘clients’ into another country for a simple cash payment.

ENFORCED LABOR

Traffickers abduct victims or recruit them through bogus marriage and employment agencies, promising them good jobs or schooling, before selling them into enforced labor. A recent U.S. government report estimated 50,000 Asian, Latin American and East European women and children are trafficked into that country each year to work as prostitutes, servants or in the garment industry.

But America is only one of many other destinations. The number of women and children entering Western Europe may be three times as high as the U.S. figures. In the late 1990s, Mexican police smashed a crime ring which had lured 1,200 Mexican women into prostitution in Japan in little more than one year. NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo uncovered a sex-slave ring involving women from Moldova, Ukraine and other countries.

Smugglers feed off humanitarian crises. In 1999 they opened a lucrative route between Indonesia and Australia for desperate Afghans and Iraqis fleeing chaos in their countries and in evident need of protection. Other rings offered Kosovar refugees in Albania and Macedonia trips to Western Europe for the equivalent of around \$1,000.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson said this trade in human misery “is (still) conducted with a frightening level of impunity” despite efforts to stamp it out. At the international level, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has a Proposed Action Plan 2000 for Activities to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings. A U.N. sponsored committee on the Elaboration of a Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime is discussing two draft Protocols concerning migrant smuggling and trafficking.

TOUGHER LAWS

The United States and Canada are both considering new, tougher legislation to bolster existing efforts to stem the illegal flows. The U.S. Congress is considering a Trafficking Victims Protection Act and a draft Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in Canada proposes steep penalties—fines of up to C\$1 million and life in prison—for traffickers.

Canada already stations ‘migration control’ officers in several overseas countries to check documents and stop would-be migrants, including asylum seekers, before they board aircraft. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service has helped train

foreign border officials to detect false documents and combat trafficking.

But as countries around the world continue to tighten access to their territories and their asylum policies, refugees may increasingly be forced to resort to traffickers, smugglers and other illegal means to reach safety. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) fears that many persons genuinely in need of assistance, may already be falling through the cracks.

Trafficking of human beings has ballooned into a \$7 billion annual global business.

Some refugee advocacy groups believe that the new American and Canadian legislation could inadvertently punish well-meaning persons trying to help family members escape persecution and insist that efforts to curb trafficking should not in themselves become new obstacles in thwarting people trying to claim refugee protection or reuniting families.

Other organizations are attempting to build safeguards into pending legislation. UNHCR has insisted that the principle of non-refoulement, or forcible return to a country of origin, must be preserved in all new U.N. protocols on the issue. Involved agencies said human rights considerations must be included in the elaboration of the U.N. Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols.

And the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which helps uprooted peoples move to safe areas, said the ‘three P’s’ must be employed to help stamp out trafficking and smuggling: prevention, protection of the victims and prosecution of the perpetrators. ■

And the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which helps uprooted peoples move to safe areas, said the ‘three P’s’ must be employed to help stamp out trafficking and smuggling: prevention, protection of the victims and prosecution of the perpetrators. ■

for those things yourself,” Kenneth Best, an asylum seeker from Liberia told one recent asylum symposium.

Even the INS’ most vocal critics say there has been a major improvement in the quality of adjudications since the creation of the asylum corps in 1990. Some cases, however, can still be decided not only by the available evidence and accumulated expertise of an officer, but also by the offi-

cial’s intuition and ‘gut’ feeling. A documentary film released recently in the United States called Well-Founded Fear, for the first time went behind the scenes to record these life and death decisions in the making and chronicled the soul searching and often tortuous route by which a decision is reached on whether a person will be allowed to stay in the United States or be deported.

“How do you decide (without any firm evidence) when someone is telling the truth or not?” asks one INS official plaintively. “It’s not simple and you’re never sure.” The facts “stay fuzzy forever and we still have to make a decision based on fuzziness,” another adds.

“After you’ve done this for a while you become much more critical and you become very aware of inconsistencies,” an-

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“We have to do even more than our share, because we have so much more...”

When Japanese troops overran the British colony of Hong Kong during World War II, a middle-class Chinese couple and their infant daughter attempted to make their escape. By sheer luck and bluff they boarded a ship bound for Canada via Mozambique, South Africa and Brazil even though at that time the country did not accept Chinese immigrants. The daughter became a broadcaster and earlier

this year **ADRIENNE CLARKSON** was sworn in as the 26th governor general of Canada, the representative of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. She was the first refugee to be named to the vice-regal post. She recently sat down with REFUGEES in the official governor general's residence in Ottawa to discuss her own experience and Canada's role with respect to refugees today.



A. MAC NAUGHTAN

REFUGEES: How did the refugee experience shape your life?

Answer: Being uprooted and coming to Canada was the single most important influence on my life. My first 30

years were driven by the experience of coming here at age three with one suitcase, almost stateless, of coming to a country which was 'racially challenged', which had a law against Chinese immigration, and which was about to intern its citizens of Japanese origin. My parents felt that the most important thing was that we should enter the mainstream of Canadian life.

Q. The emphasis in Canada today seems to be both on becoming 'Canadian' but also retaining ethnic links—as opposed to the melting pot concept in the United States.

A. We have to be very careful. Our downtown areas reflect the whole world. (But) If you say to people, "We are so diverse we don't really have a culture in Canada" that's very dangerous. If we don't believe in our own way of life, then people who come here will bring their own values from other places and say, "Maybe we can substitute those." I think here we do try to get the best of both (worlds).

Q. In your installation speech you talked about 'punishing societies' and 'forgiving so-

cities.' What did you mean by this? Can generosity spark a backlash in Canada?

A. Ours is a society which has evolved and changed very much. My family almost didn't get on the boat because we were Chinese. But people don't look at color or ethnicity in that way any more. There may be atavistic ideas which still rush out periodically, but you can deal with this through public education. Any country that understands itself will be able to deal with periodic outbursts. There is a generosity (in Canada) which comes from never having had a totalitarian regime, and from living in large spaces.

Q. As commander-in-chief of the Canadian Armed Forces, how do they make a difference in U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian operations?

A. What they bring to any situation is a completely open mind. That's something always to be cultivated. We can have a moderating influence, giving people the tools for an equal start. Our soldiers tend to see things from the Canadian point of view, where solutions can be found and where change occurs quickly. In the Balkans, where I recently visited our forces, it is different. This is hard for our peacekeepers, not knowing if the change they work to bring about will last.

Q. What advice would you give to a newly arrived refugee?

A. To get an education. Education is the key to life here. It means the refugee will have choices. It is the key to a society which has decided to take in immigrants. Refugees are usually very aware of this.

Q. Do you think the global refugee problem will get worse?

A. If we continue to have this very profound imbalance between very, very rich countries and very poor countries, very healthy countries and countries ravaged by disease, it won't be a pretty picture. Canada has a great track record for giving, and I would like us to continue to be committed to it forever, the way the Scandinavians are. I think we have to do even more than our share, because we have so much more.



UNHCR / S. COLVEY

A recently arrived Sikh woman and child approved for resettlement meet with her Canadian lawyer and translator.



Some early arrivals in Canada are taught the duties of being good citizens.

▶ other asylum officer said. “I hope that’s what it is. It could be that you’re just very jaded. How do you know where one begins and the other ends? If I admitted I was jaded I shouldn’t be doing this job anymore, so I say I have a more acute understanding of credibility issues.”

One official noted that most people arriving from a specific area are rejected and he asks a colleague, “What’s the point of them even coming here?” The colleague replies, “Because if they don’t come, they can’t get anything. If they do come here they might get something.”

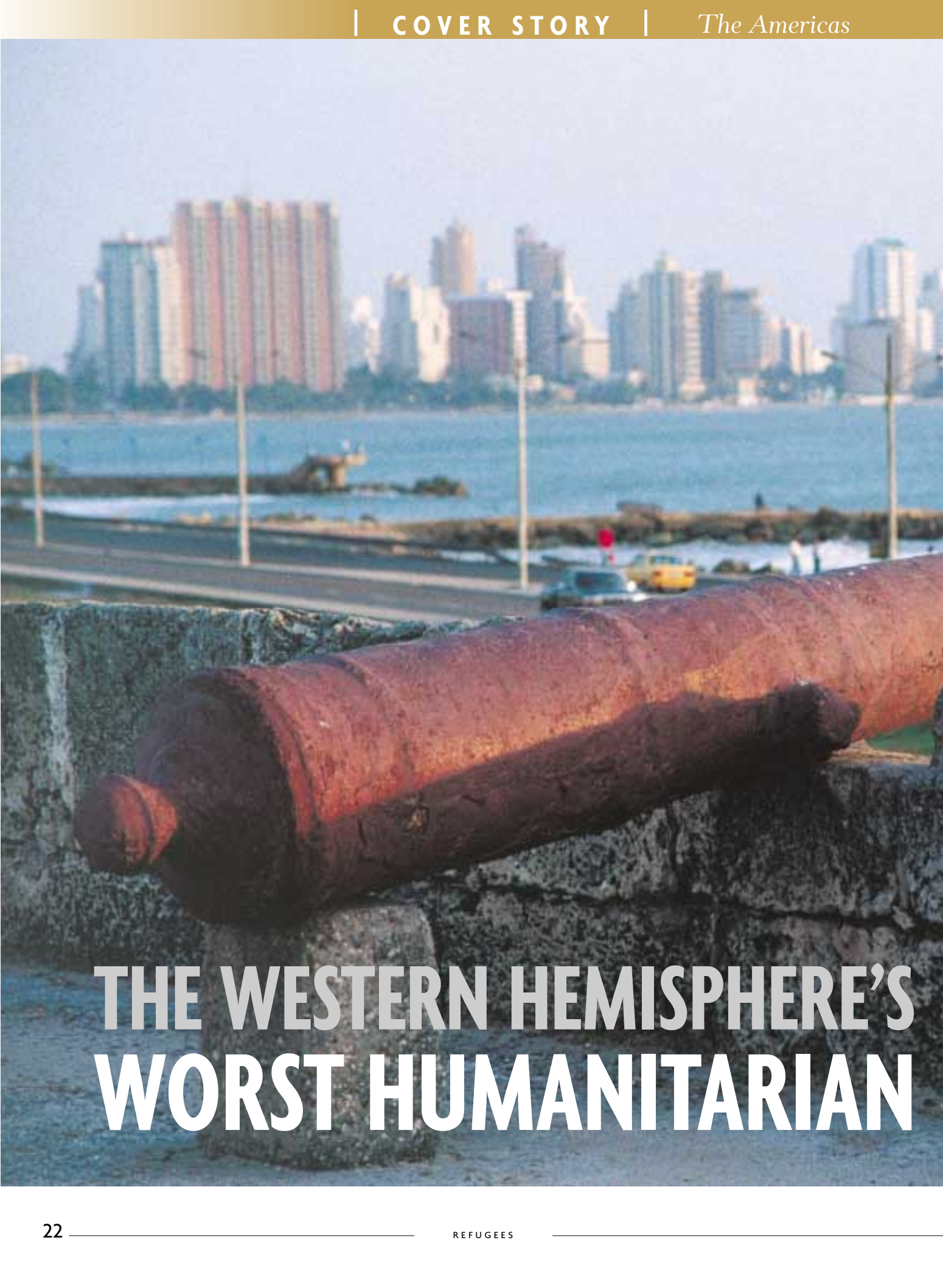
“But they know it’s a lottery and the odds are stacked,” said the first. “Right, but have you ever bought a lottery

ticket?” the second man responds.

The climate may slowly be changing. Humanitarian activists formed a nationwide Fix ‘96 Campaign seeking changes in the 1996 immigration law. A Refugee Protection Act of 1999 has been introduced into Congress which would limit the use of expedited removal to immigration emergencies. Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy and others have explored measures providing safeguards to asylum seekers held in detention.

*While you wait for asylum
America says ‘We won’t give you
food, or shelter, or a lawyer or let
you earn money to pay for those
things yourself.’*

Kathleen Newland said, “What people respond negatively to is being taken for a fool and the abuse of a country’s asylum system. But there’s tremendous support in the United States for the very pure concept of a sanctuary for the truly oppressed.” ■



THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE'S WORST HUMANITARIAN



Luxury hotels and slums side by side in old Cartagena.



UNHCR / R. WILKINSON

Colombia struggles to end nearly four decades of conflict and help hundreds of thousands of uprooted civilians.

CRISIS....

by Ray Wilkinson

The Colombian city of Cartagena is one of the world's historical jewels. Centuries-old buildings adorned with ornate wooden balconies and painted in pastels, vivid blues and reds, conjure up the port's colorful history of treasure galleons and the buccaneers who terrorized the Spanish Main. Gleaming multi-decked liners glide into the bay nowadays, disgorging day trippers from Miami eager to snap up bargains of gold and emeralds while high-rise hotels serve fresh lobster dinners and fine wines. Latin American governments, perhaps inspired by the city's swashbuckling past and its ability to survive wars and invasion, signed a ground-breaking accord here in 1984 which offered refugees fleeing regional conflicts greater help and protection than they had received in the past. The politicians called it the Cartagena Declaration.

Seventy-three-year-old Eugenio Martinez Laguna has had no time to enjoy Cartagena's beauty, wealth or indeed its Declaration. He lives virtually in the shadow of the old San Felipe Spanish fortress whose rusting cannon symbolically protects the city. But while tourists gambol on nearby beaches, when a recent visitor called, Laguna was nailing together his home, a three-sided shack of tin sheeting, wood slats and torn black plastic sheeting. His wife, Isidora, and six other family members share three rickety beds, a single battered wooden cupboard and a couple of pots in which they boil rice and potatoes, and occasionally fish, on an outside stone oven.

A nearby canal reeks with the thick slime of industrial and human waste, discarded plastic bottles, toys and rusting bed-frames. When it rains, the baked mud floors turn to ankle-deep sludge, the nearby waters of the bay inundate the region and sweep away all the shacks in the shantytown.

UNHCR / R. WILKINSON

COLOMBIA AT A GLANCE

In 1819 Simon Bolivar won the independence of Greater Colombia from Spain which had colonized the region in the 16th century. It included what are today Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador, the latter two countries breaking away in 1830 and Panama becoming independent in 1903.

The country is located in the northwest corner of South America bordering the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. With an area of 1.1 million square kilometers (440,000 square miles), it is roughly the size of France, Germany and Italy combined and encompasses hot coastal plains, equatorial forests, pampas and the northern fringes of the Andes mountain chain.

Colombia has a population of nearly 38 million people of mainly Spanish and Indian descent. Catholicism is its major religion.

It is rich in mineral resources, especially oil and coffee, and is the world's major source for platinum and emeralds. It is also today the world's major center for cocaine.

Colombia has Latin America's oldest functioning democracy, but nevertheless has been wracked by internal strife virtually since independence. The latest round of conflict has continued unabated for more than 40 years.

It involves the civilian government, the country's military, several left-wing guerrilla groups and right-wing paramilitaries fighting for territory, wealth and power.

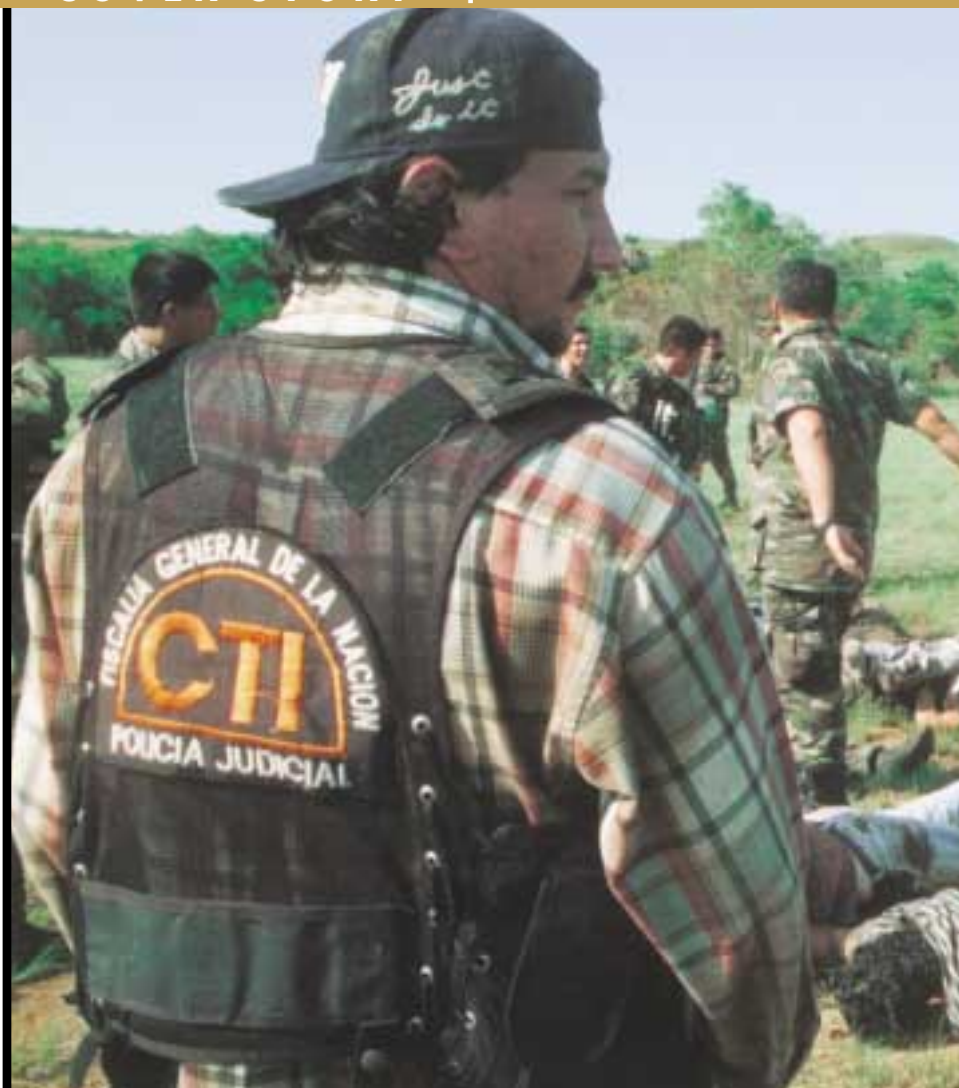
An estimated 200,000 people have been killed in the ongoing conflict and as many as 2 million may have been internally displaced since 1985, though the government insists these figures are too high.

Latin American governments signed the Cartagena Declaration in the historic Colombian city of the same name in 1984 promising to extend help to refugees fleeing conflict in the region. Its provisions do not cover most of Colombia's own "internal" victims of war.

In 1997 the government invited UNHCR to establish a presence in the country to help IDPs and refugees who fled to neighboring states. The organization has offices in the capital, Bogota, and the towns of Apartado and Barrancabermeja.

► "We have no money, almost no food and the floods will come again one day," the weather-beaten farmer says. "But we are happy here. Why? Because we are secure."

Until 1997 Laguna farmed a family plot south of Cartagena. Then gunmen invaded his village. They shot his son and grand-



Police investigate a murderous ambush south of the capital of Bogota in which 15 persons were killed.

son in front of him. "They gave no reason. They just killed them," he said. The gunmen rampaged through the village killing other men and forcing everyone to flee, as they had intended. Many of the terrified villagers made their way to Cartagena where they established their own little community on the outskirts of the city.

A FLOOD OF HUMAN DEBRIS

The Laguna family became members of a huge tide of human debris which has engulfed Colombia, producing the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere. Since 1985, according to one estimate, nearly two million people have been uprooted, around 600,000 in 1998-99 alone. The government said that figure was too high, and that many civilians had already permanently relocated in other parts of Colombia and started new lives.

Whatever the exact number is, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said the huge displacement had "ac-

celerated the destruction of the (country's) social fabric and has contributed to the impoverishment of the population, the disintegration of the family, malnutrition, sickness, alcoholism, drug addiction, school absenteeism and common crime."

Violence has wracked the region virtually since it wrestled independence from Spain in 1819 and the modern state of Colombia was born. The latest round of violence has lasted more than 40 years involving government forces, entrenched landowning elites, extreme right-wing paramilitary forces and Marxist guerrillas fighting for territory, wealth and power. Underpinning the conflict, and thriving in the resultant chaos, is Colombia's drug trade, the world's largest, which bankrolls both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas.

Caught squarely in the cross hairs of the conflict are Colombia's peasants and anyone who dares to speak out against either side—journalists, teachers, trade union leaders and human rights activists. While the



s were killed.

HCR office in Colombia said, "Until recently this has been an almost invisible crisis. People left their homes in ones and twos or small groups. They drifted to the cities where they became virtually indistinguishable from the urban poor already there." Fearing additional reprisals, many displaced persons preferred to remain anonymous in these 'belts of misery' they created around the cities.

TACKLING THE CRISIS

Gradually, Bogota and the international community recognized the gravity of the crisis. In 1997, the same year the government invited UNHCR to open an office here, Colombia adopted National Law N° 387, which for the first time included measures to directly assist, protect and seek solutions for the internally displaced. Ironically, though Colombia was the host for the signing of the Cartagena Declaration, that document covered only refugees—people seeking sanctuary in another

country—and did not apply to persons trying to escape violence in their own countries. (Partially as a result of the Colombia crisis, U.N. member states have begun a vigorous debate on the very different circumstances of refugees and IDPs and how to better assist all displaced persons. See REFUGEES Magazine n° 117).

The government designated a single national organization, the Red de Solidaridad Social (RSS) to oversee IDP issues and drew up an ambitious \$75 billion blueprint—Plan Colombia—to tackle the country's major problems, ranging from helping the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians to an expanded war on the drug trade.

Washington, alarmed by the deteriorating situation inside Colombia and the ever-expanding narcotics industry—80 percent of the cocaine imported into the U.S. comes from Colombia—considered a \$1.6 billion aid package as part of the overall plan. European states were being canvassed for contributions.

Meanwhile, neighboring states such as Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama worried that the Colombian disease would eventually 'go regional' and involve major population movements into their territories.

UNHCR has adopted a two-pronged regional approach to the conflict. In surrounding countries, the agency is helping strengthen asylum procedures in anticipation of any future large-scale exodus from Colombia. In Venezuela, experts are providing advice to the legislative assembly for a refugee law which will be incorporated into a new constitution and training army units in human rights and refugee law.

It recently opened a liaison office in Ecuador, and in Panama it is promoting the adoption of amendments to current refugee legislation which allow people seeking sanctuary a maximum stay of two months.

In addition to its office in Bogota, UNHCR opened two field offices in the northern towns of Apartado and Barrancabermeja. As its budget increases from \$1.8 million this year to \$4 million in 2001, it will open additional offices in the country, including in the southern town of Putumayo. Its programs include providing technical help to the government with advice on humanitarian assistance, seminars for the military and contingency planning for emergencies, coordinate U.N. agencies

working with the displaced and increasingly search for lasting solutions for the victims.

A FORBIDDING LANDSCAPE

Colombia's northern border with Panama is a forbidding place. It

is an unending landscape of swamp bisected by deep rivers and inlets. There are no roads here. The northern tip of the Andes mountains, which run the entire western length of South America, start where the swamp ends. The area is sparsely pop- ▶

Violence has wracked Colombia virtually since it wrestled independence from Spain in 1819.

► ulated, but strategically important, sitting astride the Panamanian frontier, straddling both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. There has been talk of driving a second Panama Canal through the region which is also rich in natural resources such as timber and minerals.

Colombia's major guerrilla faction, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) controlled the region, but in a terror campaign designed to challenge the Marxists supremacy, paramilitaries indiscriminately killed civilians and drove thousands of others like the Laguna family from their homes in late 1996-97.

Some civilians have cautiously begun returning to the region, participating in a series of projects designed to try to call the bluff of the insurgents. Supported by such institutions as the church, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other groups and with names such as 'Communities of Life' and 'Peace Commu-

nity of San Francisco de Asis', the villagers have effectively declared their neutrality in the conflict and challenged the paramilitaries and guerrillas to leave them alone and the government to provide the assistance necessary to restart their lives.

The village of Limon, tucked away deep in the swamp, is one such experiment. When church and UNHCR field personnel visited the area

recently, they first had to travel for several hours by fast river boat and then hack for two hours through thick foliage and ankle deep mud. During the rainy season, the entire area floods, primitive trails turn into thigh-deep rivers of mud and homes are inundated. Villagers take the floods in stride, moving to the top third of their one-storey wooden homes and perching there till the waters recede.

More than 100 people returned initially to Limon, moving into the clapboard

“Like the intellectual, the reporter, the human rights activist, the displaced person, it is my turn to have to abandon my native soil, my life, my soul, my country.”

UNHCR and church officials wade through coastal swamps to reach an isolated village and check the progress of displaced civilians who decided to return home.





homes other civilians had abandoned. They have cleared the bush to construct new homes for hundreds more civilians expected to follow shortly. Crops have been planted. Children splash happily in a small muddy stream.

"We just want the men with guns to leave us alone," said 50-year-old Evangelina, whose brother and nephew were killed in the attacks four years ago by the paramilitaries.

"We hope this will all work, but in the end only God knows. If they want to enter and kill again, nothing will stop them." To try to prevent that, a representative from the national Ombudsman's office and two members of the International Peace Brigades organization live with the villagers, acting as observers and 'moral deterrents' by their presence to further armed attacks. "So far, so good," said one during the recent UNHCR visit. "For the moment at least, everything is peaceful."

OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

There are other signs of optimism. The government is involved in lengthy and tortuous peace negotiations with the FARC guerrillas and is trying to start a similar process with the second largest group, the ELN. U.N. and international organizations as well as powerful nations like the United States, have become more involved in searching for solutions.

But success is far from assured. Many observers believe the conflict will intensify even as the talks progress, with the guerrillas and paramilitaries seizing as much territory as possible to strengthen their bargaining positions.

While some civilians have begun moving back into areas of northern Colombia, human rights monitors say others are leaving, fearing renewed conflict. In the 'peace village' of Domingodo guerrillas recently executed a village leader, accusing him of collaborating with the paramilitaries—a clear indication the gunmen on both sides will tolerate the non-violent movement only at their convenience.



Recently returned villagers rebuilding their destroyed homes and attending classes in a simple wooden schoolhouse.

Villagers in the peace communities also complain of broken government promises and the lack of assistance for their communities. Ambushes, abductions and murders are everyday events and targeted individuals continue to flee Colombia. "I am one more," wrote Francisco Santos, news editor of the country's leading newspaper, *El Tiempo*, as he fled to the United States. "Like the intellectual, the reporter, the human rights activist, the displaced person, it's my turn to have to abandon my native soil, my life, my soul, my country."

Foreign Minister Guillermo Fernandez de Soto insisted recently, "Before, we used to tackle the issue of the internally displaced in the way one would put out a small fire. Now we intend to do it in a comprehensive manner."

Humanitarian groups give the government high marks for its intentions, but effective implementation is another matter. National Law 387 is one of the most comprehensive documents of its kind anywhere in the world, at least on paper, but too little practical help is reaching the displaced.

President Andres Pastrana launched the peace process when he took office, but is under no illusions about the difficulties ahead. Peace talks, he said, "will be extremely complex and could take years."

The country is watching and waiting, unclear which way events will swing. Two large billboards en route to the capital's airport sum up the uncertainty. One reads, "Don't go away. Things are getting better." The second one says, "The last one to leave turns off the lights." ■

■ Nearly 2,000 Guatemalan refugees received naturalization documents in a springtime ceremony in Mexico's Quintana Roo state.

■ Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked member countries to sign all treaties reflecting U.N. core principles at a September summit.

Seeking asylum

MEXICO

Joining the club

Mexico has acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the two cornerstones of international protection. It became the 139th signatory to the Convention. It also acceded to the 1954 Convention on Statelessness. During civil conflict in Guatemala in the early 1980s an estimated 46,000 civilians fled to Mexico. Many have since gone home but an estimated 22,000 people have stayed and the government offered them full nationality. Such actions reflected Mexico's "long tradition of asylum," according to High Commissioner Sadako Ogata.

UNITED STATES

Caribbean experiment

How does an organization with limited human and material resources cover 12 island nations scattered over tens of thousands of square miles of ocean? UNHCR's Washington office decided the answer was to create Honorary Liaison positions in each of the states in the Caribbean where it needed a presence. The officers have been drawn primarily from the ranks of community leaders in non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector. Immigration issues in these diverse nations are often controversial and politically sensitive. Not all of these states have signed international refugee treaties or even have immigration agencies and asylum officers. Despite that, they have offered sanctuary to Haitian and Cuban refugees as well as people from as far away as Burundi, Sri Lanka, China, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Chechnya.

RWANDA

Reliving the horror



Rwanda, the stuff of nightmares.

“Hearing them die at the end of the phone because I decided not to send troops to reinforce them, because the risk of them going there was too high to even be able to accomplish that. Yet at the end of the phone, they were screaming for help. And I essentially am saying no.” The nightmare still haunts Romeo Dallaire six years after genocide in the central African country of Rwanda began. Dallaire had arrived in that country the previous year, a general in the Canadian army and head of a nearly 2,000-strong United Nations force trying to monitor a fragile truce between a government dominated by the majority Hutu tribe and rebels of the minority Tutsis. Months before the killings started, Dallaire tried to warn his superiors and major nations, but was ignored. He was virtually powerless to intervene when the slaughter began. He recently announced his retirement from the army because of continuing ill health following the nightmare of Rwanda. In a subsequent Canadian television interview he revealed many of his thoughts at the time... and since. “I will remain frustrated at the non-intervention,” of the U.N. and major powers he said in the interview. “I would have

used deterrence, instead of offensive. The other frustration was – I think I maybe wasn't convincing enough. Maybe I should have gone to New York and argued right there on the ground, early on.”

Some major powers who had extensive first hand information, the general said, “were playing with the U.N., toying with the U.N., using the U.N. as a cover; demonstrating a will on one side through the U.N., but ultimately really not wanting to play on the other side.” He added, “But the real crux of it is when it actually happened, the reactions during those three to nearly four months. That's where the cold heart of lack of humanism actually came to the fore in spades.” He added, “When I'm asked, why did you stay, why didn't you pack it in? I said if we can save one Rwandan, at least morally, we've attempted to stymie the debacle that was going on.” Dallaire left Rwanda in 1994. He told his television audience he had attempted suicide “a couple of times. There were many days in the past, less so now, where I wish I had died there. I think the ultimate solace will be maybe some day, of not sensing that suffering and all that pain. But the Rwandans paid a hell of a bigger price.”

■ A volunteer corps, the U.N. Information Technology Service, will help people in developing countries to use new technology.

■ Targeting of civilians is a threat to international peace and security, a Security Council resolution said.

■ Up to 16 million people in northeast Africa are threatened by starvation because of crop failure and displacement.

■ International donors pledged \$2.3 billion in economic aid to stabilize the volatile Balkan region.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Lessons learned

When civil conflict gripped Guatemala in the early 1980s, an estimated 1.3 million people were uprooted from their homes and some 46,000 civilians fled to Mexico as refugees. While many eventually returned home, around 22,000 Guatemalans—about half of them born in refugee camps—stayed and the Mexican government offered them full nationality. A 'lessons learned' seminar was held in Geneva to examine the results of the 'Guatemala experience.' UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner Soren Jessen-Petersen said the whole of Central America had become a 'laboratory for solutions' during this period. In 1984, 10 Latin American governments adopted the Cartagena Declaration which expanded protection and assistance to Central American victims of armed conflict and human rights abuses. The 1989 International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) helped UNHCR promote long-term solutions in addition to more immediate assistance programs. And the

UNHCR / B. PRESS



A Guatemalan returnee near Cantabel uses an 'improved' stove for the family meal.

agency pioneered quick impact projects (QIPs) in Nicaragua—small-scale projects designed to bridge the gap between the immediate and long-term needs of returning refugees which UNHCR subsequently introduced in other trouble spots.

For the first time since UNHCR became involved with repatriation, refugees themselves largely negotiated the terms of their return, in particular access to land and they then helped shape a formal 1996 peace agreement in the country. Refugee participation

and visibility in the political process, stimulated donor interest in funding the repatriation project. Participants agreed that a 'generous' repatriation package was vital to the program's success. There were also failures. Humanitarian coordination in initial reintegration assistance was patchy as was the linkage between the quick impact projects and later, longer-term development programs. Also, there were no clear guidelines on the nature of UNHCR's protection role in a country of origin.

CUBA

Thanks for the help

Sadako Ogata paid the first ever visit by a High Commissioner to Cuba in May and after reviewing the organization's activities there, thanked the government for helping refugees. "Cuba has a very important tradition of giving asylum and protection to refugees from many parts of the world," she said in a speech at Havana University. "I would like to acknowledge and praise its openness and generosity" particularly allowing "refugees to have access to public services, in-

cluding support for those needing special care because of the severe physical scars left by war." Since gaining power in 1959, Cuban President Fidel Castro, whom Mrs. Ogata met during her visit, has provided refuge to many opponents of right-wing Latin American dictatorships as well as victims of conflicts in Africa.



UNHCR / B. GOLDBERG

Seeking asylum

ARGENTINA

First of its kind

The Foundation 'Argentina for ACNUR' has been established to help UNHCR promote refugee issues and help raise funds. It is the first organization of its kind in Latin America and is modelled on similar national committees in other parts of the world and reflects an increasing South American interest in humanitarian issues.

SOUTH AMERICA

Winds of change

While some Latin American governments continue to struggle with the legacies of military dictatorship, a growing awareness of refugees and asylum is playing a part in the transition toward complete democracy. Recent cases underline the trend. Argentina granted a Chilean civilian refugee status because of the continued use of military courts to try civilians in that country. Argentina also granted a previously rejected Peruvian asylum seeker sanctuary because of the continued use of torture and a biased judicial system in Peru. In Brazil, senior government ministers apologized and defended refugee rights following charges by both the police and press that Angolan refugees had been responsible for a gang war in Rio de Janeiro in which six persons were killed.

CANADA

Going home

Canada has staged its largest ever mass deportation of rejected asylum seekers by returning 90 'boat people' who entered the country illegally from China. They were among nearly 600 Chinese who arrived last summer on Canada's west coast.

Auguste R. Lindt

High Commissioner 1956-1960

Auguste R. Lindt was elected by the U.N. General Assembly on December 10, 1956, as the new head of the organization's refugee agency. Within days he was plunged into a crisis which would help shape the image and future of the still fledgling UNHCR—overseeing an assistance program for 200,000 people who fled to Austria and Yugoslavia from the Soviet repression in Hungary, an event which helped define the cold war era.

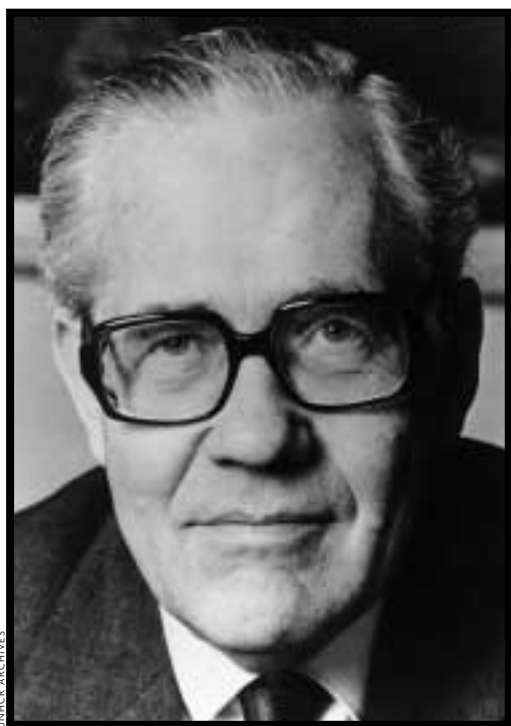
Africa was the next problem. Even as the crisis in the heart of Europe continued, Lindt and his team turned their attention to the conflict in Algeria and in 1957 he launched an assistance program to help civilians who had fled to neighboring Morocco and Tunisia.

His earlier training as a journalist, humanitarian delegate and Swiss diplomat helped him during one of the most hectic periods of his life. After studying law in Geneva and Bern, Lindt had served as a special correspondent for several European newspapers in Asia, Europe and Africa. After Swiss army service from 1940-45 he became a special delegate for the International Red Cross in Berlin and then Swiss observer at the U.N. from 1953-56. After leaving UNHCR, he served as Swiss Ambassador in the United States, the Soviet Union, Mongolia, India and Nepal.

He was 94 when he died in his sleep in April.



UNHCR ARCHIVES



UNHCR ARCHIVES

Poul Hartling

High Commissioner 1978-1985

Poul Hartling served as High Commissioner for seven years after a distinguished career in the church and Danish parliament. After graduating from the University of Copenhagen with a degree in theology, he became the Lutheran curate of Frederiksberg Church during the war years, 1941-45.

He was elected to parliament in 1957 and served first as foreign minister between 1968-71 and then as prime minister from 1973 to 1975.

His tenure as head of UNHCR coincided with the height of the cold war and refugee crises around the world including Viet Nam, Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and Central America.

Hartling received on behalf of UNHCR its second Nobel Peace Prize in 1981 for helping to tackle what the Nobel committee called a "veritable flood of human catastrophe." In response, the High Commissioner said the award was "a statement to the world's refugees that you are not forgotten."

In addition to his work for UNHCR, Hartling continued his humanitarian involvement, serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the Danish Inter-Church Aid and was one of the founders of the Danish Refugee Council.

"With steadfast courage and commitment, he helped ease the suffering of millions uprooted from their homes," High Commissioner Sadako Ogata said at the announcement of his death, at the age of 85.



CUBAN



HAITIAN



“Cuba has a very important tradition of giving asylum and protection to refugees. By allowing so many to stay in their country, Cubans have given the world a powerful message of solidarity and understanding.”

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata on a recent visit to Havana.



“Some of us are worrying about whether the stock market will crash... while more than half our fellow men and women have much more basic worries, such as where their children’s next meal is coming from.”

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his millennium report to U.N. member states.



“Sometimes the obstacle (to assisting internally displaced people) can be summed up in one word: sovereignty. But sovereignty is not a license for irresponsibility. States cannot be allowed to use sovereignty to justify the abuse of their people.”

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Richard Holbrooke, on the current difficulties in trying to help millions of internally displaced persons.



“We have to do even more than our share, because we have so much more.”

Adrienne Clarkson, Canada’s governor general and herself a former refugee, on that country’s role in helping refugees.



“I am one more. Like the intellectual, the reporter, the human rights activist, the displaced person, it’s my turn to have to abandon my native soil, my life, my soul, my country.”

Francisco Santos, the news editor of Colombia’s El Tiempo newspaper, on his decision to leave the country after death threats.

“The Immigration Service is far more professional than just a few years ago, handling applications faster, more equitably and more humanely than at any other time.”

Doris Meissner, Commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.



“The United States has no cause to be smug. Grave flaws in this country’s asylum laws have led to high

rates of prolonged and unnecessary detention and immediate deportation without hearing... two major failures to uphold international standards of refugee protection.”

A recent editorial in Newsday.



“Closing the back door to those who would abuse the system allows us to ensure that the front door will remain open to genuine refugees and immigrants.”

Canadian Minister of

Citizenship and Immigration Elinor Caplan.



“I think there will be more funding if we (the donors) are sure the funding is buying an adequate level of assistance.”

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Julia Taft arguing that humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR should sharply increase their demands for funds for such areas as Africa.

