

Chapter XII

Refugees and displaced persons

In 1997, the number of persons of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) totalled 21 million. Of those, some 12 million were refugees, 3.3 million were repatriating refugees in the early stages of their reintegration, 3.6 million were internally displaced persons and 1.2 million others were humanitarian cases, for the most part victims of conflict. During the year, more than 676,000 refugees returned voluntarily to their countries of origin, highlighting the fact that repatriation was the preferred solution for many of the world's refugees.

Although there had been a distinct reduction in the number and scale of refugee-producing conflicts over the previous several years, the potential for large-scale displacement remained ever present in several regions and the increase in the number and intensity of ethnically based conflicts within States continued to be the subject of concern.

Africa continued to host the largest number of refugees of any continent in 1997, with some 7 million refugees, internally displaced persons and other people being helped by UNHCR. It was also in Africa that the number of people returning to their countries was the highest. The situation in the Great Lakes region remained a serious concern for UNHCR, due to continued violence against refugees and gross violations of human rights, which compelled UNHCR to suspend activities related to Rwandan refugees in the Congo in early September. Large-scale movements of more than 1.3 million returnees to Rwanda reduced the number of refugees in camps but created reintegration and security problems.

Some positive developments in other areas of Africa also eased the refugee situation during the year. After eight years of civil conflict, elections were held in Liberia in July, which led to the spontaneous return of some of the 500,000 refugees. Despite the slow pace of the peace process in Angola in 1997, some 53,000 Angolans spontaneously returned home. The repatriation of Togolese refugees officially ended in September, after almost all of the 300,000 refugees who had fled in 1993 returned to their country. In East Africa, the repatriation of some 65,000 Ethiopian refugees from the Sudan was also expected to finish by the end of 1997.

Elsewhere, the repatriation of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan restarted following the signing of a peace agreement in June, leading to the return of 6,600 refugees to Tajikistan despite a difficult security situation in both countries.

Security constraints also affected UNHCR operations in the North Caucasus, but over 20,000 internally displaced Chechens were assisted in returning home during 1997 from the surrounding republics in the Russian Federation. The repatriation from Bangladesh of Muslim refugees from Rakhine State in Myanmar continued, leaving 21,000 refugees who did not wish to return. Following political violence and military conflict in 1997, over 60,000 Cambodians sought refuge in Thailand.

In Central America, there was further progress in repatriating Guatemalan refugees from Mexico. During the year, 3,573 Guatemalans returned.

Of the 3 million persons uprooted by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, more refugees were able to be repatriated, particularly to Bosnia and Herzegovina where some 174,000 returned. Repatriation elsewhere in the region was slow. By the end of 1997, only 1,125 refugees had returned to Croatia from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The UNHCR Executive Committee, in October, considered repatriation challenges as its annual theme, including such issues as refugees from civil conflicts, forcible displacement within countries and threats to the institution of asylum, as well as threats to the security of humanitarian personnel. The Committee emphasized that refugee protection was primarily the responsibility of States and called on States to ensure that refugees were protected effectively.

Those issues were also raised by the Security Council, which in June expressed its grave concern at the increase in the use of force against refugees and other civilians in conflict situations, and called on those involved to comply with international law and to ensure the safety of refugees, displaced persons and other civilians, and to guarantee the unimpeded and safe access of UN and other humanitarian personnel to those in need.

The General Assembly also stressed that refugee protection was primarily the responsibility of

States, whose cooperation and political resolve were required to enable UNHCR to fulfil its mandated functions.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Programme policy

At its forty-eighth session (Geneva, 13-17 October 1997) [A/52/127Add.1], the Executive Committee of the UNHCR Programme emphasized that refugee protection was primarily the responsibility of States, and that the mandated role of UNHCR in that regard could not substitute for effective action, political will and full cooperation on the part of States, including host States and countries of origin, as well as other international organizations and the international community as a whole. The Committee called on States to take all necessary measures to ensure that refugees were protected effectively, including through national legislation and compliance with their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law instruments having a direct bearing on refugee protection, as well as through full cooperation with UNHCR in the exercise of its international protection function and its role in supervising the application of international conventions for the protection of refugees. It encouraged States and UNHCR to continue to promote regional initiatives for refugee protection and durable solutions and to ensure that regional standards conformed fully with universally recognized standards and responded to particular regional circumstances and protection needs. Noting that voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement were the traditional durable solutions for refugees, it affirmed that voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution and called on countries of origin, countries of asylum, UNHCR and the international community to enable refugees to exercise freely their right to return to their homes in safety and dignity. It noted that a comprehensive approach to refugee protection comprised, *inter alia*, respect for human rights; the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibited expulsion and return of refugees to places where they would be in danger; access of asylum-seekers to fair procedures for determining status and protection needs; and provision of material assistance where necessary. The Committee called on the High Commissioner to continue to strengthen the Office's refugee law promotion

work, with the active support of States and through increased cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and other relevant organizations.

In her opening statement to the Committee, the High Commissioner remarked on the apparent contradictions between humanitarian principles and State interest, especially in a situation of mass displacement across conflict lines. As examples of lessons drawn from past experiences, she stated that refugee camps should be located well away from border areas; the civilian character of refugee settlements should be preserved by not allowing armed elements and political extremists to live with and control refugees; and those who had committed crimes against humanity should be brought to justice. The lack of response to UNHCR proposals to implement such measures had contributed to further insecurity and conflict. In that context, she proposed to States and to regional organizations, primarily the Organization of African Unity, a two-way effort: her Office was ready to discuss with Governments practical measures that needed to be adopted to facilitate respect for humanitarian principles and that took into account their concerns.

The High Commissioner emphasized that UNHCR efforts to carry out repatriation under diverse circumstances had led it to confront the challenge of reintegration of uprooted populations. The Office had grappled with the need to develop a comprehensive approach to the requirements of the transition from war to peace, joining the UN system-wide search for a strategy for post-conflict peace-building.

Describing human resources as the mainstay of UNHCR's mission and operations, the High Commissioner noted that the Office had launched on 1 September the Career Management System, which attempted to optimize the utilization of staff resources while enhancing the Office's support for career planning, individual objective-setting and performance evaluation. The new system was closely linked to the "change management" exercise, initiated in 1995 and known as the Delphi project, and dealt with the areas of new technologies, human resources and financial management tools.

Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance

The Standing Committee of the UNHCR Executive Committee, at a meeting in January, discussed inter-agency follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 [YUN 1995, p. 927] on strengthening coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, based on a conference room paper presented by the Depart-

ment of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) (renamed the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). As a result of the inter-agency process outlined in the paper, the Secretary-General submitted to the Council a July report [E/1997/98] on the review of the capacity of the UN system for humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR was affected both by the new management tools proposed and implemented by the Secretary-General and by the key sectoral measures proposed in the humanitarian field, within the context of his proposals for UN reform (see PART FIVE, Chapter I). UNHCR was a member of two of the four executive committees set up by the Secretary-General, namely the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security. The relatively frequent meetings of both allowed for improved coordination of UN initiatives, particularly where there was an interface between political/peacekeeping and humanitarian activities.

On the implementation of reform in the humanitarian sector, UNHCR, along with DHA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP), was a member of a working group set up by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. The working group had been asked to examine how General Assembly resolution 46/182 [YUN 1991, p. 421], which set out guiding principles and methods for UN emergency humanitarian assistance, could best be implemented, given the experience of the preceding five years. The recommendations of the group were for the main part accepted by the new Emergency Relief Coordinator. As reported by UNHCR [A/53/12], reform in the humanitarian sector was expected to lead to a strengthened Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on international emergency assistance (see PART THREE, Chapter III). Within that context, UNHCR looked forward to the development of a clear system-wide policy on coordination options for complex emergencies, especially with regard to the combined roles of the resident coordinator and humanitarian coordinator, the lead agency, and the placing of the humanitarian coordinator within the administrative framework of one of the operational agencies.

UNHCR agreed that the issue of internally displaced persons should be included within the scope of the priorities established by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for 1998, as proposed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. In the view of UNHCR, progress should be made on the less contentious matters, such as a manual of best practices and the devel-

opment of training modules, as well as on decision-making, the division of labour and allocation of responsibilities in respect of internally displaced persons.

In 1997, UNHCR continued to develop linkages with other members of the UN system. In that respect, global or country-specific memoranda of understanding were updated (WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO)) or concluded. Joint consultations on new agreements, with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), for example, were pursued. Country-specific agreements were concluded in Eritrea (the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), Liberia (UNDP), Rwanda (UNDP) and Uganda (UNICEF) in an effort to improve the delivery of assistance to refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons. In the case of Algeria, an agreement on common premises was signed with UNDP. Globally, memoranda of understanding with some of the major partners of UNHCR (UNDP, WFP and WHO) were updated, while new ones were signed with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the International Organization for Migration.

Evaluation of UNHCR

UNHCR inspection and evaluation activities were outlined in a July report [A/AC.96/886] to the Executive Committee. The reporting period was a time of consolidation for the Inspection and Evaluation Service, which finalized, tested, improved and integrated procedures with oversight work. A major achievement in consolidating the inspection function was the finalization of the Service's computerized database project. The database allowed for comprehensive periodic analyses of compliance with inspection recommendations. Several such analyses were prepared and presented to the High Commissioner and senior management. Follow-up mechanisms for evaluation reports were also reassessed and would make use of the database.

During the period under review, inspection missions were undertaken in 15 countries in Africa, Asia, Central America, Europe and the Middle East. Particular emphasis was placed on managerial effectiveness, including accountability, cost-effectiveness and monitoring. A number of thematic evaluations were completed. They included reviews of UNHCR implementing arrangements, UNHCR refugee education activities, UNHCR project staff arrangements and UNHCR assistance to older refugees, and an evaluation of UNHCR efforts on behalf of children and adolescents, which was conducted in cooperation with the International Save the Children Alliance. The Service also participated in

two joint evaluations with WFP and UNICEF. In addition, general evaluation guidelines were produced for UNHCR staff to encourage and facilitate field-based evaluation initiatives.

The UNHCR Executive Committee, in a decision on a number of administrative and financial matters [A/52/12/Add.1], took note of the report on inspection and evaluation activities.

Relations with NGOs

During 1997, UNHCR concluded 931 implementing agreements with 443 NGOs, covering operational activities with refugee and other populations of concern to UNHCR in 131 countries. The majority of projects were implemented by some 322 national NGOs. UNHCR continued to promote the UNHCR/NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) process [YUN 1993, p. 1072], aimed at enhancing the cooperation and coordination of activities in favour of refugees, including through regular protection and other briefings, meetings on specific issues and UNHCR/NGO consultations prior to Executive Committee sessions. Those consultations were extended to two and a half days in 1997, and were attended by over 150 NGOs, including PARinAC NGO focal points and southern hemisphere NGOs. In April, the High Commissioner hosted a one-day meeting with major implementing and operational NGO partners. Two regional PARinAC meetings took place during the year, one in Jordan, covering the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, and the second in Brazil, covering the South American countries. UNHCR/NGO regional recommendations for joint action were drawn up for both areas.

At the eighth meeting of the UNHCR Standing Committee, in June 1997, it was decided that NGOs registered as observers at the plenary session of the Executive Committee would be allowed to participate as observers in meetings of the Standing Committee, following their written request to do so. During the year, over 5,000 NGO staff members worldwide benefited from UNHCR-sponsored training. While the majority of them undertook protection training, other training included emergency management, programme management, people-oriented planning, food aid, registration, nutrition, logistics, security awareness, environmental awareness, resettlement and various other workshops.

The UNHCR Executive Committee, in an October decision [A/52/12/Add.1], supported UNHCR proposals to enhance the capacity of national NGOs to enable them to participate more actively in refugee and refugee-related operations and to develop with NGOs an operational partnership agreement that would set out standards govern-

ing the work of the respective parties in refugee and refugee-related situations.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 12 December [meeting 70], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee [A/52/639], adopted **resolution 52/103** without vote [agenda item 107].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the activities of her Office and the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its forty-eighth session,

Recalling its resolution 51/75 of 12 December 1996,

Reaffirming the fundamental importance of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, in particular their implementation in a manner fully compatible with the object and purpose of those instruments, and noting with satisfaction that one hundred and thirty-five States are now parties to one or both instruments,

Commending the High Commissioner and her staff for the competent, courageous and dedicated manner in which they discharge their responsibilities, paying tribute to those staff members whose lives have been endangered in the course of their duties, and deploring the deaths of staff members as a consequence of violent events in several countries around the world,

1. Endorses the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its forty-eighth session;

2. Strongly reaffirms the fundamental importance and the purely humanitarian and non-political character of the function of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of providing international protection to refugees and seeking permanent solutions to the problem of refugees;

3. Deplores the immense human suffering and loss of life that have accompanied refugee flows and other forced displacements, in particular the numerous serious threats to the security or well-being of refugees, such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion, physical attacks and detention under unacceptable conditions, and calls upon States to take all measures necessary to ensure respect for the principles of refugee protection, including the humane treatment of asylum-seekers in accordance with internationally recognized human rights and humanitarian norms;

4. Emphasizes that refugee protection is primarily the responsibility of States, whose full and effective cooperation, action and political resolve are required to enable the Office of the High Commissioner to fulfil its mandated functions;

5. Reaffirms that everyone is entitled to the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution, and, as asylum is an indispensable instrument for the international protection of refugees, calls on all States to refrain from taking measures that jeopardize

the institution of asylum, in particular by returning or expelling refugees or asylum-seekers contrary to international human rights and to humanitarian and refugee law;

6. Stresses the importance of international solidarity and burden-sharing in reinforcing the international protection of refugees, and urges all States and relevant non-governmental and other organizations, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner, to cooperate in efforts to lighten the burden borne by States that have received large numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees;

7. Condemns all acts that pose a threat to the personal security of refugees and asylum-seekers, and calls upon States of refuge, in cooperation with international organizations where appropriate, to take all necessary measures to ensure that the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements is maintained, as well as to abstain from any activity likely to undermine this, *inter alia*, through effective measures to prevent the infiltration of armed elements, the identification and separation of any such armed elements from refugee populations, the settlement of refugees in secure locations and by affording to the Office of the High Commissioner and other appropriate humanitarian organizations prompt, unhindered and safe access to them;

8. Calls upon States and all concerned parties to refrain from any actions that prevent the staff of the Office of the High Commissioner and other humanitarian personnel from performing the functions required under their mandates or obstruct them in so doing, to take all possible measures to safeguard their physical security and property, to investigate fully any crime committed against them, to bring to justice persons responsible for such crimes and to facilitate the discharge of the mandated functions of the Office of the High Commissioner as well as of other humanitarian organizations;

9. Urges all States and relevant organizations to support the High Commissioner's search for durable solutions to refugee problems, including voluntary repatriation, integration in the country of asylum and resettlement in a third country, as appropriate, and welcomes in particular the ongoing efforts of her Office to pursue, wherever possible, opportunities to promote conditions conducive to the preferred solution of voluntary repatriation;

10. Acknowledges the desirability of comprehensive approaches by the international community to the problems of refugees and displaced persons, including addressing root causes, strengthening emergency preparedness and response, providing effective protection and achieving durable solutions;

11. Recognizes the value of comprehensive regional approaches in which the High Commissioner has played a significant part in both countries of origin and countries of asylum, and encourages States, in coordination and cooperation with each other and with international organizations, if applicable, to consider adopting protection-based comprehensive and regional approaches that conform fully with universally recognized standards and respond to particular regional initiatives, circumstances and protection needs;

12. Reaffirms that voluntary repatriation is the ideal solution to refugee problems, and calls upon countries

of origin, countries of asylum, the Office of the High Commissioner and the international community as a whole to do everything possible to enable refugees to exercise their right to return home in safety and with dignity;

13. Reiterates the right of all persons to return to their country, and emphasizes in this regard the prime responsibility of countries of origin for establishing conditions that allow voluntary repatriation of refugees in safety and with dignity, and, in recognition of the obligation of all States to accept the return of their nationals, calls upon all States to facilitate the return of their nationals who have sought asylum and have been determined not to be refugees;

14. Calls upon all States to promote conditions conducive to the return of refugees and to support their sustainable reintegration by providing countries of origin with necessary rehabilitation and development assistance in conjunction, as appropriate, with the Office of the High Commissioner and relevant development agencies, urges the Office of the High Commissioner, within its mandate and at the request of the Government concerned and in view of the relationship between safeguarding human rights and preventing conditions that give rise to refugee outflows, to strengthen its support of national efforts at legal and judicial capacity-building, where necessary, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and, in view of creating conditions furthering reconciliation and long-term development in countries of return, also urges the Office of the High Commissioner to strengthen its cooperation and coordination with relevant development agencies;

15. Calls upon States to adopt an approach that is sensitive to gender-related concerns and to ensure that women whose claims to refugee status are based upon a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons enumerated in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, including persecution through sexual violence or other gender-related persecution, are recognized as refugees, and encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to continue and to strengthen its efforts for the protection of refugee women;

16. Urges States and relevant parties to respect and observe principles of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law that are of particular relevance to safeguarding the rights of child and adolescent refugees, and, noting the particular vulnerability of refugee children to being forcibly exposed to the risks of injury, exploitation and death in connection with armed conflict, urges all States and concerned parties to take all possible measures to protect child and adolescent refugees, including, in particular, from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, and to prevent their separation from their families;

17. Calls upon all Governments and other donors to demonstrate their international solidarity and burden-sharing with countries of asylum through efforts aimed at continuing to alleviate the burden borne by States, in particular developing countries, countries in transition and countries with limited resources, that, due to their location, host large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, to contribute to the programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner and, taking into account the effects on countries of asylum of the

increasing requirements of large refugee populations and the need to widen the donor base and to achieve greater burden-sharing among donors, to assist the High Commissioner in securing additional and timely income from traditional governmental sources, other Governments and the private sector in order to ensure that the needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons of concern to the Office of the High Commissioner are fully met.

Future of UNHCR

In accordance with resolution 47/104 [YUN 1992, p. 894], the General Assembly reviewed the arrangements for UNHCR to determine whether it should be continued beyond 31 December 1998.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 12 December [meeting 70], on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/52/639], the General Assembly adopted **resolution 52/104 without vote** [agenda item 107].

Continuation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 47/104 of 16 December 1992, in which it decided to review, not later than at its fifty-second session, the arrangements for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with a view to determining whether the Office should be continued beyond 31 December 1998,

Recognizing the need for concerted international action on behalf of refugees and displaced persons of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Considering the outstanding work that has been performed by the Office of the High Commissioner in providing international protection and material assistance to refugees and displaced persons as well as in promoting permanent solutions to their problems,

Noting with deep appreciation the effective manner in which the Office of the High Commissioner has been dealing with various essential humanitarian tasks entrusted to it,

1. Decides to continue the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for a further period of five years from 1 January 1999;

2. Also decides to review, not later than at its fifty-seventh session, the arrangements for the Office of the High Commissioner with a view to determining whether the Office should be continued beyond 31 December 2003.

Financial and administrative questions

In 1997, UNHCR's final budget (covering both General and Special Programmes) was just under \$1.2 billion [A/53/12], compared to \$1.3 billion in 1996. Donors provided some \$806 million, compared with total contributions of \$970 million in 1996.

As in previous years, funding of the General Programmes remained a priority in 1997. Those programmes were core activities for refugees and provided the High Commissioner with the flexibility needed to deal with emergencies and voluntary repatriation operations. However, the upward trend of funding for General Programmes experienced until 1996 did not continue. As at 31 December 1997, the Office had received \$320 million for General Programmes, compared with the previous year's figure of \$351 million. A number of important donors were not able to maintain their previous funding levels, particularly those contributing in a currency other than the United States dollar.

Special Programmes accounted for some 60 per cent of UNHCR operational activities. Appeals were launched, in conjunction with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for operations in the former Yugoslavia, for the Afghan repatriation programme, the emergency in the Great Lakes region of Africa and programmes in the Horn of Africa. UNHCR also issued appeals for Central America, for repatriations to Angola, Liberia and Myanmar, and for a number of other operations. The lack of contributions and the timing of pledges for repatriations in Africa and operations in the former Yugoslavia presented great challenges to the Office during 1997. Those programmes were, at times, short of finances, which hampered operations in the field. UNHCR raised some \$486 million for special operations, repatriations and emergencies, in addition to the funds under General Programmes.

Regional apportionments for UNHCR expenditure in 1997 were as follows: Africa, \$429.4 million; Europe, \$254.1 million; Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, \$78.2 million; Asia and the Pacific, \$62.2 million; and the Americas, \$34.8 million.

For 1998, UNHCR faced projected budgetary requirements of some \$1 billion. A 1998 General Programmes target of \$440 million was approved, the first reduction in a number of years of the General Programmes level. For Special Programmes, UNHCR required some \$635 million. Requirements for operations in the Great Lakes region of Africa and the former Yugoslavia, as well as repatriation operations in Africa and Asia, remained priorities, as did programmes in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

In an October decision [A/52/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee approved the revised 1997 General Programmes budget, amounting to \$452,612,000. It also approved the regional/country/area programmes, other programmes

and the headquarters budgets under 1998 General Programmes, amounting to \$359,100,000, as well as a programme reserve of \$35,900,000 (representing 10 per cent of programmed activities), \$25,000,000 for the Emergency Fund and \$20,000,000 for the Voluntary Repatriation Fund, which constituted a 1998 total General Programmes budget of \$440,000,000 [A/AC.96/884/Add.2]. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, within the approved level, to make adjustments in project, regional/country/area programmes, other programmes and the headquarters budgets as might be required by changes affecting refugee/returnee programmes. The Committee requested UNHCR to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs indicated under the 1998 General and Special Programmes, which were estimated at \$995.9 million, bearing in mind the statute of the Office and the priority to be accorded to statutory activities, and the financial rules for voluntary funds. UNHCR was requested to present further proposals to ensure a more appropriate and transparent categorization of expenditure and posts and the harmonization of its budget presentation with that of other relevant UN agencies, with a view to seeking the Committee's approval at its next annual session and, subject to such approval, the introduction of the proposals in the 1999 budgetary documentation for the year 2000.

Accounts (1996)

The audited financial statements on voluntary funds administered by UNHCR for the year ending 31 December 1996 [A/52/5/Add.5] showed total expenditures of \$1,143 million and total income of \$1,034 million, with a reserve balance of \$346.2 million.

The Board of Auditors reviewed the statements and issued its comments in July [A/52/5/Add.5], which included recommendations to be brought to the attention of the General Assembly. Its findings were also communicated to UNHCR, which provided explanations and answers to the Board's queries [A/AC.96/885/Add.1]. Among its recommendations on financial management, the Board said that UNHCR should ensure that audit certificates were submitted by the implementing partners in sufficient time for the Administration to ensure that the expenditure was reflected in the financial statements. UNHCR was also urged to review its system of recording of expenditure by implementing partners, and to focus more attention on timely review and cancellation of obligations no longer required. In regard to programme management, the Board recommended that programme delivery and administrative support costs in the budgets of country programmes

should be reviewed and norms should be established. Project objectives needed to be clearly defined and quantified so that there was no conflict between objectives and inputs and the executing agency had a clear idea of the targets to be achieved.

The Board's examination of the accounts maintained by the various implementing partners indicated deficiencies in the maintenance of accounting records and preparation of cash and bank accounts. The Board called for the maintenance of separate accounts for UNHCR funds by the implementing partners and adequate control by field offices.

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), in an October report [A/52/518], reviewed both the financial reports and the audited financial statements for 1996 of the voluntary funds administered by UNHCR. As it had mentioned in the past, ACABQ pointed out that the timely submission of audit certificates for expenditures by implementing partners continued to be a concern, and it recommended an assessment of the capabilities of individual implementing partners contracted for major projects. ACABQ requested the High Commissioner to take into account the Board's recommendations on management of assets through a software/hardware system. It expressed concern at the observations made by the Board regarding the use of consultants and noted the deficiencies in the settlement of travel claims.

In its general decision on programme, administrative and financial matters [A/52/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee noted both the Board of Auditors' and ACABQ's reports on UNHCR activities financed from voluntary funds, and requested that it be kept informed of measures taken to address the recommendations raised. In addition, the Committee expressed support for the UNHCR proposals to improve the audit certification of implementing partners, and asked to be kept informed of further progress.

Standing Committee

The Standing Committee held four meetings in 1997 (30-31 January; 30 April-1 May; 24-26 June; 9-10 September and 8 October) [A/AC.96/880, 881, 888, 894]. It reviewed UNHCR programmes in different regions, refugees and the environment, refugee children and adolescents, protection, governance issues, and management and financial issues, and adopted decisions on programme and funding projections, the social and economic impact of large refugee populations on host developing countries, the annual theme of "repatriation challenges" for the 1997 session of the Executive Committee, and NGO ob-

server participation in the Executive and Standing Committees.

In October [A/52/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee decided to include a number of issues in the programme of work of its Standing Committee in 1998, and requested that UNHCR include in its documentation on each item the relevant recommendations of the auditors and ACABQ, as well as the steps taken to implement those recommendations and related Executive Committee decisions and conclusions. Those issues were: international protection; protection/programme policy issues; follow-up to the debate in the Executive Committee on the 1997 annual theme; programme and funding matters; management, financial and human resource matters; oversight issues; coordination issues; and governance issues.

Safety of staff

At its October session [A/52/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on the safety of UNHCR staff and other humanitarian personnel. It called on States and all parties concerned to refrain from preventing or obstructing humanitarian personnel from performing their functions, and to safeguard the physical security and property of such personnel. States were requested to investigate any crime committed against those staff and to bring to justice persons responsible for those crimes. The High Commissioner was urged to bring the issue to the attention of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, with a view to drawing up, in consultation with the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, recommendations on improving security for humanitarian personnel.

Refugee protection and assistance

Protection issues

The primary functions of UNHCR were to provide international protection and to seek permanent solutions to the problem of refugees by assisting Governments to facilitate their voluntary repatriation, or their assimilation within new national communities.

International protection meant securing respect for the basic rights of refugees, including admission to safety and non-refoulement, as well as ensuring that refugees were accorded favourable treatment in countries of asylum. Another important aspect of protection was promoting ratification of the relevant international instruments by States and incorporation of those instruments into national legislation. The protec-

tion of refugees was linked to the search for and the attainment of durable solutions to the refugee problem.

In a July note on international protection [A/AC.96/882], the High Commissioner said that contemporary refugee flows were characterized by flight from war and human rights abuses; the very objective of some civil conflicts was the forcible expulsion of targeted populations. That type of violence had caused particular dilemmas for refugee protection. The resulting mass displacements had included civilians, fighters and persons active or complicit in genocide, making asylum placement difficult. The report noted that, during the preceding year, there had been numerous incidents of refoulement and serious abuses of refugee rights. Refugees and asylum-seekers had been expelled, rejected at borders, interdicted on the high seas and otherwise involuntarily returned, and major human rights violations had occurred during forced relocations.

The High Commissioner stated that it was essential that persons in need of international protection be admitted and identified; such persons needed to be protected against refoulement as well. Another concern, refugee security, was evident in situations where the peaceful nature of asylum was not respected, whether through armed attacks on refugee camps and settlements or their militarization. Failure to implement international standards in respect of the civilian nature of camps and protected populations had contributed to the perception of refugee influxes as a threat to national and regional stability.

In securing protection for refugees, the High Commissioner said, a first step would be to distinguish persons who required international protection from those who did not, and giving at least temporary protection in cases of mass influx. In mass influx situations, military elements had to be disarmed from the outset. Camps or settlements should be situated at a proper distance from frontiers, and refugees' adherence to national law ensured. The international community needed to support proper access to camps and their monitoring as critical aspects of securing protection and assistance for both refugees and returnees. It also needed to share the burden in situations when refugee influx overwhelmed the capacity of host States.

As part of the work of the Executive Committee [A/53/12], UNHCR continued consultations with a number of States on such issues as international protection for all who needed it, statelessness, burden-sharing and detention of refugees and asylum-seekers. In accordance with UNHCR guidelines on detention, interventions were undertaken by the Office with various Governments

on the subject of unjustified detention. UNHCR continued to participate in intergovernmental consultations aimed at harmonizing national laws and procedures, especially in Europe, and sought to promote comprehensive regional approaches to protection and immigration policies. The return of persons not in need of international protection remained a problematic issue for UNHCR, amidst disagreements between Governments as to the desirability of involving UNHCR in the return of such persons.

The Executive Committee, in an October conclusion [A/52/12/Add.1], reaffirmed the right of all persons to return to their countries and the responsibility of States to facilitate the return and reintegration of their nationals; recommended to States that strategies for facilitating the return, in safety and dignity, of persons not in need of international protection be examined within the framework of international cooperation; and encouraged UNHCR to continue, in cooperation with other appropriate international organizations, to look into ways in which the return process of individuals, determined through fair and effective procedures not to be in need of international protection, could be facilitated. The Committee emphasized that refugee protection was primarily the responsibility of States and it called on States to take measures to ensure that refugees were protected, including through national legislation and compliance with international human rights instruments. The Committee noted that voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement were the traditional durable solutions for refugees; affirmed that voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution, when feasible; and called on countries of origin, countries of asylum, UNHCR and the international community to enable refugees to exercise freely their right to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

In another conclusion on safeguarding asylum, the Committee, noting with concern that the growing complexity of refugee crises posed serious and novel challenges to the institution of asylum, reiterated the need for full respect to be accorded to the institution of asylum, including, *inter alia*, the principle of non-refoulement, the need to admit refugees into States, access of UNHCR to persons in need, the responsibility of host States to separate any armed or military elements from refugee populations, and the duty of refugees to respect the laws of host States.

SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION

The Security Council, having considered the matter of protection for humanitarian assistance

to refugees on 21 May and 19 June [meetings 3778 and 3790], issued a statement through its President [S/PRST/1997/34]:

The Security Council has considered the matter of protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations and has given careful consideration to the views expressed in the debate on the matter at its 3778th meeting on 21 May 1997.

The Council notes that massive displacement of civilian populations in conflict situations may pose a serious challenge to international peace and security. The Council, in seeking protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations, underlines the importance of pursuing a coordinated and comprehensive approach in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Council expresses its grave concern at the recent increase in attacks or use of force in conflict situations against refugees and other civilians, in violation of the relevant rules of international law, including those of international humanitarian law. The Council reiterates its condemnation of such acts and once again calls upon all those concerned to comply strictly with the relevant rules of international law. In particular, it calls upon all parties concerned to ensure the safety of refugees, displaced persons and other civilians, and guarantee the unimpeded and safe access of United Nations and other humanitarian personnel to those in need.

The Council also expresses its grave concern at all attacks or use of force against United Nations and other personnel associated with United Nations operations, as well as personnel of humanitarian organizations, in violation of the relevant rules of international law, including those of international humanitarian law. In this context, the Council recalls its resolution 868(1993) and the statement by its President of 12 March 1997. It also recalls the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1994. In this context, it calls upon all parties concerned to ensure the safety and security of these personnel as well as personnel of humanitarian organizations, and encourages all States to consider ways and means to strengthen the protection of such personnel.

The Council reminds all States and others concerned of the need to bring to justice those who violate international humanitarian law. In this context, it recalls the resolution on the establishment of an international criminal court adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 1996.

The Council supports further exploration of ways and means by which the international community may enhance the compliance by parties concerned with the relevant rules of international law, including those of international humanitarian law.

The Council encourages States to consider acceding to the relevant international conventions designed to address the problems of refugees.

The Council underlines the importance of ensuring clear, appropriate and realistic mandates to be implemented in an impartial manner as well as ade-

quate resources for United Nations peacekeeping operations. In this context, the Council, in establishing or authorizing an operation to protect humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations, reaffirms the principles of full respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the States concerned. The Council also underlines the importance of ensuring the proper discharge of the mandates conferred upon peacekeeping operations.

The Council stresses the importance of ensuring closer coordination between the relevant United Nations bodies and other international agencies, acting in accordance with their own mandates and status, with a view to effectively providing or protecting humanitarian assistance to those in need. In this context, the Council encourages an enhanced role for the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in coordination to this end.

The Council stresses the importance of the activities of the relevant United Nations bodies, agencies and other international humanitarian organizations and the need for these activities to continue to be carried out in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance.

The Council also stresses the importance of crisis prevention, including by addressing the root causes of such crises. It therefore encourages the Secretary-General and all States to look further into practical ways to enhance the United Nations capacity and capability in this regard.

The Council encourages the Secretary-General to study further how to improve the protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations.

International instruments

In 1997, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477], bringing the number of States parties to one or both instruments to 131. The Executive Committee, by a conclusion adopted in October [A/52/12/Add.1], welcomed the accession of those three States, and noted with appreciation that a number of States not party to the Convention and the Protocol continued to maintain a generous approach to asylum. Nevertheless, considering that over 50 States had not acceded to those instruments, the Committee encouraged the High Commissioner to continue to promote further accessions. It urged States that had not done so to accede to and implement those instruments, as well as relevant regional instruments for the protection of refugees. Welcoming the growing number of accessions to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [YUN 1954, p. 4161 and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness [YUN 1961, p. 533], the Committee encouraged UNHCR to continue to promote further accessions, to provide technical

and advisory services and training globally, and to disseminate information on statelessness and nationality issues. Spain acceded to the 1954 Convention in 1997.

In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, UNHCR continued to promote accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, providing training and advice on refugee legislation and status determination procedures. The Office also participated in drafting the 1997 European Convention on Nationality and provided technical and advisory services on nationality laws and their implementation to a number of States in Central and Eastern Europe.

Promotional activities

In 1997, UNHCR increased its promotional efforts at the regional level, participating in various seminars and conferences on refugee issues and organizing refugee law and protection courses for government officials, implementing partners, academic institutions and NGOs in all regions of the world. It continued to monitor the work of the six treaty bodies, the Commission on Human Rights and its Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. It also supported a study carried out by the Subcommission on forced displacements.

Assistance measures

The overall number of persons of concern to UNHCR in 1997 stood at 21 million. That figure represented some 12 million refugees, 3.3 million repatriating refugees in the early stages of their reintegration, 3.6 million internally displaced persons and 1.2 million others of humanitarian concern, for the most part victims of conflict. Over 676,000 refugees returned voluntarily to their countries of origin in 1997, highlighting the fact that repatriation was the preferred solution for many of the world's refugees. Over the previous few years, there had been a reduction in the number and scale of refugee-producing conflicts around the world. However, the potential for large-scale displacement existed in several regions and the increase in the number and intensity of ethnically based conflicts within States continued to be of concern. Solutions were tailored to meet specific characteristics of refugee movements, whether mass outflows from civil war, individuals seeking asylum from persecution, or movements of non-refugees. The Office also continued to develop its institutional capacity to manage voluntary repatriation, seeking to ensure the reintegration of returnees and facilitation of peace and reconciliation. In that regard, UNHCR advocated the creation of conditions con-

ducive to return and reintegration through UN system-wide efforts that included institution-building, strengthening civil society, promoting equity, eliminating landmines and more effective control of small arms.

UNHCR assistance activities were grouped under two broad categories: General Programmes (including a Programme Reserve, the Voluntary Repatriation Fund and the Emergency Fund) and Special Programmes. General Programmes activities were considered statutory, that is, activities relating to the protection of and assistance to refugees and the pursuit of durable solutions for them. In addition, those activities had to be sufficiently stabilized to allow predictable programming and realistic funding. Total voluntary fund obligations for 1997 activities amounted to \$973.1 million, with \$385.1 million for General Programmes and \$588 million for Special Programmes, which included programmes under funding appeals issued by the United Nations. Some 29 per cent of Special Programmes pertained to the UNHCR programme of humanitarian assistance in the former Yugoslavia and a further 36.5 per cent to operations in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The Emergency Preparedness and Response Section of UNHCR acted as the Office's focal point for both emergency preparedness and response. In 1997, the Section dispatched Emergency Response Teams to Cambodia, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Zambia. Emergency Management Training Programme (EMTP) workshops, an important element of emergency preparedness, were held in Georgia (for the Caucasus countries), Turkey (for Central Asia, South-West Asia and Middle East countries) and the United Republic of Tanzania (for countries of East Africa). A country-specific EMTP was organized in Japan. Those training workshops were designed for staff from Governments, other UN agencies, operational partners and UNHCR. In 1997, total expenditure on emergency assistance amounted to \$10.4 million, of which \$4.7 million was under General Programmes and \$5.7 million under Special Programmes.

One form of assistance, referred to as care and maintenance programmes, followed the emergency phase of an operation. The majority of those programmes in 1997 were implemented in Africa, with substantial programmes carried out in the Great Lakes region, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea and Kenya. Major care and maintenance programmes were also carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and the Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Care and maintenance assistance continued to be provided in South-East Asia to Vietnamese populations, pending their repatriation or resettlement.

During 1997, more than half of UNHCR General Programme expenditure (\$234.2 million) was in the form of care and maintenance activities, while the amount spent for care and maintenance assistance under Special Programmes was \$241.3 million.

As part of its efforts to seek durable solutions to refugee problems, UNHCR, in 1997, established the Reintegration and Self-Reliance Unit, which assisted returning populations in post-conflict situations. During the year, UNHCR spent \$282.7 million on voluntary repatriation, including assistance to returnees in countries of origin.

UNHCR also provided assistance to refugee populations where Governments had permitted them some degree of local integration into national society. Those projects were intended to promote socio-economic self-reliance of the refugee group. The largest projects were implemented in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico, the Sudan and Uganda. Total expenditures amounted to \$119.1 million.

In 1997, some 30,250 refugees were resettled under UNHCR auspices, including refugees accepted for resettlement but who did not travel before the end of the year. Almost half of those resettled were from the Middle East. UNHCR expenditure on those activities totalled \$3.5 million.

Refugees and the environment

The Environmental Guidelines, promulgated by UNHCR in June 1996, continued to be the principal policy framework for integrating sound environmental management practices into UNHCR activities. Efforts were under way to develop environmental indicators, which would become a part of planning, monitoring and evaluation of the environmental impact of refugees and returnees. Throughout 1997, a project entitled "Towards sustainable environmental management practices in refugee-affected areas" allowed UNHCR to identify environmental lessons learned from refugee operations. Large, integrated environmental projects were being implemented in several countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Model projects were implemented to demonstrate the principles of the Environmental Guidelines in those countries, as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, the Sudan and Zambia. Those projects focused on such matters as environmental planning; geographical information system environ-

mental databases; demarcation of nature reserves and other protected areas; selective guided firewood harvesting; promotion of energy-efficient cooking practices and cooking devices; firewood and stove provision in exchange for environmentally sound work; environmental education and awareness raising; erosion control; protection of areas to allow for natural regeneration; tree planting; agro-forestry and home gardening; and environmental health.

Refugee women

In 1997, UNHCR continued to implement activities in relation to the four areas of concern for UNHCR under the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women [YUN 1995, p. 1170]. Those four areas were: women and armed conflict; violence against women; human rights of women; and the girl child. UNHCR sought to integrate gender perspectives into all policies and programmes. A total of 1,794 Professional staff members and implementing partners had been trained in using gender analysis for programme planning. To combat violence against women, especially sexual violence, UNHCR and its implementing partners had introduced and promoted a crisis prevention and intervention programme in several refugee situations, such as in Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania.

In an effort to aid refugee women affected by armed conflict to reconstruct their lives, UNHCR encouraged special initiatives for refugee and returnee women under the Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) and the Rwanda Women's Initiative (RWI). Both BWI and RWI facilitated and supported local and national governmental and non-governmental peace-building initiatives. They also enhanced the integration and participation of women in economic, social and cultural development processes through income-generating activities, education programmes, health care (including reproductive health care), shelter programmes, and management and leadership training. In addition, UNHCR supported inter-agency initiatives worldwide that increased the number of women participating in peace-building, conflict resolution and reconstruction. In December, UNHCR facilitated an inter-agency meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which sought to document the best practices of women in peace-building.

Women's rights awareness training was implemented in Guatemala, Kenya, Mexico and Nepal to inform women of their rights to protection from domestic, sexual and other forms of violence. In Ankara, Turkey, UNHCR assisted the

Government to modify its asylum criteria to include women who refused to marry pre-selected husbands, divorced women denied child custody and women who advocated women's liberation.

Refugee children

UNHCR presented a progress report on activities in favour of minors to the Standing Committee at its seventh meeting (30 April-1 May). The report also described UNHCR follow-up to the UN study on the impact of armed conflict on children, the "Machel study" [YUN 1996, p. 663]. Child rights-based performance objectives were established for all phases of UNHCR operations in complex emergencies. To implement those objectives and the Machel study's recommendations, the High Commissioner issued a policy instruction to each country operation calling for the creation of a plan of action, focusing on five critical issues: sexual exploitation and violence; under-age military recruitment; education; unaccompanied minors; and adolescents. In October, the Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on refugee children and adolescents in which it made a number of recommendations to States, UNHCR and other concerned parties to enhance the protection of and assistance to minors, and to take measures to protect child and adolescent refugees.

Report of Secretary-General. In response to General Assembly resolution 51/73 [YUN 1996, p. 1110], the Secretary-General submitted a report in August [A/52/273] on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors, a term referring to persons under 18 years of age or under a country's legal age of majority, who were separated from both parents and were not being cared for by a guardian or other adult legally responsible for them. The report reviewed inter-agency cooperation in this field; some issues of concern, including violence against refugee minors, military recruitment, sexual exploitation, the best interests of unaccompanied minors, and their situation in countries practising individual refugee status determination; and current responses.

The Secretary-General reported that UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and NGOs, having recognized the situation of unaccompanied minors, had identified three goals—to prevent separations, to reunify unaccompanied minors with their families, and to ensure adequate care of those minors. In the Great Lakes region, agencies dealt with an exceptionally high proportion of unaccompanied minors. Of the 12,000 minors identified as unaccompanied during the mass repatriation from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania at the end of 1996

and the beginning of 1997, about 80 per cent had since been reunited with their families. From March to June 1997, 5,200 unaccompanied Rwandan minors were repatriated from Kisangani and other collection points in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while the number of such minors remaining in that country was unknown.

In his description of inter-agency cooperation, the Secretary-General noted the memorandum of understanding signed in March 1996 by UNICEF and UNHCR, which provided a framework for cooperation for the development and use of global programming guidelines to ensure protection, care and family reunification of unaccompanied minors. UNHCR took the lead in countries of asylum, while UNICEF had the lead role in countries of origin; in both situations, they worked with NGOs. The memorandum paved the way for increased cooperation, including possible joint missions to assess and address the needs of separated minors. UNHCR worked with several NGOs on emergency deployment of community service officers, country evaluations and training, as they related to children and adolescents. Among current UN responses to situations involving unaccompanied minors, the report stated that inter-agency collaboration in the Great Lakes region was ongoing in response to the ever-changing situation. In the former Yugoslavia, plans were under way for an inter-agency conference to discuss best-interest standards. The UNHCR/International Save the Children Alliance country evaluations and capacity-building programmes aimed to ensure that children's and adolescents' needs were properly accounted for in programming and protection activities.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 12 December [meeting 70], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/52/639], adopted **resolution 52/105** without vote [agenda item 107].

Assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 49/172 of 23 December 1994, 50/150 of 21 December 1995 and 51/73 of 12 December 1996,

Aware of the fact that the majority of refugees are children and women,

Bearing in mind that unaccompanied refugee minors are among the most vulnerable refugees and the most at risk of neglect, violence, forced military recruitment, sexual assault and other abuses and therefore require special assistance and care,

Mindful of the fact that the ultimate solution to the plight of unaccompanied minors is their return to and reunification with their families,

Noting the revised Guidelines on Refugee Children issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in May 1994 and the development of an emergency kit to facilitate coordination and to enhance the quality of responses to the needs of unaccompanied minors by the Office of the High Commissioner, the United Nations Children's Fund and non-governmental organizations,

Noting with appreciation the efforts of the Office of the High Commissioner in the identification and tracing of unaccompanied refugee minors, and welcoming its efforts in reunifying family members of refugees,

Welcoming the efforts exerted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the reunification of family members of refugees,

Noting the efforts of the High Commissioner to ensure the protection of and assistance to refugees, including children and unaccompanied minors, and noting that further efforts need to be exerted to this effect,

Recalling the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General;
2. Expresses its deep concern at the continued plight of unaccompanied refugee minors, and emphasizes once again the urgent need for their early identification and for timely, detailed and accurate information on their number and whereabouts;
3. Expresses the hope once again that adequate resources will be provided for programmes of identification and tracing of unaccompanied refugee minors;
4. Calls upon the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in cooperation with other relevant United Nations bodies, to incorporate into its programmes policies that aim at preventing refugee family separation, considering the importance of family unity;
5. Calls upon all Governments, the Secretary-General, the Office of the High Commissioner, all United Nations organizations, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations concerned to exert the maximum effort to assist and protect refugee minors and to expedite the return to and reunification with their families of unaccompanied refugee minors;
6. Urges the Office of the High Commissioner, all United Nations organizations, other international organizations and non-governmental organizations concerned to take appropriate steps to mobilize resources commensurate with the needs and interests of unaccompanied refugee minors and towards their reunification with their families;
7. Calls upon all States and other parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law, and, in this regard, calls upon States parties to respect fully the provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and related instruments, while bearing in mind resolution 2 adopted at the twenty-sixth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held at Geneva from 3 to 7 December 1995, and to respect the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which accord children affected by armed conflict special protection and treatment;
8. Condemns all acts of exploitation of unaccompanied refugee minors, including their use as soldiers or human shields in armed conflict and their forced re-

recruitment into military forces, and any other acts that endanger their safety and personal security;

9. Calls upon the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund and other United Nations organizations and international organizations to mobilize adequate assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors in the areas of relief, education, health and psychological rehabilitation;

10. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session on the implementation of the present resolution and to give special attention to the girl-child refugee in his report.

Regional activities

Africa

In a September 1997 report [A/52/360] on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, the Secretary-General, quoting UNHCR statistics, stated that at the end of 1996 Africa hosted 4.1 million refugees, some 2 million internally displaced persons of concern to UNHCR and 1.66 million returnees in the early stages of reintegration. In 1997, the largest refugee flows were in the Great Lakes region (see below). In West Africa, a major breakthrough came in Liberia with the agreement by the warring factions to demobilize and disarm before holding elections (see PART ONE, Chapter II). UNHCR and its operational partners recommenced preparations for the voluntary repatriation of 527,000 Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries. Organized repatriation was launched in December 1997. The situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated severely following a military coup that overthrew the elected civilian Government on 25 May; consequently all repatriation activities there were suspended, leaving 380,000 refugees outside the country. The repatriation of some 300,000 Togolese refugees who sought asylum in Benin and Ghana in 1993 was expected to be completed by the end of 1997. In the case of Malian refugees, of whom nearly 100,000 had returned, assistance in countries of asylum would cease at the end of 1997, while reintegration activities would continue in Mali until the end of 1998. In Mauritania, a programme facilitated the reintegration of 30,000 returnees who spontaneously returned from Mali and Senegal. No progress was made during 1997 with regard to the repatriation of an estimated 320,000 Eritrean refugees residing in the Sudan.

In the Horn of Africa, some countries of origin were unwilling to receive their own citizens back unless they were provided with what the Government considered adequate assistance from the international community for reintegration.

Some 10,000 Somali refugees were repatriated at the end of July, and it was expected that an additional 90,000 Somali refugees would return from Ethiopia beginning in June. By the end of 1997, it was estimated that some 452,000 Somalis remained in exile.

An unprecedented heavy rainfall in the Da-daab area of Kenya, where more than 125,000 refugees were located in three camps, required airlifting of food and other relief supplies at high cost.

Uganda was one of the few Governments that offered land for local settlement of refugees. Refugees, mainly Sudanese, were transferred from transit centres to settlements as land was made available and infrastructures were created. In 1997, UNHCR focused its activities in Uganda on local settlement activities, with a view to achieving self-sufficiency.

The objective of the UNHCR operation in Angola was the repatriation of 240,000 Angolan refugees in neighbouring countries and their reintegration in Angola. Due to the slow pace of the peace process in Angola in 1997, however, UNHCR revised its estimated requirements for the year downward, from \$38.2 million to \$21 million. Despite that, some 53,000 Angolans spontaneously returned home from Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997. In southern Africa, most countries were experiencing a steady increase in arrivals of urban refugees, the majority of whom came from Angola. In South Africa alone, there were over 38,000 registered asylum-seekers from 52 different countries.

Among other UN bodies supporting refugee programmes, the World Food Programme (WFP) was the principal international channel for the provision of food aid in emergencies for refugees, displaced persons and returnees. UNICEF supported a range of emergency programmes focusing on the most vulnerable children, including those among locally affected families in conflict areas, internally displaced groups, returnees and refugees. In Angola, Mozambique and Rwanda, UNICEF worked with UN partners and international and local NGOs to integrate emergency interventions into long-term programming measures. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) worked towards the reintegration of uprooted populations, assisting Governments by providing those populations with a working infrastructure following their return.

Throughout Africa, UNHCR cooperated with various agencies, particularly UNICEF and WFP, to implement policies and guidelines on refugee women, refugee children and the environment. Special attention was given to protection, access

to food, access to appropriate health care, education, self-reliance through skills training, income generation, participation in decision-making in camp management and other related activities. UNHCR and WFP, along with the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, tried to ensure effective and complementary response in major emergencies. UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and the United Republic of Tanzania ensured that children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women and unaccompanied children received emergency health, water, nutrition and sanitation assistance. UNHCR and UNDP signed a memorandum of understanding in Rwanda for activities relating to repatriation and initial reintegration of refugees until the end of 1997. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR focused on quick-impact projects that could be implemented immediately and at modest expense, while UNDP took the lead in re-initiating earlier projects that were halted owing to deteriorating security conditions.

In addition, UNHCR cooperated with African subregional organizations. Joint activities between UNHCR and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) enhanced cooperation on humanitarian and refugee issues. OAU granted \$50,000 to UNHCR to assist Somali refugees in the eastern part of Ethiopia. A memorandum of understanding outlining the framework for cooperation in responding to refugee and returnee issues was signed in June between UNHCR and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In the Horn of Africa, UNDP worked on a programme that would upgrade the capacity of IGAD to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and to alleviate humanitarian crises. In southern Africa, UNHCR collaborated with the Southern African Development Community in areas of mutual concern, such as refugees, returnees, displaced persons and undocumented migration in southern Africa.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 12 December [meeting 70], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/52/639], adopted **resolution 52/101** without vote [agenda item 107].

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

The General Assembly,
Recalling its resolution 51/71 of 12 December 1996,
Having considered the report of the Secretary-General and that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Noting with appreciation the efforts expended by countries of asylum in accommodating refugees,

Convinced of the necessity of strengthening the capacity within the United Nations system for the imple-

mentation of relief programmes for refugees, returnees and displaced persons,

Welcoming the ongoing process of voluntary repatriation of refugees in some parts of Africa,

Welcoming also decision CM/Dec.362(LXVI) on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity at its sixty-sixth ordinary session, held at Harare from 28 to 31 May 1997,

Welcoming further the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Africa, held on 25 September 1997, and the attention that was given at that meeting to the issue of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa,

Taking note of the memorandum of understanding signed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Southern African Development Community in July 1996 concerning refugees, returnees, displaced persons and undocumented migration in southern Africa,

Taking note also of the memorandum of understanding signed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in June 1997 on refugees and returnee issues,

Recalling the provisions of its resolution 2312(XXII) of 14 December 1967, by which it adopted the Declaration on Territorial Asylum,

Recalling also the Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa of 1969 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,

Recognizing the need for States to create conditions conducive both to the prevention of flows of refugees and displaced persons and to solutions, especially voluntary repatriation,

Recognizing also the positive outcome of the conflict resolution efforts carried out in the subregion by the Economic Community of West African States, in creating a conducive environment for the voluntary repatriation of refugees and displaced persons,

Bearing in mind that the majority of refugees and displaced persons are women and children,

Noting with great concern that, despite all the efforts deployed so far by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and others, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa, especially in the West African and Great Lakes regions and in the Horn of Africa, remains precarious,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General and that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

2. Notes with concern that the declining socio-economic situation, compounded by political instability, internal strife, human rights violations and natural disasters, such as drought, has led to increased numbers of refugees and displaced persons in some countries of Africa;

3. Expresses deep concern at the serious and far-reaching consequences of large numbers of refugees and displaced persons in the receiving countries and the implications for security, long-term socio-economic development and the environment;

4. Expresses concern at instances where the fundamental principle of asylum is jeopardized by the unlawful expulsion or refoulement or by threats to the

life, physical security, integrity, dignity and well-being of refugees;

5. Expresses its appreciation and strong support for those African Governments and local populations that, in spite of the general deterioration of socio-economic and environmental conditions and over-stretched national resources, continue to accept the additional burden imposed upon them by increasing numbers of refugees and displaced persons, in compliance with the relevant principles of asylum;

6. Commends the Governments concerned for their sacrifices in providing assistance and protection to refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons and for their efforts to promote voluntary repatriation and other durable solutions;

7. Expresses its gratitude to the international community, and to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in particular, for the humanitarian assistance it has continued to render to refugees and displaced persons and to the countries of asylum;

8. Welcomes the strengthening of cooperation between the Office of the High Commissioner and the Organization of African Unity at all levels, and urges the two organizations, in conjunction with United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the international community and the Governments concerned, to increase efforts aimed at facilitating voluntary repatriation in a dignified and orderly manner and at addressing the root causes of the refugee problem and working out modalities for a lasting solution;

9. Reiterates that the Plan of Action adopted by the Regional Conference on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in the Great Lakes Region, held at Bujumbura from 15 to 17 February 1995, as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/149, continues to be a viable framework for the resolution of the refugee and humanitarian problems in that region;

10. Calls upon the Office of the High Commissioner and other concerned entities to intensify protection activities by, inter alia, supporting the efforts of African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities, including training of relevant officers, disseminating information about refugee instruments and principles and providing financial, technical and advisory services to accelerate the enactment or amendment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees;

11. Appeals to Governments, the United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community to create conditions to facilitate the voluntary return and the early rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees;

12. Appeals to the international community to respond positively, in the spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing, to the third-country resettlement requests of African refugees;

13. Commends the Governments of the Great Lakes and West African regions and of the Horn of Africa and the Office of the High Commissioner for their initiatives to promote repatriation within the framework of tripartite agreements on voluntary repatriation of refugees in the regions;

14. Encourages the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to continue to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, within their respective mandates, in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in emergency humanitarian situations in Africa;

15. Welcomes the ongoing efforts undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with host Governments, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the international community in concentrating on the environment and ecosystems of countries of asylum;

16. Notes with satisfaction the voluntary return of millions of refugees to their homelands following the successful repatriation and reintegration operations carried out by the Office of the High Commissioner, with the cooperation and collaboration of countries hosting refugees and countries of origin, and looks forward to other programmes to assist the voluntary repatriation of all refugees in Africa;

17. Expresses its concern about the long stay of refugees in certain African countries, and calls upon the Office of the High Commissioner to keep its programmes under review, in conformity with its mandate in the host countries, taking into account the increasing requirements there;

18. Urges the international community to continue to fund the general refugee programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner, taking into account the substantially increased needs of programmes in Africa;

19. Calls upon Governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the international community as a whole to strengthen the emergency response capacity of the United Nations system on the basis of the experience of the emergency in the Great Lakes region and to continue to provide needed resources and operational support to refugees and countries of asylum in Africa until a durable solution can be found;

20. Calls upon the international donor community to provide material and financial assistance for the implementation of programmes intended for the rehabilitation of the environment and infrastructure in areas affected by refugees in countries of asylum;

21. Requests all Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to pay particular attention to meeting the special needs of refugee women and children;

22. Calls upon the Secretary-General, the Office of the High Commissioner and intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations to increase the capacity for coordination and delivery of humanitarian emergency assistance and disaster relief in general with States and others concerned in respect of asylum, relief, repatriation, rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees, returnees and displaced persons, including refugees in urban areas;

23. Requests the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive and consolidated report on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum, under the item entitled "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons

and humanitarian questions" and to present an oral report to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1998.

Great Lakes operations

During 1997, in the Great Lakes region of Africa, thousands of refugees, many of whom had first dispersed in various locations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), returned to their own countries (see also PART ONE, Chapter II). Their return by air and by land to Rwanda was more often an evacuation as a last-resort solution rather than voluntary repatriation. Other refugees continued to resist returning to Rwanda and further dispersed throughout the Great Lakes region and some 10 other African countries. Smaller numbers of Burundi refugees were found along with the Rwandan refugees.

UNHCR was called upon to provide international protection and care for 75,000 refugees from the DRC who arrived in the United Republic of Tanzania, while some 31,000 refugees from the eastern part of the DRC remained in western Rwanda. In June, some 40,000 refugees arrived in Kinshasa as a result of the civil war in the Congo. Among them, approximately 15,000 were assisted in a refugee camp. The Burundi refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania became the single largest group of refugees in the region. While some 100,000 of them repatriated spontaneously, a similar number arrived from provinces where new outbreaks of fighting had occurred. In Burundi, the security situation improved to such an extent that UNHCR considered it safe for an increased number of refugees to return in the course of the year. UNHCR assisted communities as well as returnees and provided emergency assistance for new displacements. Repatriation to the Congo also became possible in December, with the signing of a tripartite memorandum of understanding.

During 1997, the total number of refugees in camps decreased enormously as a result of those large-scale movements. The only large-scale programme in the region at the end of the year was in the United Republic of Tanzania, where UNHCR assisted 450,000 refugees from Burundi and the DRC.

In an effort to reduce the large residual group of Rwandan refugees in the DRC, over 70,000 people were returned to Rwanda from May to June by a mass air evacuation. Thousands of others continued their trek in search of safety, gathering in smaller groups in the Congo (15,000), Angola (2,000), the Central African Republic and other countries. UNHCR conducted screening in the Central African Republic and Malawi, aimed at excluding those persons from refugee status who

had been involved in the 1994 genocide. Among the many thousands of Rwandan and Burundi refugees who had not been located, small numbers continued to return from dense forest areas throughout 1997. In the United Republic of Tanzania, intimidation and political activities in the camps for Burundi refugees had been observed; some of the persons concerned were returned forcibly to their home countries, and over 30,000 refugees were relocated to refugee camps by the Government.

UNHCR continued throughout 1997 with the rehabilitation of areas in the United Republic of Tanzania that had accommodated large numbers of refugees from 1994 to 1996. It provided assistance for schools, medical centres, water supply systems, repairs to key roads and measures to restore the environment. The massive return of refugees to Rwanda required an immense effort on the part of the international community and of UNHCR, in particular to assist the Government in receiving and reintegrating the more than 1.3 million citizens who returned in a matter of months. The primary purpose of the UNHCR rehabilitation programme in Rwanda was to maximize the protection of returnees, promote reconciliation, avoid new conflict and thus ensure smooth and successful reintegration. Serious incidents in the north-west of the country during 1997, however, often impeded access for UNHCR and NGO staff to returnees and directly affected returnees and refugees from the DRC.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 16 December [meeting 73], the General Assembly adopted **resolution 52/169 B** [draft: A/52/L.16/Rev.2] without vote [agenda item 20 (b)].

Special assistance to Central African countries receiving refugees

The General Assembly,
Recalling its resolution 49/24 of 2 December 1994,
Deeply concerned by the massive flow of refugees, returnees and other displaced persons in Central Africa,

Welcoming the prospects for the voluntary return, repatriation and reintegration of refugees in safety and dignity and efforts made to find durable solutions to their plight,

Recognizing the need for States to create conditions conducive to an early and sustainable solution to the flow of refugees, returnees and other displaced persons,

Bearing in mind the evident impact of these massive flows of refugees on the basic infrastructure and on the life and property of local populations in the host countries,

Also bearing in mind the deterioration of the economic, social and health infrastructure and the ecological impact in the areas receiving refugees,

Realizing the importance of assisting the host countries, in particular those countries that have been host-

ing refugees for a long time, to remedy environmental deterioration and the negative effects on public services and the development process,

Gravely concerned by the effects which epidemics are having on the health of refugees and local communities in certain areas,

Observing that the humanitarian aid dispatched should as far as possible take into consideration the scale of the needs of the local populations,

Recognizing that the countries receiving refugees, most of them least developed countries, continue to experience an extremely critical economic situation,

Expressing again its appreciation to the countries which have received refugees for the sacrifices which they are making in granting refuge and hospitality to them,

Stressing the need to continue providing special assistance to the local populations of the countries receiving refugees,

1. Congratulates the Secretary-General for the efforts he has made to draw the attention of the international community to the situation of refugees in Central African countries;

2. Expresses its gratitude to all States, organizations and bodies of the United Nations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have done so for the financial, technical and material assistance they have been delivering to those countries that have been receiving refugees since the onset of the crisis and for the humanitarian assistance they have continued to render to refugees and the host countries, and calls upon them to continue to provide assistance for the implementation of programmes intended for the rehabilitation of the environment and social infrastructure in areas affected by the massive presence of refugees in those host countries;

3. Expresses its deep concern at the serious social, economic, health and ecological impact that the massive and unexpected presence of refugees can have;

4. Calls upon all African Governments and in particular those of Central Africa to do their utmost to assist refugees, notwithstanding the constraints which their limited resources place upon them;

5. Urges the Governments of the region and all concerned parties to provide safe and unhindered access for United Nations and other humanitarian personnel to the populations in need in all areas of the region;

6. Calls upon all States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international financial and development institutions to facilitate the restoration of the basic services destroyed in the countries receiving refugees;

7. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session a report on the follow-up to the present resolution.

The Americas and the Caribbean

In 1997, 3,573 Guatemalan refugees were repatriated with UNHCR assistance, for the most part from Mexico, thus bringing the total of returnees repatriated through UNHCR since 1984 to some 38,000. Organized collective repatriation was expected to close in 1999, although there were still approximately 28,000 Guatemalan refugees in south-eastern Mexico. UNHCR sup-

ported Mexico's plan for the permanent settlement of Guatemalan refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo, which focused on upgrading and transferring the basic infrastructure and services of the refugee settlements to the local administration, and on addressing the question of land titles.

In Belize and Panama, UNHCR promoted plans for individual voluntary repatriation and permanent local settlement by securing permanent residence permits or citizenship. In 1997, in Belize, a programme of community-based quick impact projects consisted of 24 micro-projects in the water, infrastructure, education, health, crop-production and income-generation sectors benefiting 4,810 refugees and their Belizean host communities.

In Colombia, UNHCR was concerned about the forced displacement resulting from the escalation of armed violence. The High Commissioner agreed to Colombia's request for a permanent UNHCR presence in Bogota. The UNHCR Liaison Office in Caracas, Venezuela, focused on statutory activities related to Colombia as a country of asylum and as a country of origin.

UNHCR continued to follow the implementation of the asylum-related provisions contained in the 1996 immigration legislation enacted by the United States, providing technical advice on international standards to the Immigration and Naturalization Service with respect to the regulatory framework, policy guidelines and their practical application. In Canada, UNHCR was invited to comment on a report resulting from an independent review of Canada's Immigration Act. In the Caribbean region, UNHCR was reorienting its activities from the largely completed task of achieving durable solutions for the small residual Haitian and Cuban refugee caseloads.

Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States

South Asia

Some 9,400 Muslim residents of Rakhine State in Myanmar voluntarily repatriated from camps in Bangladesh during the first quarter of 1997, bringing the total number of persons returning from camps in Bangladesh under UNHCR auspices since 1994 to 230,000. However, voluntary repatriation and alternative durable solutions for some 21,000 individuals remaining in two camps were adversely affected by obstructive action against repatriation taken by minority elements in the camps.

The escalation of armed conflict in Sri Lanka during 1997 prevented a continuation of the voluntary repatriation of over 65,000 Sri Lankan

refugees from India. Some 20,000 newly displaced persons were provided shelter and relief assistance in UNHCR-assisted Open Relief Centres in Mannar District. Over 428,000 persons also benefited from 224 micro-projects, which focused on water supply/sanitation, education and income-generating activities in six northern districts.

In India, efforts to promote self-reliance among some 18,000 urban refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, continued during 1997, and the number of refugees receiving monthly subsistence support was reduced from 10,000 to some 2,200 persons. India also provided shelter to some 65,000 Sri Lankans and 98,000 asylum-seekers from the Tibet region.

There were no significant developments regarding the situation of some 93,000 refugees from southern Bhutan accommodated in seven camps in eastern Nepal.

East Asia and the Pacific

Throughout 1997, UNHCR continued to support repatriation, resettlement and self-reliance measures aimed at achieving durable solutions for the relatively small residual caseload of Indo-Chinese refugees in the region. A total of 755,857 Vietnamese refugees had been resettled in third countries since 1975, some 109,198 Vietnamese had repatriated to their country of origin since the inception of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees in 1989 [YUN 1989, p. 707] and some 27,658 Laotian refugees had returned to their country of origin since 1981.

Under an agreement reached between Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in March 1997, an individual case status review of the Ban Napho population was in progress. Repatriation counselling was being continued in view of indications that many individuals would not meet internationally recognized refugee criteria and would be expected to return to their countries. In Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, returnee reintegration and monitoring assistance continued.

At the end of 1997, some 103,100 refugees from Myanmar were residing on the Thailand side of the border between Myanmar and Thailand, comprising 91,300 Karen and 11,800 Karenni. UNHCR supported ongoing initiatives by the Thai authorities to relocate and consolidate camps that were vulnerable to cross-border incursions or were difficult to access during the wet season.

Following political violence in July 1997 in Phnom Penh, and subsequent military conflict in north-western Cambodia, over 60,000 Cambodians sought refuge in Thailand. UNHCR, in conjunction with the Government of Thailand, pro-

vided emergency relief to the Cambodian refugees in three camps. In China, UNHCR assistance for Indo-Chinese refugees focused on sustainable local settlement through the creation of employment opportunities.

UNHCR sponsored the Expert Meeting on Regional Approaches to Refugees and Displaced Persons in Asia (Bangkok, Thailand, July). Convened in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), it considered the causes, nature and consequences of population movements and was aimed at facilitating communication, understanding and cooperation among States on refugee and displacement issues, at a time when the economic crisis in the region had created higher levels of legal and illegal migration in several countries.

Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East

As a result of the continuing civil war in Afghanistan, which had prolonged the human tragedy for more than 17 years, involuntary movements of displaced persons and new refugees and violations of basic human rights continued and were the main concerns of UNHCR in the country. In 1997, some 87,000 Afghan refugees repatriated voluntarily. UNHCR remained concerned by the continued presence of 2.6 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, whose return depended on a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, as well as the restoration of stability and reconstruction in areas of return. In Tajikistan, the signing of the General Peace Agreement in June 1997 (see PART ONE, Chapter IV) created a political framework for peace and national reconciliation. Subsequently, UNHCR was able to recommence the voluntary repatriation of Tajik refugees from northern Afghanistan in July. By mid-November, some 10,200 Tajiks had returned home safely and their repatriation from northern Afghanistan was completed. The number of Iraqi refugees returning from Iran increased significantly in 1997 and further returns were expected.

UNHCR planned to begin in 1998 a repatriation operation under the 1990 United Nations Settlement Plan for Western Sahara [YUN 1990, p. 919]. However, the voluntary repatriation operation could begin only when certain key activities of the Plan were completed and with the full cooperation of the parties concerned.

In northern Iraq, the Atroush camp was closed in early 1997 and Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin received alternative assistance in Ain Sufni (6,800 persons) and 19 other locations. During the year, some 1,000 persons repatriated from northern Iraq to Turkey.

UNHCR continued to implement its capacity-building and prevention objectives in all five Central Asian States, consistent with the Programme of Action of the CIS Conference (see below). Close coordination had been established with the new Governments and other agencies in such matters as resolving and mitigating refugee migration and forced population movements.

Europe

According to UNHCR figures [A/53/12], Western Europe witnessed a 10 per cent growth in the number of asylum-seekers in 1997, reaching 270,000, compared with 245,000 in 1996. The highest relative increases were in Ireland, Greece and Italy, where the number of applicants more than doubled. Other significant increases occurred in Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland. UNHCR hoped that the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, signed on 2 October 1997, would facilitate the adoption of a comprehensive European asylum policy, based on common standards of protection that were consonant with internationally agreed standards.

Of the 3 million persons uprooted by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, some 815,740 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina remained in asylum countries at the beginning of 1997. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia hosted nearly a quarter of a million refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and also provided asylum to some 300,000 refugees from Croatia. The numbers of refugees and displaced persons who returned home to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997 totalled 120,000 and 53,810, respectively. By the end of 1997, only 1,125 refugees had returned to Croatia from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Within Croatia, over 11,000 internally displaced persons had returned home. By the end of the year, the number of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in need of durable solutions had decreased to 602,000. The main objective of UNHCR was to seek a breakthrough on the voluntary return of minorities to their homes. To that end, the concept of "Open Cities" was introduced in the first half of 1997, whereby municipalities that agreed to accept the return of minorities would be given assistance by the international community. In 1997, 4,443 persons were resettled in third countries.

Over 1.3 million persons (both internally displaced and refugees) were registered in the Russian Federation, most of whom were from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It was estimated that an additional 2.8 million unregistered persons resided in the Russian Federation. Since 1992, some 30,000 refugees and

asylum-seekers from outside CIS had been registered by UNHCR.

In the North Caucasus region, UNHCR delivered assistance to over 90,000 internally displaced persons from Chechnya (Russian Federation) residing in neighbouring republics and regions. Cross-border assistance was provided to some 150,000 internally displaced persons in Chechnya itself. Over 35,000 internally displaced persons from Prigrodny district of North Ossetia were still residing in Ingushetia and had benefited from legal and individual assistance. In addition, there were 29,300 registered Georgian refugees in North Ossetia. UNHCR organized a repatriation programme to move that caseload back to South Ossetia and Georgia. The UNHCR humanitarian assistance programme in Georgia catered for some 300,000 refugees and internally displaced persons.

The main migration issue facing Ukraine was the return to and reintegration in the Crimea of formerly deported persons, numbering 248,700. To prevent a statelessness situation among the formerly deported peoples, UNHCR launched a plan of action to assist the Crimean Tartars and others to acquire Ukrainian citizenship.

In support of the policy of integration of the Government of Armenia, UNHCR continued to provide assistance, addressing the needs of some 150,000 of the most vulnerable. The humanitarian programme of UNHCR in Azerbaijan moved towards a post-emergency phase, with a stronger emphasis on promotion of self-reliance and targeted assistance for 150,000 of the most vulnerable.

Conference on refugees of CIS countries and neighbouring States

In an August report [A/52/274 & Corr.1], the Secretary-General described follow-up to the 1996 Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States [YUN 1996, p. 1117]. The report was submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 51/70 [YUN 1996, p. 1118], by which the Assembly also requested UNHCR, in cooperation with IOM and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to steer the activities in implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Conference. Under a joint operational strategy for 1996-2000, national implementation plans in each CIS country were drawn up. UNHCR and IOM made a joint appeal for funds in November 1996, thus providing a channel through which States or interested organiza-

tions could support implementation of the Programme of Action.

Most CIS countries had elaborated or revised legislation on migration and displacement, the Secretary-General reported, and many had promoted human rights. Some paid particular attention to minority rights and had made efforts to reduce statelessness. UNHCR strengthened its own regional policies and approaches, developing strategies and practical tools for capacity-building, enhancing or launching programmes to address such issues as statelessness, citizenship, involuntarily displaced persons and formerly deported peoples. IOM concentrated on migration management, integration assistance, migration assistance, and research and information activities. Other organizations active in the region included UNDP, which assisted internally displaced persons in Georgia and the reintegration of returnees in Crimea, Ukraine, focusing on improving the infrastructure and access to social services. Also in Crimea, UNICEF provided educational and medical supplies for community centres and polyclinics.

The Steering Group set up in October 1996 to monitor progress in implementing the Programme of Action met on 2 July 1997. Participants included 45 States, 21 international organizations, 73 NGOs and 4 other entities. A report compiled by UNHCR and IOM outlining progress made in each CIS country provided the basis for the review.

UNHCR and OSCE organized an expert meeting on freedom of movement (Kiev, Ukraine, December), with the participation of government representatives and independent experts from all the CIS countries and some others. Potential changes were considered in residence registration systems that impacted particularly negatively on asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR initiated a number of programmes in cooperation with other international organizations and NGOs to strengthen the capacities of local NGOs in implementing the Programme of Action.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 12 December [meeting 70], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/52/639], adopted **resolution 52/102** without vote [agenda item 107].

Follow-up to the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 48/113 of 20 December 1993, 49/173 of 23 December 1994, 50/151 of 21 December 1995 and, in particular, 51/70 of 12 December 1996,

Having considered the report of the Secretary-General and that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Recognizing the acuteness of the migration and displacement problems in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States,

Noting with satisfaction the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration in developing strategies and practical tools for more effective capacity-building and enhancing programmes to address the needs of various categories of concern to the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States,

Convinced of the necessity for the further strengthening of practical measures towards the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States,

Reaffirming the view of the Conference that the primary responsibility for tackling population displacement problems lies with the affected countries themselves and that these issues are to be regarded as national priorities, while at the same time recognizing the need for enhancing international support for the national efforts of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States aiming at the effective implementation of such responsibilities within the framework of the Programme of Action of the Conference,

Recalling that the protection and promotion of human rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions are essential to prevent mass population displacement,

Mindful of the fact that effective implementation of the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action of the Conference should be facilitated and can be ensured only through cooperation and coordinated activities undertaken in this respect by all interested States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and other actors,

Noting and reaffirming the importance of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General and that of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

2. Notes the positive results achieved by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States, and invites these organizations to continue to steer the ongoing and future activities relating to the follow-up to the Conference;

3. Welcomes the efforts of the Governments of those countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States that, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner, the International Organization for Migra-

tion, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, have undertaken practical steps in the implementation of the Programme of Action;

4. Invites all countries that have not yet done so to accede to and implement fully the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees;

5. Appreciates the efforts made by the Office of the High Commissioner, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to support the implementation of the Programme of Action in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and underlines the necessity of an appropriate response by the international community to appeals for funds by the Office of the High Commissioner and the International Organization for Migration;

6. Calls upon States and interested international organizations, in a spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing, to provide appropriate forms and levels of support for the practical implementation of the Programme of Action;

7. Invites international financial and other institutions to contribute to the financing of projects and programmes within the framework of the implementation of the Programme of Action;

8. Invites the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to intensify bilateral and subregional cooperation in maintaining the balance of commitments and interests in the process leading up to the implementation of the Programme of Action;

9. Calls upon the Governments of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States to continue to strengthen their commitment to the principles underpinning the Programme of Action, in particular human rights and refugee protection principles, and to lend high-level political support to ensure progress in its implementation;

10. Emphasizes the necessity of fulfilling the recommendations of the Programme of Action relating to ensuring respect for human rights as an important factor

in the management of migration flows, the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and stability;

11. Urges the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to take into account those elements of the Programme of Action that are relevant to her mandate;

12. Encourages the involvement of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in the follow-up to the Conference, and invites them to demonstrate stronger support for the process of the multinational constructive dialogue among a wide range of the countries concerned and further action with a view to the full implementation of the recommendations of the Conference;

13. Calls upon the Governments of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States as well as international organizations to strengthen further their cooperation with non-governmental organizations and to increase their involvement in the implementation of the outcome and the follow-up to the Conference;

14. Requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to enhance its relationship with other key international actors, such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other human rights, development and financial institutions, in order to better address the wide-ranging and complex issues in the Programme of Action;

15. Recognizes the importance of undertaking measures, on the basis of strict adherence to all of the principles of international law, including humanitarian law and international human rights standards, to prevent situations leading to new flows of refugees and displaced persons and other forms of involuntary displacement;

16. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session on progress achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action;

17. Decides to continue examination of this question at its fifty-third session.