

REFUGEES

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YEAR
IN REVIEW

The September Terror: *A Global Impact*

**Afghanistan's
Agony**



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



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UNHCR/A.F. FAGETTI/CS/INDI199

4 Humanitarian officials help civilians returning to Timor. But in the wake of the September terrorist attacks in the United States, there are fears that many countries may tighten up their security and immigration policies, and refugees and asylum seekers could face an even more difficult future.



UNHCR/A. BANTA/CS/PAK2001

14 Afghanistan was the largest single humanitarian crisis even before the latest troubles when hundreds of thousands of additional civilians were uprooted.



UNHCR/S. GREENE/CS/INDI1993

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The global fallout

THE WORLD WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN following the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States.

This is true, not only for the immediate victims, their families and governments directly involved in the terrorist incidents, but for millions of people who were

There has been a remarkable turnaround in military fortunes on the battlefield, but it is not immediately clear what effect that will have on the country's reeling civilian population, especially as another shuddering winter closed in on the region and much of the country was in a virtual state of lawlessness.

Away from Afghanistan, countries rushed to introduce anti-terrorist legislation, beefed up their frontier security and warily eyed foreigners of a 'certain hue.'

UNHCR sympathized with legitimate security concerns. But the refugee agency—along with many legislators—was equally worried that any 'rush to legislation' could compromise hard won legal protections for people with few other defenses and could help spread xenophobia already bubbling beneath the surface in some countries against 'bogus' refugees.

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said repeatedly that the 1951 Refugee Convention already offers safeguards to prevent terrorists from infiltrating the international asylum system and noted that refugees were normally the victims of terrorism and not the perpetrators of it.

"Asylum seekers make a perfect target for people who want to invoke old prejudices against foreigners," Lubbers said. "Asylum seekers can't answer back."

But could there be a silver lining at the end of this particular crisis? The suffering will continue for some time to come, but with a large slice of luck and renewed commitment to humanitarian principles, just possibly.

Perhaps publics at large, focused for a moment on the crisis, will look behind the scare headlines and discover who refugees are—people just like you and me—and perhaps this time around the industrialized world will not walk away from Afghanistan in its greatest hour of need.



already among the most vulnerable in the world—refugees and asylum seekers in every part of the globe and virtually the entire population of Afghanistan.

The latest crisis in that country was triggered and perpetuated by the outside world—first when the Soviet army invaded the country, and then when the international community increasingly ignored the sad state in which it was left when foreign soldiers withdrew.

A years-long drought added to the misery and was already ravaging the land when hundreds of thousands of additional civilians became 'collateral damage' in the latest round of bombings and fighting—some of them dying, others fleeing to 'safer' villages and camps and some escaping across officially closed borders to neighboring countries.



AFTER THE TERROR... THE



© VALERIE GACHE/EPA

Difficulties for asylum seekers and refugees, including this boatload of Kurds who recently reached Greece, had increased in the wake of the terror bombings.

Refugees and asylum seekers worldwide feel the effects of the September attacks in the United States

by Ray Wilkinson

AFGHANISTAN WAS, of course, the epicenter. In the maelstrom of fear and war that followed history's worst single act of terrorism in the United States, millions of civilians a half a world away became unintentional victims in the inevitable fallout, their misfortune being to live near the headquarters of 'World Terrorism, Inc.'

Untold numbers of Afghans abandoned their villages in search of greater safety in other parts of the country, joining an estimated one million people who had already been uprooted from their homes by years of civil war and famine. Others, too old, fragile, afraid or poor, cowered in their houses with dwindling supplies of food and heat at the height of a U.S.-led bombing campaign.

Although the borders of neighboring countries were officially closed, tens of thousands of people trekked across mountains and ill-defined tracks, crossing porous frontiers where an estimated 3.5 million Afghans had been in exile for as long as two decades.

Despite a dramatic turnabout on the battlefield, continued widespread insecurity and the on-rushing winter, when one of the most inhospitable and harsh land-

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FALLOUT



UNHCR/J. AUSTIN/CONVOY2001

People around the world, including civilians fleeing recent problems in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, receive protection from UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations.

fleeing the kind of terror the western world now appeared determined to stamp out. The United States ‘temporarily’ slowed the granting of visas to able-bodied men from 26 Arab and Muslim nations.

NEWSWEEK magazine ran a cover story entitled “Will America lock its gates?” and editorialized: “Foreigners... from students and technical workers to bedraggled refugees find themselves asking the question that never would have occurred to them before September 11—is the United States closing its gates?”

Neighboring Canada introduced tougher measures for front-end security screening of all asylum seekers immediately upon their arrival at land borders and airports. Previously, they had been allowed to enter the country and report for processing at a later date.

Australia had leaped into the world headlines even before the attacks in the United States by refusing to allow more than 430 people, including many Afghans, who had been rescued from a sinking ship

to land in the country and ask for asylum. They were eventually shunted to the improbable destination of Nauru, a tiny spec in the South Pacific, for processing. Canberra asked other countries spread right across the South Pacific to accept future boatloads of claimants.

One reputed destination was Tuvalu—a nation which fears it is sinking beneath a rising Pacific Ocean. One suggested loca-

scapes in the world is buried by impenetrable oceans of snow, threatened to prolong the human suffering for many more months.

Overnight, Afghanistan became the focus of global attention (*following story*). But there was a dreadful irony at work; for years the impoverished state deep in the heart of Central Asia had been the center

retreat and some unavoidable further collateral damage—a military euphemism for innocent victims—was visited on the civilian population.

GLOBAL TREMORS

A veritable media armada recorded Afghanistan’s suffering with around-the-clock coverage, but tremors from the

TREMORS FROM THE SEPTEMBER ATTACKS IN NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON WERE FELT, NOT ONLY IN AFGHANISTAN, BUT AMONG REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN EVERY CORNER OF THE GLOBE.

of the world’s largest humanitarian crisis. But the international community, disillusioned with a seemingly insoluble problem in a region, which had once hosted ‘The Great Game’ between imperial superpowers, had increasingly chosen to ignore it.

Now, rich nations were offering to piece Afghanistan together again, albeit after terrorism was blasted out of its mountain

September attacks in New York and Washington were felt among refugees and asylum seekers in every corner of the globe.

Governments and politicians from America to Albania to Australia urgently debated anti-terrorism legislation which could affect refugees and asylum seekers. Some beefed up border controls and strengthened checks on all arrivals, including Afghans and others sometimes

to land in the country and ask for asylum. They were eventually shunted to the improbable destination of Nauru, a tiny spec in the South Pacific, for processing. Canberra asked other countries spread right across the South Pacific to accept future boatloads of claimants.

One reputed destination was Tuvalu—a nation which fears it is sinking beneath a rising Pacific Ocean. One suggested loca-

tion on Tuvalu was so desolate the country's former president said, "The place can never sustain a population, even coconuts die there."

The government introduced legislative amendments to restrict the scope for judicial interpretation of the provisions of the 1951 Convention, authorized interdiction at sea and withdrew remote areas on its own territory—Christmas, Cocos and Ashmore islands—from a so-called 'immigration zone' thus denying foreigners arriving there the right to make asylum claims in liberal courts.

Australia directly linked the attacks in the United States with its position vis-à-vis asylum seekers. "You've got to be able to control that (the right to refuse entry to boat people), otherwise it can be a pipeline for terrorists to come in and use your country as a staging post for terrorist activities," Defense Minister Peter Reith told one radio interviewer.

Neighboring New Zealand agreed to accept 145 people refused by Australia and at virtually the same time as Reith was making his remarks, Deputy Prime Minister Jim Anderton responded to a question in Parliament: "It is reprehensible to link the terrorists attacks in the U.S. to refugees in New Zealand, let alone the Muslim community."

In a later, separate, interview High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said he had sympathy with the dilemma faced by countries such as Australia. "At the same time, the answer cannot simply be 'Keep them out,'" he said. "You need to organize it in a way that we go for the law and not for the law of the jungle. That's a challenge, not only for Australia, but for governments together."

RESETTLEMENT SUSPENDED

For several weeks Washington suspended a program which annually welcomed for resettlement as many as 80,000 refugees unable to return to their own countries as it undertook a comprehensive security review. An estimated 20,000 people who were waiting to travel to the U.S. were blocked until President George W. Bush signed a directive in late November effectively lifting the ban.

Though it was shortlived, the freeze brought additional heartache to refugees.

A seven-year-old Afghan boy who had already made it to America faced a very uncertain future after the attacks. He suf-

fered from a rare blood condition and was awaiting the arrival of his sister, the perfect bone marrow match, to save his life. Her arrival, however, was put on hold.

One Afghan widow with five children who had already sold her last pieces of furniture to raise money for the trip now faced eviction from her temporary lodging. Seventeen Sierra Leoneans, mostly women with children, who had escaped the devastating civil war in that country were confronted with a continued stay in a refugee camp.

John Koor had counted himself among the lucky ones because after 14 years in a refugee camp, he had finally made it to the United States in August. But 'the events' even caught up with him in his new safe haven. The 21-year-old said finding work in the wake of the attacks was maybe the toughest obstacle he had ever faced. "If we do not find jobs soon, we are in trouble, I think," he told the local press. "We will be homeless. It is better to be in the refugee camp than sleeping on the streets of this country."

Iran, whose borders were closed to prevent any major influx of Afghans, forcibly deported several hundred people who had nevertheless successfully made it to the country.

Even the Caribbean's sleepy Cayman Islands, famed for its tourist resorts rather than terrorism, did not escape the fallout. Three Afghan asylum seekers who had arrived by ship from Turkey, were initially released and then put into protective custody following the attacks. In Mexico, around 100 Iraqi Chaldeans, most of whom were en route to America to seek asylum, were put into protective custody until their future could be sorted out.

Sporadic attacks against 'foreigners', their homes, businesses and mosques, were reported from many countries.

ALARM AND UNDERSTANDING

Humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, were sympathetic to national security concerns, but extremely cautious and worried about some developments.

"Refugees and asylum seekers are already the objects of considerable mistrust and hostility in many countries, and they

are particularly vulnerable in the current climate," High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said. "We should beware of those politicians who claim to pursue the public cause, but simply exploit racial instincts. Fighting against xenophobia must be a top priority."

Erika Feller, the agency's director of international protection, said it was 'reasonable' for states to examine new security safeguards which, among other things, might be built into procedures for determining refugee status.

UNHCR would examine the "best prac-



Countries are beginning to tighten their asylum procedures in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

tices of states in this regard" she said, adding, "Our purpose in doing so is to avoid wrong answers being given to this inherently reasonable question. Put another way, our hope is to see any additional security-based procedural safeguards striking a proper balance with the refugee protection principles at stake."

UNHCR has consistently maintained that the 1951 Refugee Convention, the cornerstone of international protection for uprooted peoples (REFUGEES magazine N° 123) already contains provisions to exclude

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“The Convention is about freedom from fear”

The international community recommits itself to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention

by Ray Wilkinson

IT WAS AN UNPRECEDENTED gathering at a particularly sensitive time. Some 156 countries, non-governmental organizations, academics and other groups met in Geneva's Palais des Nations for what High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers called the most important global meeting on refugees in a half century.

After two days of speeches and discussions, the year-end conference adopted a landmark declaration reaffirming the commitment of signatory states to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. The treaty has already helped millions of people to build new lives, but has come under fire as increasingly irrelevant in a new and more complicated millennium far removed from the conditions in which the document was originally framed in the ashes of World War II.

The timing of the meeting was particularly poignant. It came three months after the September 11 attacks in the United States, the fallout from which turned the international spotlight not only on terrorism, but also on the unending humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the plight of refugees and asylum seekers globally.

Though many of the governments present in Geneva (143 nations have actually signed the Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol) were urgently pressing ahead with national security and anti-terrorism legislation, some of which could potentially adversely affect refugees, signatory states at the conference unanimously approved the declaration. This recognized the 'enduring importance' 'relevance and resilience' of the Convention and vowed to further strengthen the instrument which Lubbers underlined was a treaty "about freedom from fear."

GLOBAL CONSULTATIONS

The ministerial-level meeting was part of a process called Global Consultations on International Protection which UNHCR

launched at the start of 2001 involving governments, non-governmental organizations, academics, judges and other experts on refugees and refugee law. The process was aimed at reaffirming the centrality of the Convention in helping the world's uprooted peoples and examining contentious issues threatening to undermine the international system of protection.

The Consultations are scheduled to end in mid-2002 at which time UNHCR will draw up a set of objectives entitled an Agenda for Protection to serve as a guide to governments and humanitarian organizations in their efforts to strengthen worldwide refugee protection.

Though some governments have merely paid lip service to the Convention in recent years and others believe it is increasingly outdated, the declaration affirmed nations "commitment to implement our obligations under the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol fully and effectively" and promised to "address the causes of refugee movements, as well as to prevent them."

It contained recommendations encouraging countries that have not yet done so, to accede to the Convention, to strengthen or adopt national refugee legislation and, because of the events of September 11 in the U.S., to be particularly careful in applying articles in the treaty covering the exclusion from its protection of persons suspected of committing serious crimes.

UNHCR was reaffirmed as "the multilateral institution with the mandate to

provide international protection to refugees" and governments were encouraged to both strengthen their cooperation with the organization and "respond promptly, predictably and adequately" to its funding needs.

The declaration emphasized that the principle of non-forcible return of asylum seekers (refoulement) was sacrosanct. It said 'prevention' of crises was the best way to avoid future outflows, and that while states should encourage 'voluntary repatriation' they should

also continue to help particularly vulnerable people to integrate or resettle in new countries.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan had told the conference that there was a growing tendency to equate refugees "at best with economic migrants, and at worst with cheats, criminals or even terrorists. We must refute this gross calumny. Refugees are victims of auto-cratic or abusive

regimes, of conflict, and of criminal smuggling rings."

As if to prove that point, Ms. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, who rose from refugee to become the President of Latvia, told the meeting of her flight to freedom: "Three weeks and three days after my family left the shores of Latvia, my little sister died. We buried her by the roadside and were never able to return or put a flower on her grave. And I like to think that I stand here today as a survivor who speaks for all those who died by the roadside, some buried by their families and others not." ■

"We buried my sister by the roadside and were never able to return or put a flower on her grave. I stand here today as a survivor who speaks for all those who died by the roadside."



Australia caused an international furore when it refused to allow more than 400 people stranded aboard a Norwegian ship, the Tampa, to land and ask for asylum.

► *Continued from page 7*
terrorists from being granted asylum, the claims of some governments, politicians and media notwithstanding (see story page 11).

“It is crucial that states understand that the Convention does not provide a safe haven to terrorists, nor does it protect them from criminal prosecution,” the agency said. “On the contrary, it is carefully framed to exclude persons who

commit particularly serious crimes.”

Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International weighed into the debate: “We are worried about the haste with which laws are being adopted” in the West, she said. “In the past, human rights were seen as a key to secure societies. Now human rights are seen as a key obstacle.”

In the aftermath of the September attacks, UNHCR publicly listed 10 specific

areas of ‘most concern.’ They included the threat of increased racism and xenophobia and the possibility of governments using proposed, recently approved or long-standing legislation and resolutions improperly against uprooted peoples because of their religion, ethnicity, national origin or political views.

There were two general areas of concern, the agency said: “That bona fide asy-

“REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE ALREADY THE OBJECTS OF CONSIDERABLE MISTRUST AND HOSTILITY IN MANY COUNTRIES, AND THEY ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE.”

lum seekers may be victimized as a result of public prejudice and unduly restrictive legislative or administrative measures, and that carefully built refugee protection standards may be eroded.”

Specifically, the agency worried that vulnerable people might be penalized in several areas including tougher, unfair regulations on deportation, extradition, exclusion from protection instruments, the withdrawal of refugee status and the possible cancellation of resettlement programs.

It was ironic, UNHCR noted, that refugees themselves were often escaping violence, including terrorism, and were not the perpetrators of such acts, despite that public perception in some countries.

It suggested several ways that security could be tightened without threatening genuine asylum seekers. They included the establishment of specialized ‘exclusion units’ in countries which would have expertise in relevant areas of refugee and criminal law as well on terrorists them-

lators as REFUGEES went to press underscored humanitarian concerns in many areas, but also some progress.

In the United States, under the “United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001” wives and children of persons found inadmissible on terrorism grounds could also be detained because of their family relationship and not for their own individual actions. Another clause would raise the bars to asylum, possibly excluding persons deserving refugee status.

The aftermath of the September at-

its way through Parliament since February rapidly received royal assent. Some advocates had viewed the bill as overly restrictive, but they fell silent on that issue to refocus their attention on questions of civil liberties and due process issues in the wake of the attacks.

In October, a 171-page anti-terrorism bill was introduced. Critics worried about the wide new powers the proposed law would give the police and courts. Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan announced a five point security strategy, including the fast-track preparation of tamper-proof permanent resident cards for new immigrants; tighter security screening of asylum claimants; increased detention and deportation capacities and the hiring of new staff at ports of entry.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration immediately tightened entry procedures for asylum seekers by ordering their ‘eligibility’ processing at ports of entry rather than the old procedure of conducting them in-country at a later date. One U.S. based charity, Vive la Casa, immediately challenged the process by driving a convoy of cars and buses containing dozens of asylum seekers to one frontier post and demanding that they be allowed to enter Canada.

The next day, a temporary 30-day order was issued allowing immigration officials to ‘direct-back’ refugee claimants to the United States to await appointments to re-appear at the border.

Ottawa was particularly sensitive to charges by some American politicians that Canada serves as a staging point for terrorists, though no evidence surfaced that any of the September terrorists entered the U.S. through the northern border.

The buzz word in immigration circles

“OUR HOPE IS TO SEE ANY ADDITIONAL SECURITY-BASED PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS STRIKING A PROPER BALANCE WITH THE REFUGEE PROTECTION PRINCIPLES AT STAKE.”



U.S. COASTGUARD

The United States has been intercepting civilians on the high seas for years. Coast guards stop Haitian boat people before they can reach the U.S.

selves; closer cooperation between border guards, intelligence services and immigration authorities which could help identify terrorist suspects early and the use of fingerprinting.

WORLDWIDE REVIEW

A worldwide review of proposed legis-

tacks also reverberated throughout America’s northern neighbor, Canada, where immigration policy and security concerns along the world’s longest unprotected frontier have been contentious issues for some time (REFUGEES magazine n° 119).

A proposed Immigration and Refugee Protection Act which had been wending

at the end of the year was 'harmonization' of the two countries immigration and refugee policies, though there were fears that any such cooperation would tilt towards tougher U.S. policies rather than the more liberal Canadian approach.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, however, insisted to Parliament: "While there is a need to work together with the U.S. on immigration and refugee matters, this government is going to resist the temptation of hastily reforming the system to the detriment of the country's liberal traditions and its welcome to immigrants and refugees."

EUROPEAN MOVES

Across the Atlantic, the European Commission tabled its own legislative proposals to combat terrorism and streamline extradition procedures between member states. The refugee agency expressed some reservations on both.

The listing of such crimes as extortion, theft or robbery would not always be severe enough to warrant a person being 'excluded' from the provisions of the 1951 Convention, UNHCR said. The "vague and broadbrush approach in defining terrorist offences... may risk unjustifiably widening the applicability of the Convention's exclusion clauses through the interpretive 'back door.'"

The second proposal, while aiming to enforce the transfer of persons suspected of crimes between two states, should in-



British newspapers highlighted attempts by thousands of people, including many Afghans, to use the Channel Tunnel to reach England and seek asylum.

clude safeguards to ensure that the protection of a refugee is not undermined by his extradition. Among other things, return arrangements to the country where a refugee is recognized should be put into place after prosecution or, at the very least, after serving a sentence.

The European Union is an influential player in the international standard-setting arena and its instruments are often used as models in other parts of the world.

"The export value of instruments that do not contain explicit legal safeguards to other regions with less developed systems of human rights protection is worrisome," a UNHCR commentary said, "since it could have the potential of undermining existing human rights and refugee protection principles."

Individual European countries considered their own measures. British Home Secretary David Blunkett introduced a

Excluding the terrorists

The 1951 Refugee Convention vs terrorism

In the wake of the September attacks in the United States, governments, politicians and media worried that terrorists might try to use the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention to mask their operations.

Some states rushed to introduce or strengthen anti-terrorist legislation. The U.N. refugee agency supported 'reasonable' additional security arrangements, but added that a 'proper balance' had to be struck with refugee protection principles

and underlined that the Convention itself already barred terrorists under its so-called exclusion clauses.

ARTICLE 1F states:

The provisions of this Convention shall not apply to any person with respect to whom there are serious reasons for considering that:

a. he has committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, as defined in the international in-

struments drawn up to make provision in respect of such crimes;

b. he has committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to that country as a refugee;

c. he has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

sweeping anti-terrorism bill which would suspend and could deny the right to seek asylum of persons detained under the proposed legislation.

Under existing law, a Special Immigration Appeals Commission examines cases of asylum seekers who are considered a threat to national security and their reasons for fleeing. The new proposals would bar the commission from considering the asylum content of appeals. It would also allow for the indefinite detention of suspects

support people in need of refuge. "I am determined that the government will maintain firm border controls," he said "but I am equally determined that that must not obstruct our obligations to provide protection to those who need it."

"Britain's shrunken political discourse, mixed with a residue of racism and xenophobia, has elevated the asylum question to a prominence it doesn't deserve," THE ECONOMIST weekly magazine opined. "A healthier attitude among politicians will

protection rather than who should be "included under the umbrella of the Convention."

The Austrian government announced persons would no longer be able to file asylum applications in its embassies following a huge increase in claimants in Pakistan and Iran. Politicians debated changes in asylum practices including suggestions that non-European claimants should not be admitted to the country during asylum procedures. Persons without proper identity papers could also be barred from refugee status, a most worrying suggestion since many refugees must use either false papers or destroy their own legitimate identification, to successfully escape persecution.

The xenophobia feared by humanitarian leaders surfaced during elections in Denmark, normally one of the world's most enlightened countries toward refugees. Mogens Camre, a European Parliament member, insisted that "All western countries have been infiltrated by Muslims, some of whom are polite to us while waiting until there's enough of them to get rid of us."

In the first European election since 'the events' Danish voters then elected a right-wing government after a campaign which focused on pledges to curb immigration.

The Balkan region has become a major transit point for an increasing number of economic migrants and refugees and countries there were under pressure from western nations even before the terrorist attacks, to tighten their borders and laws.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a new package of proposed legislative measures would include extradition language without any safeguards against the forcible return home of vulnerable civilians (*refoulement*), provisions for detention which do not take into account international refugee law principles and an amendment to deprive some naturalized citizens of their passports.

Albania said it would amend its Law on Foreigners and then expelled five persons of Arabic origin, raising concerns about the



A Sikh family confers with a lawyer while seeking asylum in Canada.

when they cannot be returned to their own countries.

"Existing refugee law protects asylum seekers while also ensuring the interests of states whose duty is to protect the public," Anne Dawson-Shepherd, UNHCR's Representative in the United Kingdom, said. "Any move to deny or suspend access to asylum procedures is therefore unnecessary and would be an erosion of the commitment" to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

WHITE PAPER

The government was also working on a 'White Paper' to set up reception centers for some asylum seekers, all of whom would be issued with new 'smart' identity cards.

Blunkett insisted the government would continue to

make much of the problem go away."

In Germany, government coalition parties agreed in principle on their own anti-terrorism package. Features would include provisions to facilitate the removal of suspected political extremists and allow authorities easier access to information on asylum seekers who could then become 'a target group of suspicion.' Humanitarian officials expressed concern that future refugee debate would center more around who could be excluded from international

"IT IS CRUCIAL THAT STATES UNDERSTAND THAT THE 1951 CONVENTION DOES NOT PROVIDE A SAFE HAVEN TO TERRORISTS. ON THE CONTRARY, IT IS CAREFULLY FRAMED TO EXCLUDE PERSONS WHO COMMIT PARTICULARLY SERIOUS CRIMES."

possible future treatment of asylum seekers of similar ethnic background.

Croatia and Bulgaria both tightened their border controls.

MIXED SIGNALS

According to some humanitarian legal analysts, the whole edifice of international protection, including the 1951 Convention itself, had been under pressure for years and the September attacks added another powerful jolt in this direction.

Particularly worrisome were concerns that legislation which might unfairly target refugees, once enacted, might take years, if ever, to undo. Also the widening perception, often fuelled by politicians and the media, of refugees and asylum seekers as automatic terrorist suspects. In some countries the words 'bogus' and 'refugees' have already become virtually synonymous.

"This form of propaganda is particularly insidious and extremely difficult to fight," one official said. "Civilians who suddenly find themselves under attack are only too ready to believe that a 'suspect' person without any papers, with a different colored skin and with a seemingly implausible tale could be the enemy. Best not to take a chance, whatever the truth, and refuse to allow them in."

A worldwide program to permanently resettle particularly vulnerable refugees, a project UNHCR termed 'imperative', faced an uncertain future.

Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien said his country would continue to fully participate and would "welcome people from the whole world" and continue to "offer refuge to the persecuted."

Washington lifted its own temporary suspension, but it did lower the numbers the country would receive in 2002 and the refugee agency worried that several other traditional resettlement countries were now also "disinclined to maintain their programs at the promised level, particularly for certain ethnic groups."

In the United States, UNHCR welcomed the inclusion of habeas corpus actions (challenging the constitutionality of a detention decision) which was included in the new anti-terrorism package. There were also proposed automatic six-month reviews for people detained but still awaiting deportation and the easing of deten-

REFUGEES THEMSELVES WERE OFTEN ESCAPING VIOLENCE, INCLUDING TERRORISM, AND WERE NOT THE PERPETRATORS OF SUCH ACTS, DESPITE THAT PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN SOME COUNTRIES.

tion restrictions in some individual cases.

While debating stronger security measures, the German government said it would introduce a new immigration law

have become new victims in a new kind of war and those who had effectively been abandoned for years to seemingly permanent exile in refugee camps.



Following the September attacks, the United States temporarily halted its resettlement program for refugees under which tens of thousands of people, including the Sudanese youth pictured above, have started new lives in the country.

which would stipulate that persons subject to persecution by so-called 'non-state agents' such as rebels or militia would be considered as refugees within the framework of the Convention. The proposed change would bring Germany into line with virtually all other signatory countries and end an anomaly where civilians fleeing countries such as Taliban-held Afghanistan were routinely excluded from asylum consideration.

Turkey also said it would reinforce the protection of Afghan asylum seekers by suspending the deportation of rejected claimants and delaying the finalization of negative decisions.

Most ironic of all, the current carnage in Central Asia could eventually offer longer term hope to millions of people who

But things will never be quite the same again, anywhere, and it is probably too soon to know the long term effects of September 11 for millions of people seeking a safer life.

The NEWSWEEK cover story on immigration intoned of America's new attitude: "Some deserving people may be kept out, but so might a few dangerous terrorists. It's the price visitors and Americans must pay for a safer country." That is a worry worldwide for refugees.

But Stephen Malet, another Sudanese Lost Boy, roommate of the unemployed John Koor in Chicago, was more philosophical: "In Sudan, we expected to die. Those people in the World Trade Center did not expect to die. This is why this country is good, even if we do not have a job." ■

Hundreds of thousands of persons were displaced within Afghanistan during the latest crisis including these civilians near Herat.

HELPING AFGHANISTAN

A COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN OPERATION IS PIECED TOGETHER

UNICEF/C. SHIRELY/OWA/62001



On the seven floors of UNHCR's blue and yellow headquarters building in Geneva, staff stood mesmerized. The video of planes slamming into the World Trade Center in New York was "unreal rather than shocking; the horror was too overwhelming to absorb at first," one senior official remembered. "But then we started to hear the words 'Bin Laden,' 'the Taliban' and

'Afghanistan' and it was very clear we were going to become part of this crisis."

In the humanitarian world, Afghanistan had become something of an enigma prior to the events of September 11.

The 1979 Soviet invasion had triggered a refugee crisis of massive proportions and in the next two decades millions of people fled the country. Millions more returned as the fortunes of war changed. And then there were new upheavals and further displacements. UNHCR alone spent more than \$1.6 billion to help what had become the globe's single largest refugee community.

But when foreign troops withdrew, the big powers lost interest in what they had

helped turn into a benighted piece of real estate in Central Asia. Traditional donors became wary of a country increasingly identified with unending war, international terrorism and the whole scale debasement of its female population.

Though basic aid continued to be pumped into the country, Afghanistan's refugee problem turned into the 'unending' or 'forgotten' crisis for much of the outside world.

"The attacks in the United States were a wakeup call," said Pierre François Pirlot, a regional expert who became head of a newly created UNHCR task force for the crisis. "They put Afghanistan

IN THE HUMANITARIAN WORLD, AFGHANISTAN HAD BECOME SOMETHING OF AN ENIGMA PRIOR TO THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11.

and its refugees back on the front burner.”

COMPLEX OPERATION

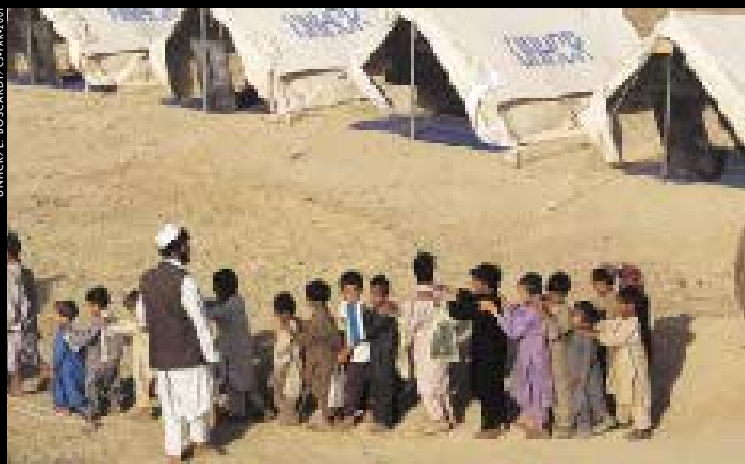
From the start, it was clear this would be one of the most complex operations UNHCR has been involved in in its 51-year history. A civil war between various loose alliances had been in progress for years, destroying virtually all of the coun-

other issues were raised for UNHCR. How could the agency aggressively meet the latest challenge without compromising other refugee crisis during a period when UNHCR had just undergone major staff cuts; how far to pursue an open borders policy with countries determined to keep them shut, allowing civilians to exercise their fundamental right to seek asylum during

MUNDANE PROBLEMS

As the humanitarian operation began, the most immediate problems to be tackled included: How many refugees could be expected? What kind of help would they need? How many staff should be deployed and where? How much would it all cost?

The ‘numbers game’ is one of the trickiest and most politically sensitive issues in any emergency. The lives of fleeing civilians, the effectiveness of programs and the reputations of governments and agencies revolve around these estimates. In Kosovo, though virtually no capital, intelligence agency or humanitarian group predicted the exodus of nearly one million people



Children attending school at a camp in Pakistan.



Tents and other emergency supplies are stockpiled in anticipation of further refugee arrivals in Pakistan.

try’s infrastructure. To compound the problem, Afghanistan was gripped by devastating drought and one-third of the country’s 25 million people already needed food and other help merely to survive.

Like Kosovo, Afghanistan’s ‘humanitarian crisis’ was highly politicized. The United States was not only UNHCR’s largest single donor, but also a major protagonist in the latest round of fighting.

Pakistan and Iran, who between them still hosted around 3.5 million long-term Afghan refugees, had never forgiven the international community for ‘walking away’ from the problem several years ago. This time around they officially closed their borders, as did the four other surrounding countries, and hung figurative ‘unwelcome’ signs along their frontiers to deter new refugees.

Fundamental protection questions and

times of persecution; where and how to help them if and when they left Afghanistan; and how to balance the needs of refugees with more than one million persons uprooted and trapped within the country—so-called internally displaced persons—who did not officially fall under UNHCR’s mandate.

In the early phase of the crisis, that problem was academic from UNHCR’s perspective. The international staff of all major agencies had left Afghanistan at the start of the bombing campaign. Like Kosovo before it, the country became increasingly isolated from the outside world, with little accurate information on what was happening there and few refugees crossing the officially closed frontiers.

“We can’t get in. They (civilians) can’t get out,” UNHCR’s chief spokesman Ron Redmond said at the time. “Stalemate.”

within a matter of weeks, UNHCR, among others, was condemned for its ‘failure’ in a slick pass-the-buck public relations exercise.

Early in this crisis, it was estimated as many as 1.5 million people could flee, *in a worse case scenario*. UNHCR had been heavily involved in the region for 20 years and Pirlot said, “You tap this experience, you talk to the people on the ground, you sniff around, you gauge the potential for the war spreading, you look at the maps and study history. And then you make an educated guess.”

Certainly, if history was any guide, this planning figure was not an unreasonable assumption. At the height of the earlier exodus, 6.2 million people had fled. In one year alone, in 1991, 1.6 million Afghans went home during a brief period of hope. The terrain may be harsh and unforgiving, but even with the most primitive

transport, two feet, people can cover huge distances quickly.

In the event, as some frustrated field workers said, it became ‘a refugee crisis without refugees’ in the first few months. Even those civilians who were able to slip across Pakistan’s porous 2,400-kilometer border became labelled as ‘invisible refugees’ as they melted quietly into already established Afghan communities to avoid official harassment.

The most obvious reason for the ‘non exodus’ of refugees were decisions by its neighbors to close their frontiers and effectively quarantine Afghanistan, moves which were then widely announced to de-

“We know you have to be prepared and you can’t prepare without funds,” one official recalled. “But they told us ‘we have our own problems. If we can’t see the refugees on television, it’s difficult to allocate funds.’”

That problem was soon resolved, UNHCR emphasizing that even if a large exodus did not materialize, in this operation at least, nothing would be wasted. Supplies stockpiled on Afghanistan’s borders could be used within the country once it reopened to international aid.

In the aftermath of the Gulf War in the early 1990s, UNHCR had decided to establish a permanent stockpile of items to meet any emergency. As the latest Afghan

are only a limited number of suppliers worldwide and the refugee agency immediately block-booked production. “We were offered tents by one donor,” Savage recalled, “but they had to go to the same suppliers we were using. The offer was self-defeating.”

Each canvas tent weighs between 70 and 120 kilos and costs \$70. UNHCR ordered 73,000 of the lighter weight models to be delivered between late September and November. An Ilyushin 76 cargo plane, the workhorse of the international humanitarian community, can carry 575 per flight and it costs \$100,000 for each trip between Europe and Central Asia.

To reduce overheads, and in the absence



Afghan refugees in Pakistan line up for water.



Mother and family find temporary refuge after fleeing Afghanistan.

FROM THE VERY START, IT WAS CLEAR THIS WOULD BE ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX OPERATIONS UNHCR HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN IN ITS 51-YEAR HISTORY.

ter mass flight. People inured to years of war either took the threatened allied ‘surgical’ air strikes in their stride, moved to the homes of families and friends in the countryside or were simply too exhausted by conflict and drought to move at all.

“Numbers are always a minefield,” one planning official said later. “It’s a very risky game and always a no-win situation.”

WHERE’S THE MONEY?

UNHCR asked for \$268 million, including \$50 million to meet immediate needs. The agency’s most important donors promised to be generous—but there was a hitch, a Catch-22. Some governments said,

crisis began, the reserves of plastic sheeting, blankets and jerry cans located in Copenhagen, Denmark, were expected to cover as many as 250,000 people.

Absent from the stockpile was one essential item, tents, but for a very good reason according to chief logistical officer Enda Savage. “It is not like going to the supermarket and plucking things off the shelf,” he said. “Tents are made of canvas. They rot when they are stored for any length of time so we cannot keep large stockpiles.”

At the start of an emergency, tents must be ordered to specific criteria, but the operation is frustrating and expensive. There

of a major exodus, a planning decision was made to send limited supplies immediately to the area and move the rest by sea or road, with the ability to switch back to air transport if warranted.

“It worked. Success from our perspective is to deliver supplies prior to the arrival of refugees,” Savage said.

But in a world where television has taught its audience to demand results instantly, the two months it took to deliver 73,000 tents, or complete similar programs, may be a luxury humanitarian agencies can no longer afford. Research is underway to manufacture lightweight, durable tents at an affordable price which can be

stockpiled and readily available.

UNHCR had been heavily criticized for the slow deployment of staff during the Kosovo emergency. Determined to avoid that problem now, it more than doubled its international presence by quickly adding 85 emergency staff on the ground and recruiting another 62 locals as mainly border monitors.

An internal evaluation of UNHCR's performance concluded that despite budget cutting constraints which had eliminated several hundred posts, UNHCR had met its immediate targets, though a major exodus "would have overwhelmed the agency."

The report said UNHCR still lacked

scrutinized every development, every second of the day.

The refugee element, played out against a harsh moonscape and full of larger-than-life figures, both colorful and pathetic, was elusive to pin down and tackle effectively in this fishbowl environment.

Fragmentary reports from inside the blockaded country suggested millions of people were living life on the very edge and many of them would surely die unless the situation could be resolved before the onslaught of another bitter winter.

"They are selling their livestock and their land, taking the roof beams out of their rooms and in some cases even sell-

tribal, physically intimidating locations and sometimes on disputed land. In one of many such incidents, villagers dismantled 70 tents at the Roghani camp in Baluchistan in November in a dispute over land ownership and distribution of jobs in and around the camp. Security forces did nothing during the incident which, however, was eventually resolved.

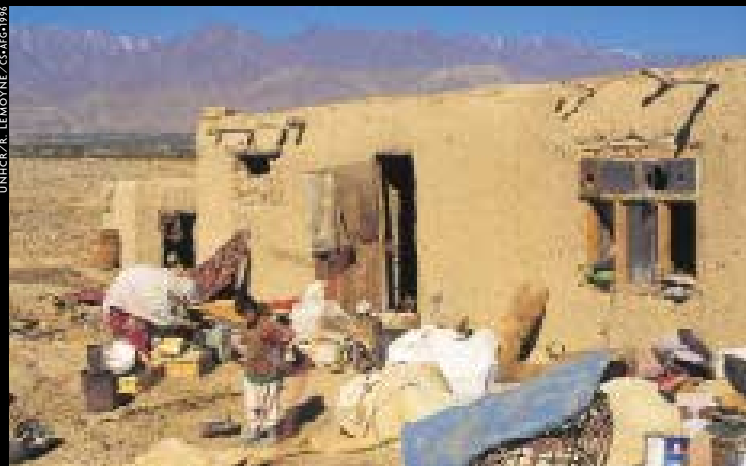
Pakistani and Iranian officials asked visiting dignitaries why they should open their borders to new floods of people when other nations had walked away from the earlier crisis and some were even now blocking the arrival of a few hundred asylum seekers.

On the Iranian border, two camps were



UNHCR/A. HOLLMANN/CSIR/1993

Many young girls who fled to Iran were able to go to school for the first time.



UNHCR/R. LEMOYNE/CSIR/1988

Afghan civilians prepare to flee their homes as war and drought sweep the country.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS, PLAYED OUT AGAINST A HARSH MOONSCAPE, WAS ELUSIVE TO PIN DOWN AND TACKLE EFFECTIVELY.

'fast track' budgetary and administrative procedures and lacked other comprehensive methods to provide updated information on staff deployment and the procurement and delivery of supplies.

IN THE FIELD

On the ground, field staff faced a surreal and frustrating experience. The Afghan crisis received overwhelming attention, not because of its humanitarian dimension, but because of the unprecedented political and military fallout following the terrorist attacks in the United States. Thousands of the world's media

ing their daughters to get a bride price," one frustrated aid worker said.

The Taliban rulers oversaw the trashing, looting and theft of U.N. offices and supplies and then, in its death throes, demanded that the agencies return to the country to help a population it had played a huge part in traumatizing.

Security concerns and numbing bureaucracy hampered humanitarian efforts to either get supplies into Afghanistan or help civilians who successfully reached surrounding countries.

Even when campsites were approved inside Pakistan, they were often in remote,

established—but on the Afghan side of the frontier and not in Iran itself, and inaccessible to U.N. staff.

There were delicate diplomatic talks on the 'open border' issue—how and where to help people who did succeed in crossing a frontier and how best to help people inside Afghanistan itself.

During a visit to the region, High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers said there had been an 'agreement to disagree' on open borders. UNHCR now evolved a two-pronged approach, developing programs to help people inside Afghanistan while simultaneously working with neighboring

countries to provide help, especially to the most vulnerable groups such as women and children and the sick and the wounded.

Field staff had to change priorities constantly while still trying to come to terms with a slippery humanitarian crisis that refused to define itself clearly.

“At one point we were concentrating our resources on trying to move people from border areas in Pakistan into camps,” one official said. “Then, when the military situation changed in northern Afghanistan,

of persons were internally displaced, but only a modest number had fled to surrounding countries as winter approached.

The immediate priority was to sustain civilians who had lost everything, with shelter, food and medical care during the long winter. “We are in a race against time and right now we are losing,” High Commissioner Lubbers said at one point in the crisis and that assessment remained just as plausible at the end of the year.

However, UNHCR (and other agen-

unlikely that many of the long-term refugees would try to go home until at least the beginning of spring and until the situation had stabilized even further.

“In Kosovo people had something to go back to,” an official said. “In Afghanistan, there is virtually nothing. Roads, water systems, schools, hospitals have all been destroyed. The country is awash with mines. We are writing on a blank sheet of paper.”

The World Health Organization estimated five million Afghans were suffering

IN KOSOVO PEOPLE HAD SOMETHING TO GO BACK TO. IN AFGHANISTAN, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NOTHING. WE ARE WRITING ON A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER.



Refugees in Iran usually integrated into local communities, rather than staying in camps as they normally did in Pakistan.

Though there are 3.5 million Afghan refugees still outside the country, millions have returned in the last few years.

the priority was to transfer supplies to Uzbekistan, ready to ship to Mazar-i-Sharif. And then we had to start gearing up to go back into Afghanistan itself. And this all happened in a matter of days.”

“There is always the risk of being overtaken by events in a fast moving crisis,” another official said.

THE FUTURE

In the last massive humanitarian emergency, hundreds of thousands of persons fled or were forced to leave Kosovo within a matter of weeks and then returned home just as quickly after only a short period in exile, surprising aid officials both times.

The Afghanistan crisis was very different. Around 3.5 million people were already in exile, many of them having been uprooted for years. Hundreds of thousands

cies) began reopening its offices in Afghanistan and restarting work with dozens of local NGOs to deliver emergency supplies as well as continuing its work in neighboring countries.

Late in the year, UNHCR developed a \$182 million regional action plan through mid-2002 to help nearly 900,000 people in four main areas. They included providing protection and assistance to nearly 400,000 Afghans in surrounding countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, being prepared for a further exodus and eventually helping refugees to return home. Inside Afghanistan, the agency will assist an estimated 500,000 internally displaced and other vulnerable persons.

Though civilians continued to go back and forth across the borders—nearly five million have returned in a decade—it was

from psychosocial distress after 20 years of conflict. More than seven million needed outside assistance simply to survive.

“We had a house. We had goats, sheep, blankets, donkeys and camels,” a 40-year-old refugee called Nazire said. “We were people. Now we have nothing.”

Reconstruction experts estimated it could take around \$10 billion to give Nazire and his fellow Afghans a new start in life. “The vast majority of the Afghan people awaken hungry, cold and sick every morning,” U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told one aid conference. “All of us know that the international community must be prepared to sustain a reconstruction program that will take many, many years.”

It is to be hoped that the international community does not again turn its back on Afghanistan, as it did once before. ■

2001 The Year

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers looks back at his first year in office

REFUGEES: What has been your biggest surprise since taking office?

There was no surprise because I had no expectations. I took the strange decision to go for the job not knowing exactly what it was about. I consulted my wife, but on the request of Kofi Annan only my wife. I just thought this job would be good because it is about people who do not have a government which takes care of them.

How do the jobs of running a U.N. agency and a government compare?

There are big differences. In a way this is more difficult. In government you can have a parliamentary debate and at the end of the day you either win or lose the battle. With UNHCR it's more fluid. There is not a decisive power or outcome. You depend on what governments allow you to do in terms of money and resources.

There have been worrying signs in some recent elections—Australia and Denmark for instance—that the asylum issue was used as a political football to the detriment of refugees and asylum seekers.

This is an uphill battle. Most people think their quality of life is threatened by the phenomenon of refugees, but the challenge is to explain that UNHCR with its refugees is a partner in building a better quality of life. Not all refugees are Einsteins, but certainly Einstein was a refugee. If you exclude refugees it backfires; it fuels criminality, negative forces. We at UNHCR have to convince by arguments. We don't have an army. We are not that rich that we can bribe the people to do good things.

You mentioned in one recent interview a prevailing “law of the jungle” toward asylum seekers.

For sure there is. We preach democracy to the whole world. But the reality is, there are deficiencies in the political systems which create refugees. Then when we have

the victims of violence and conflict, we don't provide solutions. This means too many people have to rely on human traffickers. Allowing all of this to happen, we accept the law of the jungle. We need a world based on law, but not on the law of the jungle. Our comfortable global economy allows criminals to continue their violence, but we need to work toward less violation of human rights, fewer conflicts and less violence.

The attacks of September 11 have been a watershed. Governments around the world are introducing anti-terrorism legislation. What effect is this going to have on refugees and asylum seekers?

Certainly it's a different world. However, it also provides an opportunity to seek a world in which people better understand that closing their curtains and doors (to refugees) doesn't help any more. We must build a world in which we are more inclusive in relation to the lack of justice, poverty, and the lack of development. Yes, it's more worrying, but there is an opportunity to build on the element that maybe people start to better understand the problems of refugees.

How will these new developments affect humanitarian-military relationships?

I see no problem with humanitarian agencies using military resources. It goes wrong when the military take over the humanitarian role. We have to be very precise and clear what is needed from the military to do our job. Afghanistan is based on a war against terrorism. We don't have to be neutral in actions against terrorism.

Some governments and politicians have called the 1951 Convention outdated and many appear to be merely paying lip service to it. Is it time for a rethink, a new Protocol?

Even before September 11 we were seeing mixed flows of economic migrants and asy-



lum seekers, creating a perception of refugees as phoney refugees. The attacks added to this negative climate in many countries. After the attacks UNHCR sent the signal to the world 'hey, you think that you have to be tough against us because of terrorism' but it's the other way around. We and the Convention exclude terrorism. We are partners in the concerted action against terrorists. I see the role of UNHCR growing now. It is no longer just a humanitarian organization. It's an organization which can help prevent to a certain extent the risks of criminality and terrorism. In line with this, we insist that there should be no impunity.

But to enforce that message, do you see the need for any change in the Convention?

No. No. This is clear. The Convention is good. We don't need a changed Convention, but indeed we need to work in a more no nonsense, more practical way on governance of refugees.

in Review

and discusses terrorism, Afghanistan and the 1951 Refugee Convention

UNHCR/Y. HASSANI/CSM/02001

There has been an international debate for many months now on internally displaced persons and who, principally should help them. This is a central issue currently in Afghanistan. What should UNHCR's role be there and globally vis-à-vis IDPs?

In general we should be available, but limit ourselves to those IDP situations in which UNHCR can make a difference because the root causes are the same, the streams of IDPs and refugees are mixed up. Specifically, in Afghanistan we will take care of certain numbers of IDPs, especially in eastern and southern parts of the country, assisting, monitoring and helping them decide whether and when to go home.

The latest crisis began just when UNHCR had undertaken a painful downsizing. This has happened on previous occasions (the Gulf War). Given the cyclical nature of the refugee business, should we be thinking of new ways to run this organization?

We have become leaner and healthier. We are handling this crisis in a more pro-active manner than earlier crises. Afghanistan means the time is over that we are shrinking. We

learned our lesson that we have to perform and do things better. Afghanistan is not just a dark page. It is revitalizing UNHCR.

Where do you expect to see the Afghan crisis at the start of spring?

For quite some time we will have pockets of violence, elements of insecurity. But I am an optimist. Returnees will play a key role in reconstructing the country—that is the key factor. The Afghans will find a way together to make their country more peaceful. But I am not in the business of prophecy.

I am in the business of delivering and that is what we are going to do.

On occasion you have been able to pick up the phone and ask former political colleagues in governments for funding. What is UNHCR's global funding outlook going forward?

I'm still very concerned. The alarm bell of September 11 has woken up the need for concerted action against terrorism. It still has not woken up the governments and politicians to sufficiently fund UNHCR. They are still shooting themselves in the foot. And then they complain later about flows of refugees and the lack of long-term solutions. It is dangerous for the world. Those who underfund UNHCR fuel crime.

The majority of victims in Afghanistan are Muslim. Yet the financial support to UNHCR of Muslim nations is disproportionately small. How can this situation be rectified?

It is a problem and it will take time to fix. We went on the wrong track when we globalized the mission of UNHCR, in that we were not able at the same time to globalize it to incorporate different cultures and religions. We have to overcome the shadows of the past. There is a feeling too much that UNHCR is a creation of the West. The time has come, and it is urgent, that the ownership of UNHCR will also include the world of Islam.

What has been your biggest disappointment in office?

There has been no disappointment but I find the job tougher than I thought because of the underfunding and the lack of understanding how important our work is. The U.N. family is good in coordination, but sometimes confuses coordination with the job to be done. But I end my first year on a very positive note. ■

Governments are still shooting themselves in the foot by underfunding UNHCR. And then they complain later about flows of refugees and the lack of solutions.

Afghanistan: All of its neighbors have refused to open their borders. Isn't this part of a global trend which is undercutting UNHCR's core protection mandate?

Yes it is. This is not good. There is refugees fatigue. It is rather dramatic. In 1938 there was an international conference in Evian (France) and an international attitude of 'Don't let the Jews go out' emerged. Then the drama of the Holocaust happened. We are now at 2001 and at our own crossroads. What are we going to do? Close our borders again?



EPA-AFP PHOTO/BANARAS KHAN

It was already the world's largest humanitarian crisis, but in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States in September, new agonies were visited on Afghanistan. As drought persisted and new

AFGHANISTAN

fighting erupted, hundreds of thousands of people fled to safer areas both inside and outside the country (left) while others began a long and arduous road home as security conditions in parts of the country improved late in the year (below).



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THE BALKANS *There was both hope and despair in the Balkans. Civil conflict wracked the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, sending tens of thousands of people, including those pictured above, fleeing. However, nearly two million persons have returned to their homes in the last few years and at the end of 2001, Kosovo held its first province wide elections.*



**THE INTERNALLY
DISPLACED**

As many as 25 million people who have been uprooted from their homes by war and other persecution, remained

displaced within their own countries.

There are more than four million of these vulnerable people, including those pictured, in neighboring Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a similar number in Sudan.

Crisis simmered in many parts of Africa throughout the year, and UNHCR helped care for more than five million people. There were some hopeful signs with tentative

AFRICA

steps being taken towards peace in places like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. An estimated 60,000 civilians returned to that country from neighboring Guinea (below) and the first of an estimated 170,000 Eritreans, some of whom had been exiles for more than 30 years, began going home from Sudan (right).



UNHCR/L. TAYLOR/CS31E2001



UNHCR / S. BONESS / CS4R12001



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THE CONVENTION

The Geneva Refugee Convention has helped millions of people, first to find a safe refuge and then to begin rebuilding their lives.

The treaty marked its 50th anniversary in July and continues to be a cornerstone of protection.

FALLOUT FROM TERROR

The current international structure of protection for refugees was under pressure from many quarters, even before the terrorist attacks on the United States in September. After those events, there were fears that genuine asylum seekers could face an even harsher climate as countries introduced anti-terrorism legislation and tightened frontier controls.



UNHCR/N. LETO/CSH/1995

| THE YEAR IN REVIEW |

“As emotions run high and while Americans and the rest of the world grieve, we should refrain from pointing fingers and inciting hatred against innocent groups such as refugees.”

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers in the aftermath of September 11.



“These people have been crippled by 23 years of conflict, a decade of neglect by the international community and four years of devastating drought. It was already a terrible crisis. Now it is worse.”

UNHCR spokesman Rupert Colville on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.



“They are selling their livestock and their land, taking the roof beams out of their rooms and in some cases, even selling their daughters to get a bride price.”

An aid official on the plight of internally displaced Afghans.

“Afghanistan is between life and death.”

An Islamic spiritual leader as the civil war reached a crescendo.



“It’s a very small document and will take only a few minutes of your time. A few minutes may be all the time that most of us have.”

A call from the Taliban to the ‘citizens of the world’ to read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



“We want to go abroad. Anywhere. Anywhere safe. Anywhere my wife and I can work, anywhere my children can go to school. Anywhere we can live normally.”

A refugee who escaped the fighting.



“The answer cannot simply be ‘keep



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CARTOON BY BORISLAV SAITINAC. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION



www.g.h.r.cartoon.com

Afghan farmers faced not only civil war but a devastating four-year drought.



“The Afghan capital fell as suddenly as the setting sun, leaving the scars and detritus of five of the most dreadful years suffered by any city on the planet.”

THE GUARDIAN on the fall of Kabul.



“I have not heard any music for years. It is the most beautiful sound in the world.”

A Kabul resident, listening to music for the first time since the Taliban came to power and banned it.



“It is the wall behind which refugees can shelter.”

Erika Feller, UNHCR's director of international protection on the 1951 Refugee Convention.



“In any case, no wall will be high enough to prevent people from coming.”

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers urging Europeans not to close the door to asylum.



“If we are the future and we're dying, there's no future.”

A Zambian youngster discussing the future of children in a violent world.

them out? You need to organize it in a way that we go for the law and not for the law of the jungle.”

High Commissioner Ruud Lubbers on the debate surrounding Australia's decision to prevent so-called boat people landing in

that country.



“Drought is like death. Now I have a field which gives me nothing at all.”



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