REFUGEE REPATRIATION DURING CONFLICT:
A NEW CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

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The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently noted: "This year [1992], which the High Commissioner has dubbed the beginning of the decade of voluntary repatriation could, it is hoped, see up to three million refugees return home worldwide" (UNHCR, 1992). For the first seven months of 1992 there have already been some major returns, probably totalling over one million refugees, to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran, to Cambodia from Thailand, to Iraq from Iran and Turkey, to Angola from Zaire and Zambia, and to South Africa. "Other repatriation movements expected [in 1992], and of high priority to UNHCR, are to Angola, Ethiopia (Eritrea), north-western Somalia and, hopefully, Liberia and Mozambique" (UNHCR, 1992). While this list is lengthy, it is by no means unreasonable. Of course, many returns will not come off, or will be delayed or incomplete, but some successes can be hoped for.

In Ethiopia and Eritrea, victory enhances the prospects for repatriation. On 4 October 1992 a peace accord was signed to end the fighting in Mozambique. United Nations (UN) brokered peace settlements in Cambodia--repatriation has been in progress since 30 March, El Salvador, and Angola--elections were held in September, as well as the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) are promising. Rwanda, five of its neighbors, the Organization of African Unity, and UNHCR are seeking a comprehensive settlement to the thirty year exile of Rwandese refugees. In Burundi, a new Charter of National Unity offers reconciliation for the contending ethnic groups and 15,000 refugees returned in 1991 from Zaire and Tanzania. Even before the referendum on majority-rule, South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR to permit the return of 38,000 refugees of whom 15,000 have returned. In a number of countries UNHCR has signed tripartite agreements--between the host country, country of origin, and UNHCR--to begin preparatory work towards repatriation. In Central America, the CIREFCA process (International Conference on Central American Refugees) has promoted both repatriation and reintegration activities and has produced assistance cooperation between UNHCR and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) especially in Nicaragua. In many of the disputes, the UN, benefiting from the end of the Cold War, has taken a leading role in promoting peace settlements and providing international civil servants and peacekeepers to administer and protect the accords.

The voluntary repatriations of the "decade of repatriation" will be unlike almost any that have occurred before. In most cases--Afghanistan, Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Ethiopia (Eritrea), Somalia, and others--the peace is fragile, security is tenuous, and the economy and infrastructure of the homeland is devastated. The existing 'conventional wisdom' on voluntary repatriation, based on the experiences of the past, is wrong and activities based upon it are likely to be irrelevant at best and harmful and wasteful at worst. There is a need for a new view of voluntary repatriation, a 'new conventional wisdom', so that policies and activities to assist refugees, returnees, displaced persons, and stayees will respond to realistic conditions and expectations and have a possibility of being relevant and useful.

A new 'conventional wisdom' regarding voluntary repatriation needs to recognize that most repatriation is refugee-induced and occurs under conditions of conflict. In some situations 'repatriation' is the wrong term, because there has been no restoration of the bond

between citizen and fatherland. 'Return' is a better term because it relates the fact of going home without judging its content. Similarly, 'voluntary' is suspect, because far too many refugees go home under pressure or threat or to flee poor security in their country of asylum.

UNHCR's 'conventional wisdom' on repatriation can be seen in the draft of the new edition of UNHCR's Emergency Handbook. The draft indicates that voluntary repatriation is the "most desirable solution" and sets "four preconditions for the UNHCR's participation in voluntary repatriation"

(1) *Fundamental Change of Circumstances:* "In order for UNHCR to become involved, a change of circumstances must be substantial and permanent, and not be merely transitory, as for example a ceasefire might be." There should be the end of a civil war or replacement of a repressive regime. "Examples include Zimbabwe in 1980, and Namibia in 1989."

(2) *Voluntary Nature of the Decision to Return:* "So that the refugee's decision to return or to remain can be made of his or her own free will." "Freely made individual choice." "Carefully explained to refugees. "Intention to return ... expressed in writing." Care to avoid coercion by governments or partisan refugee factions.

(3) *Tripartite Agreements Between Origin, Host, and UNHCR:* "Terms and conditions,... roles and responsibilities, ... legal and operational commitments." UNHCR to "ensure interests of refugees ... physical safety."

(4) *Return in Safety and Dignity:* Refugees to be protected "into the post-arrival period" and "not placed at unnecessary risk as a result of the repatriation operation." "Substantial and permanent change of circumstances has indeed taken place." "Legal guarantees" by country of origin, "full protection ... UNHCR will monitor." Amnesties are not a preconditions for UNHCR participation but UNHCR will negotiate blanket or general amnesties, communicate the details to the refugees, and monitor the agreement.

These four preconditions are not new, they are based on Conclusions 18 and 40 of UNHCR's Executive Committee (UNHCR, 1991d) and reflect long-established practices. They also represent properly high standards or statements of principle regarding the nature of any repatriation. Unfortunately, it is the rare refugee situation that satisifies all of most or these preconditions. The choice of Zimbabwe and Namibia as examples of repatriation is particularly unfortunate because they are atypical of contemporary refugee-generating conflicts; perhaps the last examples of return after successful conclusion of a struggle for independence from colonial rule. In the real world, UNHCR can establish standards it hopes to achieve but UNHCR cannot set preconditions for its participation. Agreements and guarantees are desirable, but returnee assistance delayed may be assistance denied. Rather, assistance must reflect the refugees' own criteria and pace of decision-making.

The impact of irrelevant assumptions or a failure to gauge the refugees' own plans and goals can be seen in the current repatriation to Cambodia. By July 1992 over 70,000 Cambodian refugees, of a total of 360,000 expected returnees, had returned to their homeland. However, as UNHCR's <u>Refugees</u> Magazine makes clear, "as soon as repatriation began" the repatriation plan proved to be "unworkable."

"Maybe these questions should be put to UNHCR. What was the organization doing handing out such sums to returning Cambodians, after promising them land?

The answer is: changing course. **Originally, UNHCR's repatriation plan rested in two basic assumptions:** first, that every refugee family should be free to return to the destination of their choice; and second, that they should be given two hectares of agricultural land.

Last year, both assumptions made sense. ... But ...the day that the first , convoy crossed the border--the situation had changed.

So it was back to the drawing board almost as soon as repatriation began. This produced a major shift in policy.

The so-called 'cash option' has also prompted plenty of internal debate. Was UNHCR failing in its duty to the refugees and 'buying them off' by handing out cash? We concluded not--that **it made more sense to face facts than persist with an unworkable plan**.   But cash presented its own problems ... of refugees carrying large amounts of money around Cambodia at a time of deteriorating security. As always, no easy answers.

...anything is possible, and that includes a massive spontaneous movement home. (Guest, 1992) (emphasis added)

An unworkable plan based on wrong assumptions about the nature of contemporary repatriation and the decisions of refugees represents a great waste of scarce time and money. And options and innovations introduced at the last minute may be poorly implemented or create their own dangers and problems.

REPATRIATION IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There are three historical trends with roots in distant centuries that have converged in the late twentieth century to exacerbate the problem of refugees. These trends are: population growth and boundary controls; increasing consciousness of ideological, ethnic, religious, and nationalistic differences; and, increased control of their subjects by sovereign states. Their combined impact is to end open lands, to reduce migration and wandering, demand conformity, decrease tolerance, increase state power, and increase the number of refugees while simultaneously leaving the refugees with fewer options for refuge.

Table 1
Unresolved Major Refugee Flows Originating Before 1980

Source	Number	Exodus Began
Palestinians	2,428,100	1948
Ethiopia	1,066,300	1961
Rwanda	203,900	1961
Burundi	186,200	1972
W. Sahara	165,000	1972
Angola	435,700	1975
Cambodia	344,500	1978
Afghanistan	6,027,100	1978
	10,883,800	long-term refugees
	5,805,500	other refugees
total	16,689,300	

Note: Although the refugee flows may have originated before 1980, many of the refugees,
particularly from Afghanistan, fled much more recently.
Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey--1991.

The changing nature of refugee problems and of world political trends has altered the contemporary practice of voluntary repatriation. For a while during the 1960s and early 1970s, repatriation was commonplace at the end of decolonization struggles. But, in recent decades, most refugee-producing conflicts have involved independent states and have been based on issues of internal nation-building, revolutionary change, and/or conflicts with neighbors. The parties involved are poor, most come from or flee to low-income states; over ninety per cent of all refugees are from rural areas of developing countries and over ninety per cent will stay in the developing countries. In the words of former High Commissioner Poul Hartling (1983), the problem is "the massive arrivals of refugees in low-income countries where often no durable solutions are at hand."

LACK OF DURABLE SOLUTIONS

The number of refugees is increasing due to a lack of durable solutions. The three durable solutions--voluntary repatriation, local settlement in the country of asylum, or resettlement in a third country--require the integration, citizenship or permanent status, of a refugee into a society. But, as Table 1 indicates, for many refugees only long-term temporary asylum is available. Over two-thirds of today's refugees are the results of conflicts over a decade old. Once the refugees register, many remain there, seemingly forever. Refugees from the 1940s through the early 1980s are still on the assistance list, along with their children and grandchildren. "Refugee problems demand durable solutions," not only because of the waste of the refugees' lives, and the cost and burden on host countries and the international community, but because in their second, third, and fourth generation, unintegrated refugees can be a violent and destabilizing social ulcer. All of the situations listed in Table 1 have recently been violent.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR REFUGEES

Beyond the tragedy of becoming a refugee is the additional tragedy that almost no country is willing to accept responsibility for refugees. A few countries, receiving ethnic kin or active in resettlement, provide not only shelter, but also the rights and privileges of citizenship. Otherwise, the truth is that no one welcomes or wants refugees. The responsibility for refugees is shared by all, which means that no country takes responsibility for a durable solution. Refugees may be well-treated but they will not become citizens or permanent residents; rather the hosts insist that eventually the refugees exercise "the most desirable solution," to go home. However, voluntary repatriation is the preferred durable solution by default rather than on its merits. Local integration, which historically played a more minor role than was apparent, has become even less of an option. Resettlement in third countries is offered to only one per cent of the world's refugees. So, by default, if the number of refugees is to be reduced, it will be by means of voluntary repatriation.

As Table 2 indicates, the last decade has seen a large and great variety of refugee return. Although virtually all of the figures and totals are suspect, they do reveal a pattern: of the millions who have returned home, over ninety per cent returned in an irregular fashion, without significant international assistance. The principles reflected in the Executive Committee's Conclusions 18 AND 40 (UNHCR, 1991D) are valid and fundamental, but practice is not based on these principles. Use of UNHCR's preconditions is essential if international protection is to be provided to refugees. However, the dilemma is that reliance on the principles can make international plans and activities irrelevant in the field.

VARIETIES OF REPATRIATION

Today, most voluntary repatriations occur under conflict, without a decisive political

Table. REFUGEE REPATRIATION AND RETURN 1975-1991

RETURN TO	FROM	
1975		
Guinea Bissau [1977]*	Senegal	124,000
Angola	Zaire	300,000
Mozambique	Tanzania, Zambia	84,000
		508,000
1977		
Burundi	Zaire	6,000
Comoros	varied	16,000
		22,000
1978		
Zaire	Angola	183,000
Zaire	Burundi	35,000
Angolans	Zambia, Portugal	4,000
Burma	Bangladesh	200,000
		422,000
1979		
Nicaragua	varied	100,000
Angola	Zaire	50,000
Equatorial Guinea	Cameroon, Gabon	35,000
Uganda	Tanzania	30,000
Cambodia [1982]	Thailand, Vietnam, Laos	420,000
Laos [1982]	Thailand	11,000
		646,000
1980		
Zimbabwe [1981]	Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia	250,000
		250,000
1981		
Chad [1982]	Cameroon, Sudan	156,500
Ethiopia [1984]	Sudan, Somalia	317,000
Angolans	Zaire	46,000
Zaire	Burundi	20,650
		539,750
1982		
Bolivia [1984]		3,000
Chile [1984]		3,000
El Salvador [1984]		3,000
Uganda [1984]	Zaire, Sudan	200,000
		210,000
1983		
Ethiopia	Djibouti	32,000
		32,000
1984		
Cambodia	Laos	2,000
Laos	Thailand	1,600
Uganda	Zaire, Sudan	38,000
Zaire	Burundi	4,000
		45,600
1985		
Argentina, Uruguay		4,800
Chad	Central African Rep.	20,000
Zaire	Angola	6,800
Ethiopia	Djibouti	7,500
Ethiopia	Sudan	55,000
Uganda	Sudan	6,000
Uganda	Zaire	23,000
Uganda	Rwanda	27,000
El Salvador	Honduras	2,300
		152,400
1986		
Uganda	Sudan	100,000
Chad	Sudan	20,000
Chad	Central African Rep.	20,000
Angola	Zaire	1,000
Ethiopia	Sudan	65,000
El Salvador	Honduras	1,000
Guatemala	Mexico	2,300
Nicaragua	Honduras	10,000
Uruguay	Honduras	13,000
		222,300
1987		
Ethiopia	Sudan	25,600
Ethiopia	Djibouti	3,500
Ethiopia	Somalia	5,000
Uganda	Sudan, Zaire	96,650
Chad	Sudan	20,000
Chad	Central African Rep.	7,000
El Salvador	Honduras	4,350
Guatemala	Mexico	3,500
Haiti	Dominican R., Cuba	750
Nicaragua	Honduras	10,000
Sri Lanka [1989]	India	43,000
		217,350
1988		
Burundi	Rwanda	53,400
Chad	Djibouti	3,500
Ethiopia	Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe	5,000
Mozambique	Sudan	31,800
Uganda	Botswana	86,400
Zimbabwe	Honduras	2,650
El Salvador	Honduras	2,450
Guatemala	Mexico	1,830
Nicaragua	Honduras	8,300
Bangladesh	India	1,500
Iraq	Iran	46,470
		243,300
1989		
Namibia	Angola, Zambia	41,100
Chad		3,700
Mozambique [1991]	Malawi, Zimbabwe	244,000
Afghanistan	Pakistan	50,000
El Salvador	Honduras, Nicaragua	3,100
Nicaragua	Honduras, Costa Rica	3,600
Laos	Thailand	1,700
		347,200
1990 Voluntary		
Bulgaria	Turkey	100,000
Afghanistan	Pakistan, Iran	300,000
Angola	Zaire	2,200
Chad	Central African Rep.	11,000
El Salvador	Honduras	8,000
Guatemala	Mexico	780
Iraq	Iran	4,500
Iraq	Turkey	2,500
Laos	Thailand	1,480
Mali	Algeria	2,000
Nicaragua [1991]	Honduras, Costa Rica	61,000
Namibia	Angola	2,000
Vietnam	Hong Kong	5,430
Yemen P.D.R	Yemen A.R.	77,000
Chile	Argentina	2,500
		580,390
1990 Involuntary		
Uganda	Kenya	1,000
Guatemala & others	Mexico	110,000
Burma	Thailand	2,900
Mozambique	South Africa	37,000
		150,900
1991		
Burundi	Tanzania, Zaire	15,000
Afghanistan	Pakistan, Iran	200,000
Ethiopia	Somalia [iv]*	374,000
Ethiopia	Djibouti	34,000
Sudan	Ethiopia [iv]	270,000
Somalia	Ethiopia	100,000
Iraq	Iran	1,048,000
Iraq	Turkey	423,000
		2,115,000
	rough total	6,883,290

Caveat: Virtually all of the figures in this table are open to dispute. There are over-counts, under-counts, double counts, and fictional counts. The individual figures and the totals are for information and discussion.

Sources: UNHCR. Report on UNHCR Assistance Activities in ---- and Proposed Voluntary Funds Programme and Budget for ---. 1974-1991. U.S. Committee for Refugees. World Refugee Survey. 1978-1991. U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on the World Refugee Situation. 1981-1984. U.S. Department of State. World Refugee Report. 1985-1990. John Rogge. "Repatriation of Refugees: A Not-So-Simple 'Optimum' Solution." University of Manitoba. 1991.

* Year in brackets [] indicates when a multi-year return ended.
* [iv] indicates the return was mostly involuntary due unsettled conditions in the host country.

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event such as national independence, without any change in the regime or the conditions that originally caused flight. Countless individual refugees and sizeable groups of well-organized refugees return home in the face of continued risk, frequently without any amnesty, without a repatriation agreement or program, without the permission of the authorities in either the country of asylum or of origin, without international knowledge or assistance, and without an end to the conflict that caused the exodus. The fact that large numbers of refugees choose to return without the 'protection' of the United Nations (UN) is an indicator of the efficacy of the protection process, and the fact that many refugees are willing to forgo assistance indicates how aid is regarded during this point in a refugee's exile. The return of refugees to their homelands under these circumstances requires new thinking about voluntary repatriation and the ways of promoting it.

The refugees are the main actors in the contemporary practice of voluntary repatriation. They are the main decision-makers and determine the modalities of movement and the conditions of reception. Refugee-induced repatriation is a self-regulating process on the refugees' own terms. The refugees apply their own criteria to their situation in exile and to conditions in their homeland and will return home if it is safe and better by their standards. Many of the returnees are in desperate circumstances--in part because their return receives woefully inadequate international support, but they do not flee again.

The Range of Repatriation

Generally, if international agencies and governments do not initiate, manage, and organize a voluntary repatriation the international agencies refer to it as an unorganized or spontaneous repatriation. However, the failure or inability to provide international repatriation assistance does not mean there is a lack of organization. Refugee-run agencies, guerrilla forces, and host governments may provide substantial organization. Unfortunately, due to the lack of international participation, return and re-integration resources are likely to be inadequate.

To a certain degree, it is better to avoid labelling types of repatriation and to concentrate instead on examining the range of repatriation experiences. It is useful to think of types of repatriation as lying along several continuums or spectrums. Amongst the possible continuums would be (1) whether a repatriation is unassisted or organized and by which actors; (2) the degree to which a repatriation is purely voluntary, encouraged, induced, or forced; (3) whether it is an individual, small group, or more sizeable collective return; and (4) a political conflict spectrum reflecting the degree to which there has been a significant change in the original cause of flight. Today, most repatriation occurs under far from ideal conditions. The repatriations occur under conflict and raise serious questions of coercion and protection.

Some of the points along a return under political conflict spectrum would be:

(1) return after fundamental political change such as independence (Zimbabwe, Namibia) or victory (Eritrea, Ethiopia);

(2) return after a political settlement or major political change (Nicaragua);

(3) return after a political settlement that does not end the political conflict and which leaves the contending parties with substantial political and military power (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka,

Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique);

(4) return to areas not controlled by the government of the country of origin (may be controlled by a rival political force, local, foreign, or international forces) (Tigray, Iraq, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Cambodia);

(5) return to a country controlled by the government that originally caused the flight (Guatemala);

(6) return caused by deteriorating political security conditions in the host country (the post-1985 return from southern Sudan to Uganda, 1989-1991 return from Somalia to Ethiopia);

(7) forced return of impressed refugees to a conflict zone (Khmer Rouge); and,

(8) interdiction and forced return of refugees to a country controlled by the government that originally caused the flight (Haitians).

REFUGEE DECISION-MAKING

When dealing with conditions of return under conflict, with ninety per cent of the return outside of international channels, it is necessary for assistance agencies to work with and react to the refugees' decisions. Working within a 'conventional wisdom' framed by UNHCR's four preconditions the international community has missed many opportunities to promote refugee-induced repatriation. If refugees had not engaged in independent decision-making and organizing, recent returns to Tigray (1985-87), Afghanistan, Mozambique, El Salvador, Bulgaria, and elsewhere would not have occurred. Because the international system has failed to provide durable solutions, some refugees are taking matters into their own hands and becoming major actors in the repatriation process.

In the last few years, UNHCR has intensified its efforts to promote voluntary repatriation. In several Central American and Asian repatriations, UNHCR undertook innovative measures to protect refugees, remain in contact with all parties, and promote return. Nonetheless, despite its importance as a durable solution, voluntary repatriation, particularly under conflict, is difficult for UNHCR to implement. Given the irregular nature of many contemporary refugee movements, many refugees never register with UNHCR while in an asylum country. The forces controlling the area to which the refugees return may not be those of the sovereign government recognized by the UN. Countries of origin often assume that returnees are part of an insurgent movement, and thus refuse to approve their return. Many refugees fear that going through official channels to repatriate and being 'turned over' to their government would put them in danger or mark them as suspect. Lastly, although UNHCR's tripartite approach to repatriation is useful and important--often stimulating and facilitating more return outside of official channels than within, its pace is often slow and does not reflect the refugees' own pace and criteria for deciding to go home. Thus, refugees often return on their own rather than wait for formal action by UNHCR.

REPATRIATION UNDER CONFLICT

In examining refugee-stimulated repatriation under conflict it is necessary to take a split

screen view of two interacting factors, the pattern of repatriation and the purposeof refugee decision-making. These two factors interact and drive the repatriation process.

There are four main phases of repatriation: (1) the 'ricochet' effect; (2) relocation-stimulated repatriation; (3) community and alienation; and, (4) major repatriations. The pattern of these phases is not rigid, the process may be drawn out or short-circuted. The progression through the phases may flow smoothly or be jumbled by events. The key factors driving the events are the assistance decisions and attitudes of the host country, changing conditions within the homeland, the location of the refugees in their refuge, and the evolution of refugee communities at sites where refugees are concentrated. Also influencing this process is the fact that most borders are relatively porous allowing refugees to visit and communicate with their homeland.

Decision-Making

There are two points to note about refugee decision-making. First, not all refugees are alike; there will be differential responses to forced location often rooted in different levels of mobility, urbanization, education, and economic status amongst the refugees. Second, we are examining refugee responses over a long period of time. The refugee community will behave differently at the beginning, generally a conservative risk-aversive response, than years later when greater initiative and risk taking will be apparent.

Our view of refugee decision-making sees the refugees as making "rational" choices amongst unsatisfactory options, striving for an outcome that achieves relative security and some small degree of control over their lives.

Although refugees are commonly thought of as powerless, and they are certainly relatively powerless, it is well to recall that the decision to flee, or to stay, or to return home, is an action and a choice. [The choice is often influenced by geography; those near the border cross it and become refugees; others, far from the border, flee to the cities and become internally displaced persons. Their status differs, but the cause of flight is often identical.]

The decision to flee obviously reflects the refugee's belief that his or her power over others and level of self-control are now inadequate to provide protection from insult, injury, imprisionment or death. Refugees make their moves to flee, to repatriate, to accept settlement or resettlement because of decisions that compare alternatives.

In comparing alternative decisions refugees attempt to conserve and strengthen their control over their own lives and to reduce the possibility that further stress will occur. Not surprisingly, refugees seek security. In clinging to the familiar, refugees attempt to move the shortest distance not only in space to remain in contact with a familiar habitat, but also in terms of the psychological and sociocultural context of their lives.

In the "relocation" phase of repatriation, refugees consider the move to refugee camps or further inland to settlements as a threat to their identity. It would move them from a known to an unknown world, further away from kin and familiar territory. Returning to a dangerous homeland, to a previously established social identity with rights and obligations, can be seen as allowing the refugee to retain more power and stability and control over his own life. The later stage of decision-making is marked by increased initiative and risk taking [which may only be to pre-flight degrees of risk taking.]

Pattern and Process of Repatriation

On the other side of the split screen, actively interacting with the refugees' desire for security and some degree of control over their lives, are the events in exile: "ricochet"

repatiations; relocation-stimulated repatriation; return by refugees alienated from the emerging refugee community; and, major repatriations.

Ricochet: If the exodus was sudden, such as a result of military action or a "stampede" away from danger, a substantial number of people who might not have felt personally threatened or whose sympathies were not in line with the majority of the refugees will immediately seek ways to return. These initial repatriations will be spontaneous and unassisted and can be termed "ricochet repatriations".

Relocation-stimulated repatriation: The next phase is the host government's round-up of refugees scattered along the border and their movement to refugee camps to facilitate aid to and control of the refugees. At this point, refugees must decide whether to accept host government control and reside in the camps or try to elude the authorities and find a place to live away from other refugees. For those who stay in the camps, repatriation will inevitably become a less immediate option. But for those refugees who settle outside the camps, repatriation is more likely to be a viable alternative, especially if they are unable to find work in the country of asylum.

Community and alienation: One of the more interesting patters found in refugee camps is the formation of politically organized, cohesive communities by uprooted peoples. Rounded up by the host government and relocated to refugee camps refugees are placed in unaccustomed communal situations which may change their way of life and crowd them in amongst strangers. In these circumstances refugees show an impressive ability to organize and cohere as a new community with its own mores and values. Frequently, refugee organizations are formed that ally with insurgent groups. Refugees come to believe that their situation is a key part of the political equation in the struggle of their group for social, cultural or economic change.

Some refugees will be indifferent or alienated from the emerging refugee community, its values and common cause. These aloof refugees, seeking control over their own lives, are candidates to move away from the camp or settlement or to repatriate. "We must not forget that, like governments, refugee leaderships are not immune to the attractiveness of repression in order to achieve a political goal or maintain stability within the community."

As time passes, the available space for repatriation is likely to increase. At home, the locus of the conflict may change; the levels of violence may decrease; political or economic changes may occur. The border may become more porous as a result of internal changes in the homeland. Cross-border trade may normalize, providing an opportunity for families in the camps and spontaneously-settled refugees to send "scouts" back to check on conditions and to find out if it is viable for small numbers of people to go back. Returns by internally displaced persons to particular regions will be carefully noted by refugees and may trigger some repatriation.

Gradually more and more people will begin to leave. They are generally people who are on the periphery of the mainstream refugee community, or those who feel they no longer "belong". The refugee organizations may oppose the return of these less committed refugees, feeling that repatriation somehow undercuts the political and/or moral position of the refugee community. Repatriations during this period may expand the political space at home, although not significantly.

Secondary relocation-stimulated repatriation: At some point, in almost every refugee situation, the host government will decide, or propose, to relocate or transfer refugees from

refugee camps near the border to camps or formal settlements further inland. This relocation may be dictated by political concerns, as in the case of Guatemalans in Mexico, or operational concerns, as in the case of Sudan. Whatever the reason, the relocation decision forces the refugees to decide whether to accept the transfer and the disruption it is likely to cause to both the refugees' lives and to the established sense of community, or to leave the camps and either attempt to integrate into the surrounding communities or repatriate.

A key consideration is the perceived breakup of the sense of community that has evolved in the camps. If more refugees show an interest in repatriation than the existing political conditions and organization of assistance allows, then organizational attitudes start to change, and agencies working with the refugees begin to actively seek ways to expand the space for repatriation.

Major repatriations: UNHCR participation is often the final stage in the repatriation process. In response to governmental pressures (usually from the host government and then from the country of origin), UNHCR will begin to provide assistance. Whether or not this is carried out as part of a formal tripartite agreement may depend on the way the repatriation is perceived by the international community. In recent years UNHCR practice has become significantly involved in repatriation earlier in the process.

Return or repatriation is not an all or nothing one-shot event. Returns occur over a long period of time, and the successes or failures of the early returnees influences not only the prospects for later returns, but also internal politics in the homeland and the attitudes of the country of asylum and the international community.

POTENTIAL SUCCESSES AND OBSTACLES

Candidates for repatriation in the "year for voluntary repatriation" include returns to Western Sahara, Mozambique, Rwanda, Iraq, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Liberia, Angola, Central America, Eritrea, Burundi, Laos, Vietnam, South Africa, Ethiopia, and others. While this list is lengthy, it is by no means unreasonable. Of course, many returns will not come off, or will be incomplete, but some successes can be hoped for. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, victory enhances the prospects for repatriation. UN-brokered peace settlements in Cambodia, El Salvador, and Angola as well as the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) are promising. Rwanda, five of its neighbors, the Organization of African Unity, and UNHCR are seeking a comprehensive settlement to the thirty year exile of Rwandese refugees. In Burundi, a new Charter of National Unity offers reconciliation for the contending ethnic groups and 15,000 refugees returned in 1991 from Zaire and Tanzania. South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR to permit the return of 38,000 refugees. In a number of countries UNHCR has signed tripartite agreements--host, origin, UNHCR--to begin preparatory work towards repatriation. In Central America, the CIREFCA process (International Conference on Central American Refugees) has promoted both repatriation and reintegration activities and has produced assistance cooperation between UNHCR and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) especially in Nicaragua. In many of the disputes, the UN, benefiting from the end of the Cold War, has taken a leading role in promoting peace settlements and providing international civil servants and peacekeepers to administer and protect the accords.

There are four clusters of obstacles to repatriation that could mar the hopeful scenario. These obstacles, which present major challenges to the refugee policy community, are: fragile peace and tenuous security; protection of the voluntary nature of return; the UN system's

plans, designs, coordination, management, and funding of repatriation operations; and, reintegration under conflict and returnee aid and development.

FRAGILE PEACE

In many of the refugee situations where hope has been reborn, there is an awareness that the reconciliation and the peace have shaky foundations. Many of the conflicts have ended without a victory for either opponent. Rather, exhausted by years of inconclusive conflict and prodded by patrons whose patience and support eroded with the end of the Cold War, a deal has been made by opponents who still possess formidable firepower. However. many refugee-generating conflicts long predated the Cold War and have the potential to resume or continue outside of the East-West context. The superpowers interference certainly caused greater damage, which may be an object of revenge and an obstacle to reconciliation, and left the parties with sufficient stockpiles to continue the conflict. Refugees who repatriate under such conditions are in danger of renewed conflict, but they also represent an important opportunity to strengthen the fragile peace.

Refugees languishing in border camps can be an impediment to peace. They often support insurgents back home and some refugee camps and settlements have been bases of rest, recruitment, and training for guerrillas. Sometimes, as in India, Uganda, Mozambique, Honduras, Mexico, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Thailand, they draw, or threaten to draw, the country of refuge into the conflict.

Given the long-term, unresolved nature of most refugee situations, it is time to consider voluntary repatriation in a new light. Rather than a passive international approach, return should be actively promoted even before the formal end of hostilities. And repatriation should be seen as a tool for reducing confrontations along tense borders, for expanding or securing zones of peace and stability for returnees, and possibly as an encouragement to talks between between the adversaries.

The mere act of going home may reduce conflict and promote peace. When thousands of Salvadoran refugees and displaced persons returned to homes in conflict zones, the reoccupation of homesites was so extensive that the Salvadoran military reduced bombing sorties in order to avoid killing civilians. The returnees even warned both sides in the civil war to keep hands-off the reoccupied zone.

If international assistance were focussed on returnee areas, conflict-free zones could conceivably be created, and further return might be encouraged and protected by the presence of international workers. Some evidence suggests that even death squads are reluctant to murder in the presence of international witnesses.

Fragile peace creates a terrible dilemma for international agencies. Certainly they cannot endorse the agreement, pressure the refugees to return, and transport them home without violating their prime mandate to protect refugees. At the same time, this reticence should not lead international agencies to discourage or hinder those refugees who want to exercise their right of repatriation. In several repatriation programs, the international community's stance has been to make extensive preparations for return, and to discourage refugees from going home before all was ready. However, refugees often act on the basis of different information and criteria than that of outsiders. The greater danger is that lost repatriation opportunities may also be lost peace opportunities. Peace canemerge from a process that includes the return of refugees and the reconciliation of communities. The dilemma is knowing which comes first, return or peace.

PROTECTION OF THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF RETURN

Too often, refugee protection is inadequate because it is focussed in the wrong direction. Protection concerns are almost exclusively directed at the country of origin whose persecution caused the exodus. For too many refugees, however, the greater and more immediate danger comes during their exile. The danger comes from threats, pressure, and attacks by the host or elements within the host society; and it comes from inadequate international assistance which forces refugees to choose between malnutrition and danger. As Minear and Weiss (1991) noted:

> With the international community opposed to the repatriation of people against their will, the choice of some Iraqi Kurds to return home on their own stands as a judgement against the lifeline available to them. Their decision to coexist with an enemy who gassed their relatives rather than trust the world to provide for their needs would be understood by Cambodians ...and Palestinians.

The ability of refugees to take matters into their own hands and organize repatriations is a hopeful sign. But often they are forced into this position by hopelessness, danger, and lack of assistance. Iran has charged that: "For the refugees, reduced assistance constituted an attempt to force them to return to their country" (UNHCR, 1990r). What is the connection between malnourished refugee children in Malawi and "spontaneous repatriation" to Mozambique? In 1979, 200,000 Burmese refugees suddenly returned from Bangladesh, a movement "precipitated ... by conditions in the camps and by a curtailment of food rations designed to encourage an early decision in favour of return" (Aall, 1979).

> Experience shows that refugees are often inadequately fed. The food which they receive may be inadequate in quantity, so that people, and particularly children starve; and inadequate in quality, causing ... repeated outbreaks of scurvy, pellagra, and other deficiency diseases. (Seaman, 1991)

The _masivas_ to conflict zones in El Salvador grew out of the hostile, hopeless situation in the closed refugee camps in Honduras. Attacks on refugee settlements in Southern Sudan have driven hundreds of thousands of refugees back to Uganda, and threats to refugees have driven hundreds of thousands from Somalia to Ethiopia and from Ethiopia to the Southern Sudan. Many host governments insist that repatriation is the only option and confine refugees to 'humane deterrence' conditions. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1991) recently reported:

> several countries as a matter of policy keep refugees in closed detention camps ... surrounded by barbed wire and surveyed by police and armed personnel ... for more than a decade. Indeed, there are children born there who know no other reality.

Perhaps nowhere in refugee assistance is the gap wider between principle and practice than in the area of voluntary return. Principle is: "free will .. a freely made individual choice." Practice is that pressure, threats, and intolerable conditions are commonplace. In its 1991 Note on International Protection, UNHCR reported:

> problems in verifying the voluntary nature of the decision to return have persisted. ... where resistance forces have exercised significant control or influence ... or where the conditions of asylum are so severe as to border on coercion to repatriate.

The responsibility for this nutrition and protection crisis lies not only with the host governments and UNHCR, but also with the donor governments, whose penny-pinching starves children and with the UN system, whose confusion and lack of coordination causes promises to be unfulfilled. A 1991 International Symposium on "The Nutrition Crisis Among Refugees" found:

> a surprising confusion in the international system about the strategies of the different government, UN and non-government agencies concerned with refugee welfare. They revealed that there were no norms for refugee rations. ... They also revealed the ambiguity about responsibilities in the system. Host governments were responsible for refugees in law, but did not have the resources to discharge the responsibility; donors had the resources but no legal obligation to the refugees; the UN had poorly defined responsibilities for the material welfare of refugees and no resources other than those they were given by donors. The non-governmental organizations had no responsibilities at all. (Seaman, 1991)

Why would adequately protected and nourished refugees return home under conflict conditions to a country ruled by the government that originally caused the flight? There may be times when we should be grateful that a 'durable solution' has not been achieved. Indeed, many such returns represent a failure by the international community to provide for and protect refugees. Non-return may be a positive reflection on the attitudes and efforts of host countries, on the support of donors, on the protection by international agencies, and on the voluntary nature of return.

THE UN SYSTEM

Beyond the problems of protection and nourishment, the UN system is not prepared to plan, design, coordinate, manage, and fund refugee return movements. In part, the difficulties are traceable to the old 'conventional wisdom' reflected in UNHCR's four preconditions for participation in repatriation. But UNHCR is only part of the problem. As events at the end of the Gulf War illustrate, contemporary refugee movements can be too large in scale, too rapid in pace, and too costly for the resources of UNHCR, or even the whole UN system. The UN system is in the midst of a fundamental restructuring which may address all or some of these difficulties, but experience is not encouraging.

Design

There is a cookie-cutter sameness to UNHCR's repatriation plans. Although responding to dramatically different situations, varying in scale and levels of conflict, the repatriation plans follow the same formula, table of contents, and boilerplate. Whether the plan is for Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, or Namibia, it follows the same outline for a voluntary repatriation operations plan. Understandably, such a plan will have sections on transport and logistics; food; water; domestic needs; health; education; shelter; social services; agriculture; reintegration; and the registration form.Further, repatriation will be seen in three phases: pre-departure; movement; and, post-arrival. The plans are strong on protection, legal arrangements, and logistics. They proceed in stages, finish one task before going on to the next, they assume control over the refugees' movements--usually to reception centers within the homeland, then on to rural areas, and, they assume UN agencies will coordinate their activities. The models for these plans are Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The successful repatriation to Namibia involved only 43,000 refugees in the context of

winning their independence, yet it was extremely costly, ran out of money, left some refugees stranded, provided little reintegration assistance, and produced a "Lessons Learned Survey" with 177 recommendations (Namibia Repatriation Unit, 1990). The Namibia repatriation is wholly atypical in that the numbers were small, there was a long time to prepare, there was peace and independence, and the return movement was controllable by the refugees themselves, through the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO), and UNHCR. In its "Lessons Learned Survey," the Namibia Repatriation Unit noted problems with the plan being "drawn up mainly by persons who were not directly involved in the implementation of the programme," that "all positions must be filled by qualified and experienced staff members at a very early stage ... [and] retained until the very end," that there was a "constant need to add more and more staff," that there were problems with a "lack of financial control," that equipment and vehicles were procured late, that "it is important to establish a co-ordinating unit preferably outside of existing country/regional desk structure," and, that "earlier collaboration with other agencies (e.g. UNDP and WHO) might have proved useful particularly in planning for the post-arrival integration phase." There is little evidence that the list of 177 lessons learned is applied to other operations.

Most of the potentially successful repatriations on the High Commissioner's list for 1992 are likely to involve hundreds of thousands, even millions, of refugees returning swiftly and irregularly to homelands with devastated infrastructures. Mixed in with these movements are likely to be equal or greater numbers of internally displaced persons in great need. Many of the refugees will not be able to go home. Many will join the ranks of the internally displaced. A great many, after years in refugee camps with schools, clinics, markets, and other services, will not want to return to farms; they will move to urban areas. Realistic repatriation plans must assume giant, rapid, irregular return movements to devastation and poverty. And, preconditions for participation are unacceptable; if refugees are returning home, under whatever circumstances, the UN cannot stand on the sidelines.

Coordination

Returnee emergencies require central management and coordination within the UN system. The tasks involve many parts of the UN system working in concert. This is a subject for debate that involves issues much wider than just returnee assistance. The Cuenod (1991) report for the Secretary-General on "Coordination Questions" notes:

> Many Governments criticized the manner in which the United Nations system, as a whole, responded. ... The main criticism being the difficulty that the United Nations entities have and the time it takes to agree among them-selves on an acceptable coordination arrangement to decide on how to assess the situation, to reach a clear division of responsibilities, to work out a unitary plan of action and to get the Secretary-General to launch a joint appeal.

As the UN reorganizes its humanitarian response capabilty, returnee assistance will represent a special challenge. The conditions that allowed a humanitarian intervention for the Kurds in Iraq are not likely to be repeated. Many returnees will be in areas not controlled by their governments. It is doubtful that the new arrangements will find a way to aid the needy without the consent of a sovereign government.

Funding

There is a tremendous need to arrange advance funding for repatriation activities.

UNHCR relies on voluntary contributions to fund its activities. This means that the availablity of resources is unpredictable and often inadequate. UNHCR is handcuffed and repatriation opportunities are lost. In the last few years funding difficulties have short-circuited a two-way repatriation between Angola and Zaire, and repatriation programs in Mozambique, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. At the 1990 Executive Committee Sweden noted: "because of lack of contributions, ongoing repatriation programmes were being hampered or even halted."

Unfortunately, this problem is far bigger than UNHCR or voluntary contributions. UN members are $377 million dollars in arrears on their assessed payments for peacekeeping operations.

> Members of the Security Council are expected to call on the United Nations to play a growing role in preserving peace in trouble spots around the globe. But the organization finds itself facing a deepening financial crisis because many of these same member nations are not paying for their share for the operations. (Lewis, 1992)

Funding shortfalls directly affect peace and repatriation possibilities because several peacekeeping operations have a repatriation component. "The members of the Council note that United Nations peacekeeping tasks have increased and broadened considerably in recent years. Election monitoring, human-rights verification and the repatriation of refugees have in the settlement of some regional conflicts ... been integral parts of the Security Council's effort to maintain peace and security" (New York Times, 1992b).

> Ending 20 years of civil war in Cambodia was an extraordinary achievement. But three months after ... the ceasefire is fraying and peacekeeping forces are not expected to be deployed before April. The main reason for delay has been the U.N.'s worsening financial crisis. (New York Times, 1992a)

There is strong evidence that the international community is failing to provide both ad hoc assistance to returnees and developmental aid to returnee areas. This failure is both financial and organizational. Not only is the funding inadequate, the implementation measures and identification of responsible agencies is lacking. It appears that as refugees return home the international community loses interest in their cause and their needs and the community's attention shifts elsewhere. There are many complaints by countries of origin--Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique--that the extensive political and military aid that went to the destabilizing activities of refugee warriors and exile groups has not followed them home. There appears to be something askew with a system that can provide guns to exiles but fails to provide the same individuals with seed and tools after they have returned home. The problem, however, is that often refugees do not return home in peace.

When refugee assistance moves from humanitarian aid toward development aid there is a shift in leverage in favor of the donors. Humanitarian aid has a compelling dramatic immediacy about it that makes it difficult for donors to stand on the sidelines. Lives are at stake and aid rushes in. Development-oriented returnee assistance, on the other hand, is after the emergency, conditions have stablized, the danger is past, and whatever the compelling arguments in favor of development aid, the drama and urgency are missing. Donors asked to fund unsatisfactory projects can sit on their purses. Countries of origin must take serious account of donor views if their projects are to go forward.

RETURNEE AID AND DEVELOPMENT and REINTEGRATION UNDER CONFLICT

UNHCR is trying to resurrect the moribund "refugee aid and development" concept in the form of returnee aid and development. The High Commissioner stated: "I am optimistic that the concept of returnee aid and development will attract much interest and support" (UNHCR, 1991c). Returnee aid and development takes the view that assistance must be given more broadly than just in the form of returnee reintegration assistance. The equal or greater numbers of displaced persons need aid, those who stayed in place have suffered, it is likely that the society and its infrastructure have been devastated. "At the local level, there may be no clear distinction between a 'returnee', a 'refugee', a 'migrant', and a 'stayee', ... some of those that have moved ... considerably better off than their neighbors" (Allen, 1991). Returnee aid cannot be given in isolation from these conditions, rather it should be integrated into the homeland's development plan. It can "act as a dynamo for local, regional or national development efforts," contribute to humanitarian solutions and stability, and the "consolidation of lasting solutions" (UNHCR, 1991c). This idea has a great deal to recommend it, but its application will be limited by the fact of return under conflict conditions. Where there has been a peace settlement or a fundamental change of circumstances, where the bond between citizen and state is being restored, returnee aid and development is a realistic possibility. In conditions of continued conflict or fragile peace, returnee aid and development is not likely to be funded.

As a system of sovereign states, the UN system is constrained to provide development aid through governments. In the case of development-oriented reintegration assistance under conflict that might mean the aid would pass through the hands a government of origin that has played little or no role in advancing a durable solution.

Development First, Peace First

In the debates about refugee aid and development and development-oriented reintegration assistance there are two points of view regarding the nexus between peace and development. One view holds that development assistance is necessary to the achievement of peace. That without programmes addressing the "the underlying social and economic structural deficiencies" (Gallagher and Diller, 1990) of a society, political power differences cannot be resolved. The other view holds that development assistance is nearly impossible without peace. The political settlement must precede, rather than follow, the assistance. The donor community, as indicated by its unwillingness to fund reintegration assistance in situations of repatriation under conflict, follows the peace before development view.

Gallagher and Diller (1990) have outlined four factors, among others, that are responsible for the failure of the development-first approach in Central America. These factors are:

(1) social and political polarization in areas of conflict,

(2) potential for harmful rather than beneficial results of assistance,

(3) insufficuient political resolve on the part of governments and

(4) limited accountability for projects undertaken.

Repatriation under conflict is by far the most common form of contemporary repatriation. In many cases the returnees and the government have made no effort to resolve their political conflicts. In some cases the refugees are clearly hostile to their government or are returning to areas controlled by insurgent forces. "In El Salvador returnees and displaced persons reside in areas of armed conflict, and any development effort on their behalf is

inevitably influenced by national security concerns" (Gallagher and Diller, 1990). Implementation of development programmes in areas of high polarization is nearly impossible.

"The development approach has proved harmful in circumstances where development programs have been used by the government or military as tools of repression" (Gallagher and Diller, 1990). Development projects can be used for counter-insurgency, to force the relocation of suspect populations, to aid in the pacification of regions. Development assistance in situations of conflict could be used to harm the intended beneficiaries. In 1985, Ethiopia's programme to relocate hundreds of thousands of people from the highlands to the lowlands was severely criticized:

> Refugee movement to the Sudan has also been triggered by a program which the Ethiopian government says is a response to the famine. ... Western organizations and governments ... have criticized the program saying its real purpose is to remove the population from dissident areas. Authorities have reportedly forced people onto resettlement trucks at gunpoint or by withholding relief food. (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1986)

When the population to receive aid consists of enemies, suspects, or former enemies it is easy to doubt the political resolve of the country of origin. The lack of resolve stems from an ambivalence toward the returnees arising from the mixture of security and humanitarian concerns. Especially in circumstances of internal competition for resources it would take a government firmly commited to reconciliation to direct programmes to those whose support is not assured. Lastly, reflecting the conflict that caused the refugee flow, there may be deep splits within the governing elements in the government of origin. In Guatemala, conciliatory measures promoted by the civil authorities were routinely undercut by military actions.

Refugees located in conflictive areas may be viewed with suspicion by the origin government, but they may benefit from their ability to articulate their needs, from their identity and cohesiveness as a threatened community, and from political support both within their homeland and from outside groups that may have assisted them during their exile. Refugees have demonstrated an impressive ability to organize collectively. They may bring home new leaders and skills. The masivas to El Salvador represent a model of repatriation whereby the repatriates are organized to protect and promote their collective interests. (Fagen and Eldrige, 1990)

Development Priorities

With regard to desirability of development aid, as distinct from short-term return assistance and efforts to restore or rehabilitate destroyed or damaged facilities to their pre-exile level of functioning, to the local areas where refugees return an added complication is the fact that the presence of returnees does not necessarily convert a region into a desirable focus for development activities. In an environment of great and numerous human needs and intense competition for scarce development resources, investment strategies need to be carefully devised to produce national benefits. A region of refugee return is not necessarily the most potentially productive area or a suitable focus for infrastructural assistance. Such development projects might be the wrong project in the wrong place with the wrong needs, thus skewing the national development plan. This is not to argue against development assistance to returnee regions, but to remind those whose primary concern is refugee

assistance that the presence of repatriated refugees is just one of many factors that need to be evaluated in the course of development decisions.

Operational Issues

Ensuring the success of voluntary repatriation goes beyond the mandate or resources of UNHCR alone. UNHCR's short-term relief and aid to returnees must be complemented by and integrated with the national development efforts for the entire population. UNHCR is not a development agency but I am determined to act as a catalyst, sensitizing, encouraging, cooperating with development organizations, donors and, most of all, the countries concerned. (UNHCR, 1991c)

One of the reasons why the original 'refugee aid and development' effort failed, was that while UNHCR can be a catalyst and prime mover, someone else must take on and finish the job. The prime candidate for this role has always been the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNDP has been courted, cajoled, and recruited to take a leading role in refugee-related development assistance. In 1983, at the initiative of the Secretary-General, UNDP was brought into the process. However, only in 1990 did UNDP's Governing Council finally take action on refugee aid and development. However, the policy paper prepared for the Council offers a view of refugee aid and development which is unacceptable to most donor countries.

there is one development process in a given country ... it is the country and its Government who bear the main responsibility for its own development. Although refugees are a special case ... they are not the only ones affected. (Denes, 1990)

An overweening respect for sovereignty is not likely to produce effective assistance to those who return under conflict. UNDP is re-examining the whole subject of returnee aid and development. It is drawing on its experiences with the CIREFCA process where UNDP and the entire UN system have been able to work effectively, up to a point, because there is a regional peace movement and the concerned countries are willing to integrate the refugees and returnees.

Returnee Aid

Separate from the complicated issue of returnee aid and development and reintegration assistance, is the problem of mere returnee aid. This is the cash, seeds, tools, blankets, etc. sent home with the returnees or, preferably, provided them at their destination. Huge numbers of refugees, a majority in many situations, return home with little or no assistance and they are not adequately aided after arrival. When large-scale movements occur, they are often very rapid, and may include elements of coercion. In the last six years over one million refugees have returned to Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, and elsewhere because of threats or attacks in their country of asylum. Their departure and arrival is unaided, relief reaches them with difficulty. Many other returnees, move on their own without international knowledge or assistance. As Allen (1991) reports on the 1986-1987 flight home of approximately 250,000 Ugandans from Southern Sudan:

The relief effort proved to be a dismal failure. According to UNHCR's own figures, in 1986 the total amount of food distributed was only 10% of expected cereals, 14% of beans, 12.5% of cooking oil, ... it is clear that the returnees were left pretty much to their own devices, and, ... things did not improve in the following year.

Because they receive woefully inadequate international assistance, many returnees are in desperate circumstances. Re-establishment and reintegration are jeopardized. The fact that they do not flee again, does not justify ignoring their plight.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a dilemma and dichotomy in examining voluntary repatriation. The dichotmy is both a promotion of repatriation and a rejection of it. The dilemma is that the promotion, like so much else dealing with refugees, is not truly voluntary, it is coerced. The international community offers no viable alternative to "voluntary repatriation." A fixation on repatriation cuts off consideration of other durable solutions and can lead to policies that harm the refugees. Given only the option of return, refugees wait while confined to camps, closed camps, detention centers, restricted settlements, and other holding facilities which prevent them and their subsequent generations from leading a complete life. By refusing to settle for anything less than the best solution for the refugees, the international community denies them a restoration to normalcy and confines them in institutions that violate their human rights and fail to protect from involuntary repatriation.

In principle, voluntary repatriation is the most desirable durable solution. The international community is on record in supporting not only the return home of refugees but also development-oriented assistance to promote reintegration and to reconstruct homelands and regions of return.

In practice, however, much remains to be done. Actual assistance to voluntary repatriation and reintegration is meager. Part of the difficulty is a lacuna in the mandates of international agencies. UNHCR cannot provide development assistance and no other agency stands ready to provide and implement development-oriented reintegration programmes. UNDP may evolve to fill this role, but its progress in this direction has been slow and reluctant. UNDP's ability to attract funding for reintegration projects will depend on much greater accountability by countries of origin with regard to the use of international monies.

The heart of the problems with repatriation and reintegration assistance is the nature of contemporary returns. The lion's share of return is repatriation under conflict without a resolution of the political issues that originally caused an exodus. A lack of peace, failure to reconcile, and continuing conflict are not conducive to long-term development programmes. Donor governments are singularly unimpressed by the argument that development assistance can precede and produce peace. Their "show me" attitude demands progress towards political reconciliation by the governments of origin before investments will be made.

Confronted with the harsh reality that no durable solution is offered to most refugees, many refugees explore the possibility of going home. Refugee-induced repatriation is a self-regulating process. Refugees will voluntarily repatriate if and when they believe they will receive sufficient protection. Protection, security, more control over one's fate are the key variables in repatriation under conflict. Protection is a perceived political "space" or opening that provides refugees not only relative physical security, but also material and moral support. The space may be so narrow that only single refugees can return, or it may be understood so broadly as to permit a collective return.

Nonetheless, despite significant protection worries, there is a need to actively promote voluntary repatriation, even under conflict. In an imperfect world that only offers long-term temporary asylum to most refugees, there is a need to assist refugees to go home. In the real world it is inadequate to protest that contemporary repatriation is problematic; confronted with

unsatisfactory options one must seek to find the best that is available. Rather than a passive international approach, repatriation should be carefully and actively promoted even before the formal end of hostilities. And repatriation should be seen as a tool for reducing confrontations along tense borders, for expanding or securing zones of peace and stability for returnees, and possibly as an encouragement to talks between between the adversaries.

Many of the several million refugees who returned home under imperfect conditions in the last few years have stayed at home. Many are in desperate circumstances, but they do not flee again. This is not to suggest that the end justifies the means; that forcing refugees to go home against their will is somehow justified if they are not persecuted or attacked. However, the fact that large numbers of refugees choose to return without international "protection" tells us something about the efficacy of the protection process and the fact that many are willing to forgo assistance indicates how aid is regarded during this point in a refugee's exile. It is evident from the number of repatriations to date that the end of conflict is not a precondition for repatriation and that suggests there are political possibilities that need to be explored.

Recommendations

A new 'conventional wisdom' is needed regarding repatriation. Without correct basic assumptions about the process and problems to be confronted it is difficult to properly design a repatriation operations plan. Repatriation plans must assume large-scale rapid return under conflict to areas not controlled by the government involved. Preconditions are acceptable as statements of standrds, values and goals, but not as a precursor to action. 'Worst-case scenarios' are likely to be closer to reality, and plans must be prepared to deal with disasters.

Donors must take a more active role in repatriation. In recent discussions in the Security Council the leading and wealthiest countries have commited their states and the UN to protecting human rights and promoting democracy. The human rights of refugees and returnees are in danger in their places of asylum and at home. The donors must become advocates for returnees. Further, they must back up their words with money. "This irresponsible approach to repatriation prospects cannot go on without placing millions of the world's most vulnerable victims of conflict at further, avoidable risk" (Winter, 1990). Donors have it in their power to pre-pay for repatriation programs, to demand that host countries respect the voluntary nature of return, and to demand better design and implementation of repatriation programs by UNHCR, UNDP, and the rest of the UN system.

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