

ALGERIA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Complete preparatory activities for the voluntary repatriation of Western Saharan refugees by March 2000 under the UN Settlement Plan for Western Sahara.
- Pending the implementation of voluntary repatriation, continue to provide assistance to vulnerable Western Saharan refugees in Tindouf.
- Provide protection and assistance to urban refugees of different nationalities, and seek lasting solutions for them.
- Promote refugee and humanitarian law, and work with government authorities to improve their capacity to administer and manage refugee matters.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Western Saharan Refugees

Given the continuing political constraints affecting implementation of the UN Settlement Plan, no repatriation took place to the Territory during the first six months of the year. Some core preparatory activities for repatriation were nevertheless conducted. The pre-registration of refugees (and their family members) eligible to participate in the referendum was completed in the camps. See the Regional Overview for North Africa for more information on the Western Sahara Operation.

Pending repatriation, basic humanitarian assistance continued to be provided to some 80,000 vulnerable refugees in the four camps located near Tindouf. According to the Algerian authorities, 165,000 Western Saharan refugees live in these camps. UNHCR's assistance covers and/or supplements those needs that have not been fully covered by other sources of assistance, which include the Algerian government, ECHO and several international NGOs. A local NGO serves as

UNHCR's main implementing partner in the camps.

Assistance to the refugees consists of food (donated by WFP), health and education services, vocational training, sanitation, shelter (tents) and domestic items. UNHCR covers the provision of 210 gr. of tea per person/per month and 200 gr. of yeast per family/per month to augment the diet and combat dehydration. UNHCR also procured 120,000 metres of canvas and sufficient rope for the repair of old or erection of new tents, as and when needed. Distribution of the canvas will take place in the second half of the year and the sewing workshop in the camps will be used to repair/make tents, as well as dresses for young girls and the elderly. To replace worn-out clothing and encourage sports activities, the purchase and distribution of 15,000 pairs of shoes and 10,000 tracksuits for children from the age of 10 to 16 is planned.

Other routine assistance activities include the purchase and distribution of 4,000 blankets for adults and 3,000 blankets for children for use during the cold desert nights; the purchase and distribution of bottled gas; the purchase of gas lamps for lighting; the local purchase of 15 tonnes of disinfectant and 20,000 bottles of chlorine bleach to combat pests and improve hygiene in the camps. Health-related activities include the purchase of vitamins, medicines, antibiotics and vaccines to cover the needs of the camp-based refugees; the replacement of worn-out medical equipment and the purchase of supplies for the camp clinics; the purchase of 300 beds and mattresses to repair worn-out items; and the purchase of two new ambulances to replace ageing vehicles. Supplies such as notebooks, coloured pencils, pens and watercolour sets are provided to some 35,000 children distributed in 500 classrooms in 25 schools in the camps. UNHCR also supported four fully equipped workshops in the camps: mechanics and welding, carpentry, weaving and sewing.

Early in the year, following the temporary sus-

pension of food assistance by ECHO, UNHCR warned of a potential food crisis in the camps. A joint WFP/UNHCR food assessment mission met with the Algerian authorities and refugee leaders in Algiers and Tindouf in March, to evaluate the number of refugees benefiting from food distribution in the camps. Following additional consultations in Brussels with ECHO, and in Rome, WFP approved the mission's recommendation to cover the food needs of all needy refugees in the camps, increasing the number of beneficiaries of food aid to 155,000 as from the month of September. UNHCR made the commitment to provide a breakdown by age of the refugee population by the end of September, to justify the increase in the number of food-aid beneficiaries.

UNHCR will initiate a nutritional survey to assess the nutritional status of women, children and adolescents. Food, health and education services in the camps will be revamped with the specific aim of combating anaemia and improving the nutritional status of children and lactating mothers; promoting the self-reliance of women in Dakhla camp through income-generating projects which include a vocational training component; and by improving the reception, handling and distribution of basic humanitarian assistance. Progress was made in the water sector. A new well was drilled in Dakhla refugee camp and another well in Rabouni was equipped to furnish water for Awserd and Smara camps. Plans for improving the potable water supply further are described later in the chapter.

Women continued to play a very active role in all aspects of daily life in the camps. For example, they are in charge of distributing food assistance to the refugees. Women have also set up committees focusing on health and sanitation issues. Women are responsible for ensuring the periodic chlorinating of the water supply. Many women also serve as teachers in the schools and most of the nurses are women. Young women have also been assigned responsibility for running nurseries, day-care centres and similar activities for the benefit of children.

UNHCR continued consulting with the parties on its proposed draft Plan of Action for Confidence-building Measures, which includes the establishment of mail and telephone links with the Territory, organised visits and a mass information campaign. The parties have not yet agreed on modalities to implement the Plan.

Urban Refugees

Since inflation eroded the purchasing power of financial allowances provided by UNHCR to urban refugees, these were adjusted to enable refugees to cope with the rise in the cost of living. About 100 refugees received assistance in the main urban centres of Algeria during the first six months of the year, of whom 24 were new arrivals during this period. Health care assistance was also provided to 17 of these new urban arrivals.

Although security conditions in Algeria have improved, the UN maintained its security alert at Phase 3, which limits the movement of UNHCR personnel in the country and, consequently, reduced contacts and negotiations with the authorities for the promotion of refugee law and other relevant issues. Restricted staff movement also affected the capacity of UNHCR to monitor fully the needs of the urban refugees.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

In line with its mandate, UNHCR's primary objectives in Algeria remain unchanged.

- Priority activities for the remainder of the year include increasing the quantity of potable water for refugees in the camps. A national tender for bids was launched to improve water infrastructure in the four camps and to increase the supply of water in both Aiun and Dakhla camps. Work is scheduled to start during the second part of the year.
- Pending a solution to the political problems affecting implementation of the UN Settlement Plan, UNHCR will maintain a

high level of preparedness in the event that a political breakthrough would allow repatriation to begin in 2000. UNHCR will maintain an adequate presence near the refugee camps in Tindouf, to follow-up and monitor regularly programme implementation, and to discharge its mandate responsibilities.

- To the extent that the security situation allows, UNHCR will continue to assess the protection and assistance needs of urban refugees on an individual basis, while working closely with the authorities to improve refugee status determination procedures.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	5,015,304	4,715,893	2,355,906	2,249,600

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.

