Refugees and displaced persons

In 2007, although the total number of persons of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) dropped to 31.7 million, from 32.9 million in 2006, the refugee population worldwide increased for the second consecutive year, owing to conflicts in the Horn of Africa and in Iraq. Of the total, some 13.7 million were internally displaced persons (IDPs), followed by nearly 11.4 million refugees, 3 million stateless persons and 740,000 asylum-seekers. An estimated 2.8 million refugees and IDPs returned to their place of origin, most of them with assistance from UNHCR. Africa hosted a quarter (2.4 million) of the global refugee population and half of the world’s 24.5 million IDPs. The United States accepted more than half of the refugees resettled globally under UNHCR auspices, or some 31,800 individuals.

During the year, UNHCR achieved success in finding durable solutions in some regions, yet was hampered by constraints in other areas. Positive developments included the conclusion of repatriation operations in Angola and Liberia; the return home of 730,640 refugees, mainly to Afghanistan (373,856); and the return of an estimated 2.1 million IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR to their places of origin, including 1 million to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and 579,000 to Uganda. Despite those gains, the Office faced significant challenges in its operations, such as conditions in Iraq not conducive to organizing returns and the plight of 2.4 million people displaced inside the country, as well as an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Iraqi refugees in host countries; humanitarian crises in Africa that were exacerbated by renewed conflict and insecurity in Chad, the DRC, Somalia and Darfur (Sudan), and resulted in further displacement or heightened risk and violence against women and girls; the worsening security environment in Afghanistan; and the impact of the global rise in food prices on refugees and IDPs who depended on humanitarian assistance. The issue of “mixed migration” flows—situations in which people with different objectives moved alongside each other—remained a concern, particularly in Asia, as Governments focused attention on security aspects of migration. Moreover, for the first time in 20 years, UNHCR resettlement submissions exceeded the places made available by States, raising concern that there were significantly more people in need of resettlement than there were places available.

In addition to its core assistance and protection activities, UNHCR committed itself to further analysis and dialogue on emerging concerns, such as issues affecting States’ efforts to manage migration, as well as the causes of displacement (extreme deprivation, environmental degradation and climate change, conflict and persecution), which were becoming increasingly complex. In April, the High Commissioner for Refugees held an international conference on addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees and IDPs in Iraq and neighbouring countries, which agreed on the need to find solutions for the vulnerable and galvanized international support for refugee-hosting countries. In order to facilitate discussions between UNHCR, States and other stakeholders on issues related to protection, the High Commissioner also held, in December, the first of a planned series of annual dialogues on protection challenges, which addressed the issue of protection for people caught up in mixed migration movements. In October, the UNHCR Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on children at risk, which included guidelines and standards for strengthening the protection of children at risk.

The financial situation of UNHCR improved in 2007. Due to administrative and budgetary measures, an upward trend in global staff costs was reversed, enabling UNHCR to allocate $15 million in cost savings to needs in the areas of malnutrition, malaria, reproductive health, and sexual and gender-based violence in several operations. During the year, UNHCR continued to assess its mission and implement structural and management reform.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Programme policy

Executive Committee action. At its fifty-eighth session (Geneva, 1-5 October) [A/62/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee of the UNHCR Programme, in a conclusion on children at risk, affirmed that children, because of their age, social status and physical and mental development, were often more vulnerable than adults in situations of forced displacement; ac-
Refugees and displaced persons

knowned that while boys and girls faced the same protection risks, children also experienced protection challenges specific to their gender; and considered the particular vulnerability of refugee children to being forcibly exposed to the risks of physical and psychological injury, exploitation and death in connection with armed conflict. The conclusion applied to children who were asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced or returnees assisted and protected by UNHCR, or stateless, and provided operational guidance to States, UNHCR and other agencies and partners, including identifying the components of a comprehensive child protection system. In addition, the Committee called for the establishment of modalities for early and continuous identification of children at heightened risk; recommended close collaboration to prevent children from being put at heightened risk; and provided lists of non-exhaustive measures to be undertaken to that effect, as well as to address specific wider environmental or individual risk factors. The Committee also adopted decisions on the nature, value and use of its conclusions on international protection; and on institutional, administrative, financial and programme matters.

In his opening statement to the Committee [A/AC.96/SR.609], the High Commissioner noted that while UNHCR was committed to delivering its mandate to offer protection, assistance and solutions for refugees, as well as to reduce statelessness, UNHCR effectiveness depended on its ability to understand the broader patterns of human displacements in the world. The complexity of displacement went beyond the asylum-migration nexus, as more and more people were forced to move due to extreme deprivation, environmental degradation, climate change, and conflict and persecution. After several years of steady decline, the number of refugees worldwide had risen to nearly 10 million at the end of 2006, owing to the conflicts in the Horn of Africa and in Iraq. Iraqis displaced inside and outside their country represented the largest group of displaced persons and the most complex “urban refugee” group that UNHCR had ever addressed. Meanwhile, nearly every model of the long-term effects of climate change predicted a continued expansion of desertification, destroying livelihoods in many parts of the world; and for each centimetre that the sea level rose, 1 million more people would be displaced. He said that, in order to effectively address the new challenges, it was important for the international community to examine the reasons, the scale and the trends of forced displacement.

On directing resources towards the 32.5 million people under UNHCR care, the High Commissioner stated that UNHCR was committed to devoting a larger share of funds to refugees and displaced persons and less on the organization. In that regard, five key reforms were implemented: the relocation of services where they were most cost-effective; decentralization and regionalization to improve field-based capacity and locate support services closer to the point of delivery; the development of a methodology for a comprehensive field review to determine which activities could be most efficiently carried out by UNHCR and its partners; reform of personnel management; and the improvement of resource management by adopting a revised resource allocation and management framework, which included replacing the bureaucratised Operations Review Board with a smaller Budget Committee and the proposal of a new four-pillar budget structure. Hence, in 2007, for the first time in a decade, an upward trend in global staff costs was reversed, with 911 staff in September instead of 1,047 at the beginning of 2006, and spending totalling $36 million more on operations than on staff between January and August 2007. Savings on staff costs enabled UNHCR to allocate $15 million to pressing needs in the areas of malnutrition, malaria, reproductive health and sexual and gender-based violence in several operations. As the success of UNHCR also depended on collaboration with its UN system partners, the Office participated in the humanitarian response review [YUN 2005, p. 991] through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and in the planning of integrated missions with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The High Commissioner welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1778(2007) (see p. 153), which established a multi-dimensional mission in Chad and the Central African Republic and represented a strong commitment to improving security and the protection of refugees and displaced persons. In other activities, UNHCR launched an internal debate on strategies and standards, on the basis of the Agenda for Protection [YUN 2002, p. 1199] and through a field reference group on protection policies; supported work to harmonize the European asylum systems and provided comments on the European Union (EU) “Green Book” in order to enhance refugee rights; achieved significant advances on local integration; signed an agreement of collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States on residual groups of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees; strengthened its refugee resettlement capacity, handling some 42,000 submissions for resettlement by June 2007; held its first meeting with 21 standby partners to exchange information and harmonize emergency deployments and interventions; and strengthened its partnerships with civil society, in particular the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), establishing five new strategic arrangements with NGOs during the year.

Despite the constant evolution of the operational environment, the High Commissioner observed that some imperatives remained valid, such as the need for long-term solutions for refugees and for ensuring the viability of returns. The reintegration challenge for
UNHCR was to strengthen the tenuous links between relief and development, enabling human security to become a reality. Although those links did not yet exist, new initiatives such as the Peacebuilding Commission and the early recovery cluster could help create them. He called on Member States to provide political guidance by formulating strategies and devising the instruments that would best serve those in need and enable the international community, including UNHCR, to face the challenges before it.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION**

On 18 December [meeting 76], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee [A/62/431], adopted resolution 62/124 without vote [agenda item 42].

**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 his Office and the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its fifty-eighth session and the conclusions and decisions contained therein,

Recalling its previous annual resolutions on the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees since its establishment by the General Assembly,

Expressing its appreciation for the leadership shown by the High Commissioner, commending the staff and implementing partners of the Office of the High Commissioner for the competent, courageous and dedicated manner in which they discharge their responsibilities, and underlining its strong condemnation of all forms of violence to which humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel are increasingly exposed,

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

 Welcomes the important work undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its Executive Committee in the course of the year, which is aimed at strengthening the international protection regime and at assisting Governments in meeting their protection responsibilities;

 Notes with appreciation the important guidance provided in the Executive Committee conclusion on children at risk to address issues of identification of these individuals and action to be taken in prevention, response and solutions;

 Reaffirms the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto as the foundation of the international refugee protection regime, recognizes the importance of their full and effective application by States parties and the values they embody, notes with satisfaction that one hundred and forty-seven States are now parties to one instrument or to both, encourages States not parties to consider acceding to those instruments, underlines in particular the importance of full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, and recognizes that a number of States not parties to the international refugee instruments have shown a generous approach to hosting refugees;

 Notes that sixty-two States are now parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and that thirty-four States are parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, encourages States that have not done so to give consideration to acceding to those instruments, notes the work of the High Commissioner in regard to identifying stateless persons, preventing and reducing statelessness and protecting stateless persons, and urges the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to work in this area in accordance with relevant General Assembly resolutions and Executive Committee conclusions;

 Re-emphasizes that the protection of refugees 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, and strongly emphasizes, in this context, the importance of active international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing;

 Also re-emphasizes that prevention and reduction of statelessness are primarily the responsibility of States, in appropriate cooperation with the international community;

 Further re-emphasizes that protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons are primarily the responsibility of States, in appropriate cooperation with the international community;

 Takes note of the current activities of the Office of the High Commissioner related to protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, including in the context of inter-agency arrangements in this field, emphasizes that such activities should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not undermine the mandate of the Office for refugees and the institution of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his dialogue with States on the role of his Office in this regard;

 Notes with appreciation the process of structural and management change being undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner, and encourages the Office to continue its pursuit of reforms, including the implementation of a results-based management framework and strategy, that would enable it to respond adequately and in a more efficient manner to the needs of its beneficiaries and ensure effective and transparent use of its resources;

 Encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to pursue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to respond adequately to emergencies and thereby ensure a more predictable response to inter-agency commitments in case of emergency;

 Strongly condemns attacks on refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons as well as acts that pose a threat to their personal security and well-being, and calls upon all concerned States and, where applicable, parties involved in an armed conflict to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law;

 Deplores the refoulement and unlawful expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers, and calls upon all concerned States to ensure respect for the relevant principles of refugee protection and human rights;
14. **Emphasizes** that international protection of refugees is a dynamic and action-oriented function that is at the core of the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner and that it includes, in cooperation with States and other partners, the promotion and facilitation of, inter alia, the admission, reception and treatment of refugees in accordance with internationally agreed standards and the ensuring of durable, protection-oriented solutions, bearing in mind the particular needs of vulnerable groups and paying special attention to those with specific needs, and notes in this context that the delivery of international protection is a staff-intensive service that requires adequate staff with the appropriate expertise, especially at the field level; 

15. **Affirms** the importance of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in analysing protection needs and in ensuring the participation of refugees and other persons of concern to the Office of the High Commissioner, as appropriate, in the planning and implementation of programmes of the Office and State policies, and also affirms the importance of according priority to addressing discrimination, gender inequality and the problem of sexual and gender-based violence, recognizing the importance of addressing the protection needs of women and children in particular; 

16. **Strongly reaffirms** the fundamental importance and the purely humanitarian and non-political character of the function of the Office of the High Commissioner of providing international protection to refugees and seeking permanent solutions to refugee problems, and recalls that those solutions include voluntary repatriation and, where appropriate and feasible, local integration and resettlement in a third country, while reaffirming that voluntary repatriation, supported, as necessary, by rehabilitation and development assistance to facilitate sustainable reintegration, remains the preferred solution; 

17. **Expresses concern** about the particular difficulties faced by the millions of refugees in protracted situations, and emphasizes the need to redouble international efforts and cooperation to find practical and comprehensive approaches to resolving their plight and to realize durable solutions for them, consistent with international law and relevant General Assembly resolutions; 

18. **Recognizes** the importance of achieving durable solutions to refugee problems and, in particular, the need to address in this process the root causes of refugee movements in order to avert new flows of refugees; 

19. **Recalls** the important role of effective partnerships and coordination in meeting the needs of refugees and in finding durable solutions to their situations, welcomes the efforts under way, in cooperation with countries hosting refugees and countries of origin, including their respective local communities, relevant United Nations agencies, international and intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, as appropriate, non-governmental organizations and development actors, to promote a framework for durable solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations, which includes an approach to sustainable and timely return which encompasses repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, and encourages States, in cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies, international and intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and development actors, to support, inter alia, through the allocation of funds, the implementation of such a framework to facilitate an effective transition from relief to development; 

20. **Recognizes** that no solution to displacement can be durable unless it is sustainable, and therefore encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to support the sustainability of return and reintegration; 

21. **Welcomes** the progress that has been achieved in increasing the number of refugees resettled and the number of States offering opportunities for resettlement, and the contribution that those States make to durable solutions to refugees, and invites interested States, the Office of the High Commissioner and other relevant partners to make use of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement, where appropriate and feasible; 

22. **Notes** the progress that is being made by interested States and the Office of the High Commissioner to take forward elements outlined in the Mexico Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America, adopted on 16 November 2004, and expresses its support for the efforts to promote its implementation with the cooperation and assistance of the international community, as appropriate, as well as by supporting host communities that receive large numbers of persons who require international protection; 

23. **Also notes** that some progress is being made by interested States and the Office of the High Commissioner within the context of the European-Asian Programme on Forced Displacement and Migration on issues related to asylum and forced displacement, consistent with the mandate of the Office; 

24. **Further notes** the importance of States and the Office of the High Commissioner discussing and clarifying the role of the Office in mixed migratory flows, in order to better address protection needs in the context of mixed migratory flows, including by safeguarding access to asylum for those in need of international protection, and notes the readiness of the High Commissioner, consistent with his mandate, to assist States in fulfilling their protection responsibilities in this regard; 

25. **Emphasizes** the obligation of all States to accept the return of their nationals, calls upon States to facilitate the return of their nationals who have been determined not to be in need of international protection, and affirms the need for the return of persons to be undertaken in a safe and humane manner and with full respect for their human rights and dignity, irrespective of the status of the persons concerned; 

26. **Notes** the increasing number of displaced in and from Iraq and the impact of those flows of persons on the social and economic situation of countries in the region, expresses its appreciation for the convening of an international conference in April 2007 at Geneva in order to sensitize the international community to the deteriorating plight of those persons inside Iraq and outside its borders, and calls upon the international community to act in a targeted and coordinated manner to provide protection and increased assistance to the persons displaced to enable the countries in the region to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner, other United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations;
27. **Urges** all States and relevant non-governmental and other organizations, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner, in a spirit of international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to cooperate and to mobilize resources with a view to enhancing the capacity of and reducing the heavy burden borne by host countries, in particular those that have received large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, and calls upon the Office to continue to play its catalytic role in mobilizing assistance from the international community to address the root causes as well as the economic, environmental and social impact of large-scale refugee populations in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition;

28. **Calls upon** the Office of the High Commissioner to further explore ways and means to broaden its donor base, so as to achieve greater burden-sharing by reinforcing cooperation with governmental donors, non-governmental donors and the private sector;

29. **Recognizes** that adequate and timely resources are essential for the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to fulfil the mandate conferred upon it through its statute and by subsequent General Assembly resolutions on refugees and other persons of concern, recalls its resolutions 58/153 of 22 December 2003, 58/270 of 23 December 2003, 59/170 of 20 December 2004, 60/129 of 16 December 2005 and 61/137 of 19 December 2006 concerning, inter alia, the implementation of paragraph 20 of the statute of the Office, and urges Governments and other donors to respond promptly to annual and supplementary appeals issued by the Office for requirements under its programmes;

30. **Requests** the High Commissioner to report on his activities to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session.

**Strengthening UNHCR**

**Oral report of UNHCR.** In response to General Assembly resolution 58/153 [YUN 2003, p. 1226] on strengthening UNHCR capacity to carry out its mandate, a UNHCR representative on 25 July provided an oral report to the Economic and Social Council [E/2007/SR.43]. Concerning the coordination aspects of its work, the representative said that the Office continued to support the reform of the UN humanitarian system to improve global response capacity. In the framework of the “Delivering as One” initiative [YUN 2006, p. 1060], UNHCR could act more efficiently on four levels by: linking programmes aimed at the return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs to other development initiatives; assisting Governments in establishing systems of asylum for refugees; facilitating the integration of long-term refugee populations; and making available to refugees national social services and health care, including antiretroviral treatments, where the host country agreed to it.

The High Commissioner continued to pursue the inter-agency approach, which was most effective in sudden emergencies or when the division of tasks among organizations was not clear. However, with regard to the reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, due to the lack of continuity between the assistance and development phases, not all of the needs of returnees were met. The High Commissioner intended to reinforce UNHCR’s strategic planning capacity, appeal to key actors in development and gain new partnerships to support and advance the durable return of refugees and displaced persons, as well as their reintegration.

UNHCR continued to collaborate with a number of international organizations including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as NGOs, particularly local NGOs, without which the capacity of UNHCR to assist displaced persons would be severely hampered. Other operational partners included the Danish and Norwegian Councils for Refugees, CARE International, Oxfam and the International Rescue Committee. As a result of such collaboration, in 2006, UNHCR allocated 20 per cent of its resources for activities related to partnership agreements with NGOs. The representative also noted that UNHCR would be unable to fulfil its mission without the cooperation of Governments, which ensured that humanitarian personnel had access to populations in need.

On 27 July, the Economic and Social Council took note of the UNHCR oral report (decision 2007/270).

**Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance**

In 2007 [A/63/12], UNHCR continued to participate in the initiatives to reform the UN system and improve the global humanitarian response capacity, particularly in the area of inter-agency cooperation. UNHCR, through IASC, helped to develop policy and guidance on the humanitarian reform process, which included the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Humanitarian Coordinator System and the “cluster approach”—a humanitarian coordination structure aimed at enhancing the predictability and accountability of humanitarian response. Other inter-agency efforts addressed mine action, housing and property restitution, information management, environmental issues and education. UNHCR was also committed to the Global Humanitarian Platform, which brought together the three families of the humanitarian community—NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations—in order to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian response by strengthening partnerships at the global and field level based on the five principles of partnership: equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. During the year, UNHCR intensified its cooperation with the United...
Nations Development Group (UNDG) on a number of policy and operational issues, particularly in relation to the “Delivering as One” initiative [YUN 2006, p. 1060], which included UNHCR participation in the UN country teams in five of the eight pilot countries: Albania, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. UN agencies, together with the Governments concerned, also agreed to establish a common programme, operational plan, budgetary framework and a country-based funding mechanism to cover financial gaps.

As bilateral cooperation with a large number of agencies remained a key feature of implementation of the UNHCR mandate, the Office continued to work closely with WFP in more than 30 field operations on food assistance, joint assessments and surveys, as well as on special nutrition projects and joint appeals. Other UN system entities that UNHCR collaborated with included the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Habitat, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN Volunteers and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. UNHCR also maintained relations with other organizations, such as the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Parliamentary Union, various EU institutions and different regional organizations. UNHCR continued to establish partnerships and relations with NGOs. During the year, one fifth of the UNHCR budget was channeled through NGOs, which made up the largest group of the Office’s partners. UNHCR had signed agreements with 629 international and 467 national NGOs to implement projects in different sectors. In addition, the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges (see p. 1243) was attended by several national NGOs working with migrants.

Evaluation activities

In a July report [A/AC.96/1043], UNHCR described the activities of its Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), which was established in September 2006 [YUN 2006, p. 1390] and fully staffed from May 2007. PDES work focused on five principal themes: IDPs and humanitarian action; reintegration and peacebuilding; refugee protection and international migration; protection of refugees and other persons of concern; and strengthening UNHCR policy development and evaluation functions. The Service published papers and reports, organized workshops and provided analyses and independent evaluations on matters pertaining to those themes, including a paper on the UNHCR role in support of an inter-agency response to the protection of IDPs; the conduct of real-time evaluations (RTES) focusing on operations for IDPs involving the cluster approach; and analyses of humanitarian issues, such as integrated UN missions, remote management and cross-border operations. PDES also published an independent study on the UNHCR response to the South-East Asia tsunami emergency [YUN 2004, p. 952] and undertook an RTES on the UNHCR response to the Lebanon crisis [YUN 2006, p. 574]. On reintegration and peacebuilding, PDES assisted the Peacebuilding, Livelihoods and Partnership Section in organizing a workshop on the role of UNHCR in post-conflict situations, which would result in a paper on UNHCR’s policy framework and implementation strategy for supporting the return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs. The Service would test and refine the policy by evaluating UNHCR reintegration programmes. At the same time it would undertake a review of the role of UNHCR in protection and the rule of law in post-conflict and transitional situations. PDES acted as the UNHCR focal point for structures and processes relating to international migration, such as the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the biennial high-level meeting between UNHCR and IOM. It also prepared two papers, one on the role of UNHCR in refugee protection and international migration and the other on forced migration and development. In other activities, PDES commissioned an independent evaluation of the UNHCR role in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in situations of forced displacement; undertook a study on UNHCR’s role in protracted refugee situations; assisted the Division of International Protection Services in finalizing a UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas; led an initiative to examine the UNHCR role in relation to victims of natural disasters and environmental displacement; and supported the work of the UNHCR Field Reference Group on Protection Policies, scheduled to hold its first plenary meeting in September, and of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges, to be held in December (see p. 1243).

Steps were also taken to strengthen the UNHCR policy development and evaluation function, including through the provision of on-the-job and external evaluation training for PDES staff; a review and revision of UNHCR evaluation policy, procedures and webpage; establishment of a Headquarters Policy Development Network; expansion of the PDES internship and research associate programme; and regular consultations with the Audit Service, the Inspector General’s Office and the Organizational Development and Management Service. PDES represented UNHCR in the UN Evaluations Group and other evaluation networks, and interacted regularly with evaluation mechanisms.
and policy units within and outside the UN system. Meanwhile, the series “New Issues in Refugees Research” continued to provide an outlet for research on refugee, humanitarian and migration issues undertaken by UNHCR staff, interns, consultants and associates.

Inspections

During 2007 [A/63/12], the UNHCR Inspector General’s Office (OIOS) carried out 14 inspections covering 18 countries and operations, resulting in some 261 recommendations to address: the review and updating of operational strategies; the issue of under-estimation of and under-investment in operational partnerships; the need for a more systematized approach to sexual and gender-based violence; the improvement of gender balance in staffing; and the need to improve living and working conditions for staff in the deep field. With regard to investigations, there were 118 cases of alleged misconduct by staff, which was a 19 per cent increase compared to 2006. Priority was given to investigate cases of misconduct that directly affected beneficiaries (38 per cent), particularly in relation to resettlement, refugee status determination and material assistance. Sixteen per cent of the cases related to harassment and abuse of power. Another development in 2007 was the doubling of complaints (compared to 2006) from UNHCR staff, refugees and asylum-seekers, pertaining to staff issues and access to protection, assistance and security functions. More effective measures were needed to enable field offices to address those grievances. In that connection, OIOS would give special attention to the matter in its 2008 inspections. A report [A/AC.96/1042] on activities undertaken by IGO since August 2006 was transmitted to the UNHCR Executive Committee in July.

Ad hoc inquiries. IGO continued its oversight function of ad hoc inquiries, which were conducted when an attack on UNHCR staff, operations or premises caused fatalities, serious injuries or large-scale damage involving financial or material losses to the Office. During 2007, one ad hoc inquiry was carried out from 6 to 15 December related to the relationship between the UNHCR Operation in Chad and the NGO Arche de Zoé, registered in Chad as “Children’s Rescue”, due to the fact that the NGO was allegedly responsible for the attempted abduction of 103 children from Chad and the Sudan. IGO also ordered an inquiry into the 11 December bombing of UN offices in Algiers, in which 17 people were killed, 40 were injured and UN agencies including UNHCR suffered serious damage to premises and property. The findings of the ad hoc inquiries were contained in confidential reports submitted to the High Commissioner, who would then assign concerned managers with follow-up.

OIOS activities. The audit service of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which provided the internal audit function for UNHCR, conducted 20 audits in 2007. In July, OIOS submitted to the UNHCR Executive Committee a report [A/AC.96/1041] on its internal audit of UNHCR for the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007, which focused on high-risk areas such as working with implementing partners, performance measurements, the internal control environment, procurement and asset management, and information and communication technology. OIOS issued 25 audit reports during the period, including 225 recommendations to improve internal controls, accountability mechanisms and organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Enlargement of Executive Committee


GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 18 December [meeting 76], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/62/431], adopted resolution 62/123 without vote [agenda item 42].

Enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly, Taking note of Economic and Social Council decision 2007/254 of 26 July 2007 concerning the enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,

Taking note also of the requests regarding the enlargement of the Executive Committee contained in the letter dated 29 November 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Benin to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the letter dated 8 January 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the letter dated 28 June 2007 from the Permanent Representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the note verbale dated 10 May 2007 from the Permanent Mission of Montenegro to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,

1. Decides to increase the number of members of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Na-
tions High Commissioner for Refugees from seventy-two to seventy-six States;

2. Requests the Economic and Social Council to elect the additional members at its resumed organizational session for 2008.

Financial and administrative questions

The UNHCR initial annual programme budget target for 2007 was set at $1,032.9 million by the Executive Committee in 2006 [YUN 2006, p. 139]. Income for 2007 totalled some $1,459.9 million, comprising $1,031.4 million in voluntary contributions, transfers and miscellaneous income (including currency exchange gains) towards the annual programme budget and $374.7 million towards supplementary programmes, $16.8 million for the Junior Professional Officer (jpo) programme and $37 million from the regular UN budget. Expenditures totalled $1,342 million, of which Africa accounted for $556 million; the Middle East and North Africa $174.1 million; Asia and the Pacific $187.5 million; Europe $107.8 million; and the Americas $39.2 million.

In an October decision [A/62/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee approved the revised annual programme budget for 2007, amounting to $1,057.9 million, including the UN regular budget contribution of $34.4 million and a $25 million increase for new or additional mandate-related activities from $50 to $75 million, which, with the provisions for jpos of $10 million and $289.3 million for supplementary programmes, brought total requirements in 2007 to $1,357.2 million.

In accordance with a 2005 Committee decision to move to a biennial programme/budget cycle [YUN 2005, p. 130], UNHCR established its first biennial budget with the September submission of a biennial programme budget for 2008-2009 [A/AC.96/1040], which covered a two-year period, yet was structured in a format similar to the 2007 budget document so as to present consolidated budgetary requirements in a streamlined manner, with an increased emphasis on trends. The Committee approved $2,204.9 million for the 2008-2009 biennial programme budget, comprising annual programme budgets of $919.1 million for 2008 and $953.5 million for 2009, including the UN regular budget contribution; an operational reserve of $92 million in 2008 and $95.3 million in 2009, or 10 per cent of programme activities; and $75 million in 2008 and $50 million in 2009 for new or additional mandate-related activities. Those provisions, together with $10 million for jpos in both 2008 and 2009, brought total requirements for 2008 to $1,096.1 million and for 2009 to $1,108.8 million. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, within the total appropriations, to effect adjustments in regional and global programmes and headquarters budgets, and to create supplementary programmes and issue special appeals when new emergency needs could not be met from the operational reserve. The Committee called on UNHCR to keep its administrative expenditure under review to reduce it as a proportion of total expenditure.

Accounts (2006)

The audited financial statements of voluntary funds administered by UNHCR for the year ending 31 December 2006 [A/62/5/Add.5] showed total expenditures of $1,104.3 million and total available funds of $1,299.3 million, with a reserve balance of $195.2 million.

The UN Board of Auditors found that UNHCR had reduced its administrative costs to avoid a shortfall of resources; expenditures fell by 3 per cent from 2005 to 2006, while resources increased by 4 per cent; UNHCR recorded an excess of income over expenditure of $47 million in 2006; and reserves at the end of the year totalled $195 million, which was the largest year-end amount recorded in the previous five years. It also found that UNHCR’s financial position had improved, mainly due to a combination of cost-control measures and foreign exchange gains, and that its sustainability depended on the ability of UNHCR to build on those short-term remedies. UNHCR continued to be exposed to considerable currency fluctuation risk, despite recording a foreign exchange gain of $23.7 million, and needed to develop foreign-exchange risk management strategies, tools for cash forecasting and a more integrated treasury management system. The installation of such a system was scheduled for completion in December 2007. The Board also expressed concern that UNHCR had not kept an accurate list of bank accounts closed during 2006, and in respect of 403 bank accounts, three year-end reconciliations had not been performed, two were inadequately supported, and another two contained unexplained entries. Of the $315.3 million disbursed to implementing partners in 2006, as at June 2007, UNHCR had received justifications of subproject monitoring reports covering $296.1 million, or 93.9 per cent of those disbursements, and audit certificates had been received for 3 per cent of the $276.3 million in 2006 implementing partner expenditures. Unliquidated obligations totalled $84.1 million at the end of 2006, of which $2.9 million was not adequately supported. The Board noted that the 2006 migration to a new asset management system had highlighted deficiencies in the legacy asset-tracking system, such as wrong data entries, inflated values due to entries in local currencies instead of United States dollars, errors in the depreciation rate applied by the database and duplication of the disposal of the same assets in different locations. The Board further noted that the procedure for the recruitment of the Deputy High Commissioner and Assistant High Commis-
sioner was not established in writing, which created a risk that future recruitments might not comply with competitive staff selection. It also expressed concern about the personnel situation of the Emergency and Security Service, which was characterized by low staff retention and high staff vacancies; the lack of emergency stockpiles; non-compliance with minimum operating security standards at 36 per cent of duty stations; unreliable statistics of the refugee population in Uganda; and a potential conflict of interest in one country office involving the employment of staff members’ spouses. The Board of Auditors made recommendations to improve financial management and reporting and programme management. It observed that of the 64 recommendations made in its 2005 report [YUN 2006, p. 1392], UNHCR had implemented five, while 57 were under implementation and two had yet to be implemented.

UNHCR, in a September report [A/AC.96/1039/Add.1], described measures taken or proposed in response to the Board’s recommendations.

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), in September [A/62/355], expressed concern about the recurrent problem of the gap between requirements and funds available to UNHCR and stressed that it was important for UNHCR to ensure predictability, flexibility and early funding, particularly in the context of the newly instituted biennial budget cycle. With the exception of 2003, expenditures had exceeded income in the years from 2000 to 2005. The Committee observed that although UNHCR reduced its 2006 budget estimate and took measures to reduce administrative costs, the other main reason for the improvement of UNHCR’s financial position was an exchange gain of $23.7 million compared to a loss of $36 million the previous year. It also noted that from 2005 to 2006 voluntary contributions decreased by nearly $24 million, which was a source of vulnerability for the Office, and urged UNHCR to increase its efforts to raise voluntary contributions. As the annual cost of staff in between assignments increased from $5.2 million in 2005 to $7.8 million in 2006, the Committee concurred with the Board of Auditors’ recommendation for UNHCR to implement a strict policy on the issue, with a view to providing every staff member with a full-time assignment in order to limit the cost for the organization. The Committee also recommended that UNHCR address issues such as non-compliance with minimum operating security standards and minimum operating residential security standards, as well as ethical standards, particularly the gap in conflict-of-interest policies.

The Executive Committee, in an October decision [A/62/12/Add.1], requested that it be regularly informed on measures taken to address the recommendations made by the Board of Auditors and ACABQ.

Management and administrative change

In 2007, UNHCR remained engaged in its in-depth process of structural and management change, which was launched in 2006 [YUN 2006, p. 1392] with the aim of reducing administrative costs, enhancing organizational responsiveness to the needs of its beneficiaries by channelling more of its resources into operations, and locating staff and services where they were most effective. The process involved reviewing and realigning structures and processes, as well as workforce and implementing arrangements, to maximize overall performance. Steps were also taken to streamline UNHCR’s Headquarters structure. Following a feasibility study and an internal and external review process, UNHCR in June outposted to a Global Service Centre in Budapest, Hungary, a number of its administrative and support functions: the Personnel Administration and Payroll Section, the Postings Unit of the Recruitment and Postings Section, the Finance Section and most units of the Supply Management Service. As at 1 May, some 140 staff were employed at the Global Service Centre, including 92 local staff. Following the initial investment to establish the new administrative centre, accrued savings from the move was estimated at $10 million per year. Along with the outposting, UNHCR was strengthening its Supply Management Service in Budapest, as well as in the global supply platforms in Beijing, Dubai and Pretoria. The Office also committed itself to a process of decentralization and regionalization, moving support functions and delegating increased authority to the field. A framework approved in June set out models for regional structures to be used flexibly in response to conditions on the ground and identified groups of countries to be serviced by those structures by 2010. The aims of regionalization were to bring decision-making and support as close as possible to the point of delivery.

In addition to structural change, UNHCR continued to streamline and simplify its processes. A revised framework for resource allocation and management was introduced in July, which allowed UNHCR to channel more of its resources to the field. In 2007, spending on operations was 20 per cent higher compared to 2006, with the same amount spent in dollar terms on staff costs. A new budget internal control framework ensured the implementation of effective budgetary controls, while applying the new resource allocation framework. The Management Systems Renewal Project would support procedural changes introduced by the new frameworks, which were expected to yield additional workforce economies over time. In other developments, the results-based management software Focus was being rolled out globally, which would further streamline planning, managing and reporting while enhancing the organization’s overall accountability. The results of the first annual Global Staff Sur-
vey, conducted in 2006 [ibid., p. 1393], were shared with staff in 2007 and prompted the High Commissioner to call for better internal communication, more transparency in senior management and improvements in the appointments, promotion and posting systems.

Standing Committee

The UNHCR Standing Committee held three meetings in 2007 (6-8 March [A/AC.96/1037]; 25-27 June [A/AC.96/1045]; and 19-20 September [A/AC.96/1047]). It considered issues relating to UNHCR programme budgets and funding; international protection; regional activities and global programmes; programme/protection policy; coordination; management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources; and governance.

In October [A/62/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee noted that during informal consultations in 2007 to investigate options for extending the input from NGOs which were UNHCR implementing or operational partners, there was no agreement by member States on options to extend the participation of NGOs in the work of the Committee. It therefore decided to pursue consideration of further options for extended NGO participation through annual informal consultations for the next two years, with a view to deciding on the question by its 2009 session. The Executive Committee also approved applications by Governments to participate as observers in Standing Committee meetings and a list of intergovernmental and international organizations to be invited to participate as observers; and requested the Standing Committee to report on its work in 2008.

Staff safety

At the June meeting of the Standing Committee [A/AC.96/1045], the Director of the UNHCR Division of Operational Services presented an update on staff safety and security issues [EC/58/SC/CRP.13], which described efforts to implement the recommendations of the UNHCR Security Policy and Policy Implementation Review, as well as new initiatives in support of the security of beneficiaries and other security-related activities. He outlined key challenges and examples of follow-up action. Delegates expressed support for UNHCR efforts to increase safety and security, and requested further information on: discussions between UNHCR and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) on security assets in crisis situations; steps taken to balance staff safety with the need to meet operational requirements; implications of remote management, particularly for local staff; security of beneficiaries; and security measures which UNHCR extended to partners. In his response, the Director stated that the main difficulties with security management were related to the availability of financial resources. In that connection, he welcomed indications that certain countries were ready to consider a centralized funding mechanism. However, he added that the Office’s dilemma lay in trying to cover its own needs while also having to contribute financially to the constantly increasing requirements of UNDSS system-wide activities. A joint review of security mechanisms in the field by WFP and UNHCR, which drew attention to challenges experienced during the Lebanese situation in 2006 and was well-received by all agencies concerned, prompted UNDSS and the Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN) to seek more innovative ways of ensuring access and delivery of protection and assistance in certain contexts. The Chief of the Field Safety Section provided an update on efforts to assist partners in carrying out their work, which included a decision by IASMN, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and UNDSS to make security training available, provide briefings and share information uniformly with NGOs.

Refugee protection and assistance

Protection issues

In his annual report covering 2007 [A/63/12], the High Commissioner described challenges facing States and UNHCR in protecting and assisting persons of concern, such as volatile or deteriorating security conditions; ongoing military operations; political turmoil; worsening economic, humanitarian or human rights situations; global rise in food prices; violations of the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibited any form of forcible removal; the large number of mixed migration flows; asylum refusals at sea; brutality against women and girls, including a high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence; and renewed conflict or violence and fighting, which restricted humanitarian access to camps and IDPs. In addition to issues impacting States’ efforts to manage migration, such as identifying persons in need of protection within mixed migratory movements, the causes of displacement (extreme deprivation, environmental degradation and climate change, conflict and persecution), which were becoming increasingly complex, were of particular concern to UNHCR. In order to facilitate open and non-directive discussions between the Office, States and other stakeholders and to encourage further engagement in the challenges faced by UNHCR and its partners, the High Commissioner convened the first of a planned series of annual events on protection issues. The first Dialogue on Protection Challenges
(Geneva, 11 December) addressed some of the problems of assuring protection for people caught up in mixed migration movements, which had been growing in scale and complexity in recent years. Some 300 participants, including representatives of 180 States, intergovernmental organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and experts in refugee and migration issues discussed dilemmas, gaps and the way forward. Delegates recognized that there were protection gaps in mixed movements, particularly with regard to migrants deemed “irregular” by the authorities and who fell outside the established protection framework, yet needed assistance or other kinds of protection. Participants called for rights-based approaches to address such gaps and place human rights and the dignity of all migrants to the fore.

The meeting of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue, scheduled for December 2008, would focus on protecting and finding solutions for refugees in protracted situations. On emergency preparedness and response, UNHCR strengthened its capacity to respond to emergencies affecting up to 500,000 people. In that regard, the Office’s Central Emergency Stockpile was made ready to respond to such emergencies and all stockpile targets were met, with the exception of lightweight tents. A report on measures undertaken by UNHCR to increase its capacity to respond to emergencies was issued in August [EC/58/SC/CRP.22]. UNHCR continued to introduce and support programmes aimed at mitigating the environmental impact of displaced populations in ecologically fragile areas and promoting adaptable solutions for such populations in resource-scarce locations. Formal and non-formal environmental education and awareness projects were included in many UNHCR programmes.

In October [A/62/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee requested UNHCR to hold informal consultations on the nature and value of Executive Committee conclusions on international protection, in order to establish the parameters and timeline of a review or evaluation on the use of such conclusions, as well as to continue consultations on how themes for conclusions were identified and the process of preparing, drafting and finalizing conclusions, with a view to recommending improvements by its fifty-ninth (2008) session.

In June [A/AC.96/1038], the High Commissioner described developments with regard to refugee movements up to May 2007 and outlined protection measures taken within the framework of the Agenda for Protection [YUN 2002, p. 1205], including strengthening implementation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477]; protecting refugees within broader migration movements; sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably and building capacities to receive and protect refugees; addressing security-related concerns more effectively; redoubling the search for durable solutions; and meeting the protection needs of refugee women and children. The note also provided an update on UNHCR efforts to address statelessness and on protection activities for IDPs, including in the context of the cluster approach [YUN 2006, p. 1394]. The High Commissioner concluded that while progress had been made in implementing the Agenda for Protection, UNHCR’s increasing involvement with IDPs raised challenges for the organization, the international community and States. He observed that collaborative initiatives with States and partners, as well as increased financial and political investment by the international community would help to achieve a more coherent and predictable humanitarian response to situations of forced displacement.

In June [A/AC.96/1045], the Director of the International Protection Services presented a document on the protection of older persons and persons with disabilities [EC/58/SC/CRP.14], which examined the challenges those groups faced in accessing protection and assistance in displacement situations. He highlighted the need for an inclusive and empowering approach in protection and programme design, together with a change in the way in which those who provided protection and assistance perceived older persons and persons with disabilities.

In October [A/62/12/Add.1], the UNHCR Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on children at risk, which provided guidelines for States, UNHCR and other agencies and partners to strengthen the protection of children at risk.

**International instruments**

In 2007, the number of parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477] remained at 144, and the number of States parties to one or both instruments remained at 147. The number of States parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [YUN 1954, p. 416] remained at 62. With the accession of Brazil, the number of States parties to the 1961 Convention on Reduction of Statelessness [YUN 1961, p. 533] increased to 34.

**Assistance measures**

The global population of concern to UNHCR dropped to 31.7 million in 2007 from 32.9 million in 2006. However, for the second consecutive year, the number of refugees increased to almost 11.4 million, as did the number of conflict-induced IDPs protected or assisted by UNHCR, which rose from 12.8 million in 2006 to 13.7 million in 2007. Some 2.4 million people were displaced inside Iraq, while fighting in Somalia,
Refugees and displaced persons

particularly in Mogadishu, brought the estimated IDP population to 1 million, and 350,000 people were displaced internally in Kenya owing to intercommunal violence following contentious elections in December. By year’s end, the number of people forcibly displaced within or outside their country had increased. Countries particularly affected by large population movements included the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the DRC, Iraq, Kenya, Somalia and the Sudan (Darfur). The number of stateless persons fell from 5.8 million in 2006 to 3 million in 2007, while the number of asylum-seekers increased to 740,000 from 738,000 the previous year.

Situations of concern included the conditions in Iraq, which were not conducive to organizing returns, and the plight of 2.4 million people displaced inside the country, as well as the plight of the estimated 1.5 to 2 million Iraqi refugees living in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, comprising the largest urban refugee situations UNHCR had ever addressed; humanitarian crises in Africa, which were exacerbated by renewed conflict and insecurity in Chad, the DRC, Somalia and Darfur and resulted in further displacement; renewed fighting in eastern DRC that resulted in heightened risk and extreme brutality, particularly against thousands of women and girls; the worsening security environment in Afghanistan that created difficult conditions for returnees and restricted humanitarian assistance; violations in Morocco of the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibited any form of forcible removal; the deportation in several countries of asylum-seekers and refugees as irregular migrants; the situation of asylum-seekers at sea; and the global rise in food prices and its impact on refugees and IDPs who depended on humanitarian assistance. In a number of Asian countries, UNHCR found it increasingly difficult to exercise its mandate with regard to large mixed migration flows across the region, as Governments focused on security concerns related to migration.

During the year, an estimated 2.8 million refugees and IDPs returned voluntarily to their places of origin, most of them with UNHCR assistance. Some 730,640 refugees returned home, mainly to Afghanistan (373,856), Burundi (39,817), the DRC (59,835), Iraq (45,420), Liberia (44,359) and the Sudan (130,693), while an estimated 2.1 million IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR returned to their places of origin, including to the DRC (1 million), Iraq (36,000), Lebanon (130,000), Nepal (50,000), Sri Lanka (158,600), the Sudan (84,834) and Uganda (579,000). Major repatriation operations were also concluded in Angola and Liberia, with 12,000 and 44,000 returnees respectively. For the first time in 20 years, UNHCR resettlement submissions, which increased to 99,000 in 2007, exceeded the 70,000 places made available by States, while the number of departures also rose to some 50,000, raising concern that there were significantly more people in need of resettlement than there were places available. The largest resettlement activities took place from Asia. Some 30,000 Myanmar refugees living in Thailand and some 10,000 living in Malaysia were referred for resettlement in other countries. In Africa, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania began the naturalization of a group of 172,000 Burundian refugees, and progress was made with several African Governments on local integration opportunities for refugees who were unlikely to return to their countries of origin.

Refugees and the environment

During the year, UNHCR continued to implement its environmental policy based on the four principles outlined in the 2005 revision [YUN 2005, p. 1310] of its Environmental Guidelines: prevention, integrated approach, cost-effectiveness and local participation, which was in line with the Office's broader objective to defend the institution of asylum as widespread damage to the environment or depletion of natural resources could be a source of conflict and affect States' willingness to provide asylum. UNHCR worked with host Governments, UN agencies, NGOs and communities to improve the areas surrounding refugee, returnee and IDP camps and settlements by preventing or limiting environmental damage. The Office supported projects to bolster environmental protection, including those related to awareness-raising and environmental education; development and implementation of environmental action plans; energy conservation; reforestation and rehabilitation; and sustainable agricultural practices. In collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Programme of Education for Emergencies and Reconstruction, UNHCR reformed its environmental education and awareness activities using generic materials for different audiences and settings, and disseminated it in Chad, Kenya and Rwanda. Other initiatives included the introduction of solar cookers and energy-efficient stoves in Bangladesh, Chad and Nepal to reduce the threat of attacks against women while collecting firewood and give them more time to work on income generation activities; the establishment of community woodlots, forests and agro-forestry farms in Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda to improve the livelihoods of both refugees and host communities; the review of 30 country operation plans for 2008 to ensure that they reflected environmental concerns; the organization of three national capacity-building workshops to train 170 UNHCR staff and partners to use sound environmental practices to manage camps and plan for camp closures; and support of an effort to plant and care for more than 10 million trees in areas of human displacement. Climate change and measures to adapt to it were also included in the UNHCR environmental agenda.
Refugees and HIV/AIDS

During 2007, in line with its HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan [YUN 2005, p. 1310], UNHCR continued to combat HIV/AIDS among refugees and other persons of concern and ensure that the basic rights of those affected by HIV/AIDS were respected. Within the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) division of labour, UNHCR played a more prominent role in the response to HIV on behalf of refugees and conflict-related IDPs, which included developing stronger HIV prevention programmes for populations at risk among its persons of concern, such as injecting drug users, substance users, and sex workers and their clients. UNHCR campaigned for the inclusion of refugees and IDPs in national HIV plans and policies. Refugees in countries in Southern Africa, West Africa and Asia, some for the first time, had the same access as local populations to antiretroviral treatments, and globally, 80 per cent of refugees had such access. The Office developed new materials on HIV prevention, stigma and discrimination in Arabic for use in the Middle East and North Africa. More than 88 per cent of UNHCR refugee operations had access to culturally and linguistically appropriate information, education and communications material. Progress was made in the prevention of HIV transmission after rape through the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis to rape victims, while services to prevent mother-to-child transmission were offered to 63 per cent of refugees, with 45 per cent of them receiving counselling from UNHCR partners.

In June [A/AC.96/1045], the Standing Committee considered reports on the Office’s HIV/AIDS programmes for refugees and IDPs [EC/58/SC/CRP.16] and on health, nutrition and HIV/AIDS [EC/58/SC/CRP.15], which presented the strategies of the newly created Public Health and HIV Section. In other activities, UNHCR published a “Policy for Antiretroviral (ARV) Medication for Refugees”, the “Clinical Guidelines on Antiretroviral Therapy Management for Displaced Populations”, a joint UNHCR/UNAIDS policy brief on HIV and its 2006 report on the Office’s HIV and AIDS policies and programmes. Based on inter-agency assessment missions conducted in Côte d’Ivoire, the DRC and Nepal, and on HIV and IDP missions in the Americas and Eastern Europe, UNHCR convened the First Global Consultation on HIV and IDPs (Geneva, 24-25 April), which brought together some 45 experts from Governments, UN agencies, NGOs and the academic world to identify gaps, plan joint programmes and improve services for IDPs. After two years of planning, the World Bank-funded “Great Lakes Initiative against AIDS” became fully operational and programme activities started in six countries of the region. UNHCR and other stakeholders also worked together in the re-established Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force for HIV in Emergencies, which would update and disseminate the “HIV Interventions in Emergency Settings” guidelines.

Refugee women

In 2007, UNHCR continued to implement its pilot project on age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM), launched in 2004 [YUN 2004, p. 1205]; incorporated the key principles of Security Council resolution 1325(2000) [YUN 2000, p. 1113] on women, peace and security into its activities; and undertook initiatives to finalize the internal review of its Gender Equality Policy, which updated the Office’s 2002 Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines for their Protection and followed the two-pronged approach of gender mainstreaming — through the AGDM strategy and targeted actions for women. The policy emphasized areas such as the importance of women’s social and political participation; economic and livelihood strategies; identification of women and girls at risk; the fight against sexual and gender-based violence; and engagement with boys and men to promote gender equality. By year’s end, UNHCR had incorporated AGDM considerations into all country programmes, bringing the number of country operations completing the AGDM roll-out to 100 and the number of country operations trained in participatory assessment methods to 109; the AGDM strategy had been incorporated in a number of UNHCR’s key operational guidelines and instructions; and the AGDM Accountability Framework had been launched globally. To promote implementation of the conclusion on women and girls at risk adopted by the Executive Committee in 2006 [YUN 2006, p. 1385], the Office developed the Heightened Risk Identification Tool, which improved the identification of refugees at risk by linking individual and community-based participatory assessment methods. Training modules on women’s leadership were distributed to staff to support UNHCR’s commitment to have 50 per cent of all refugee committees made up of women. Progress was made in addressing the lack of sanitary supplies for women and girls, which had serious implications for women’s dignity, security, health and access to education. Data from 43 camps in 2006 and 77 camps in 2007 showed an increase in the number of camps that reached the target of providing sanitary materials to all who needed it, from 33 per cent in 2006 to 50 per cent in 2007. As inadequate assistance standards had compromised the protection of women and girls, reducing livelihood and education opportunities and increasing their exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, additional funds were allocated in 2007 to respond to that violence and to improve health and nutrition.

Refugee children

In 2007, UNHCR continued to emphasize education, nutrition and protection from violence in addressing the needs of refugee children. As a critical gap had occurred in some protracted refugee situations due to lack
of funds, an additional $15.3 million was allocated to improve health, nutrition and the response to sexual and gender-based violence, enabling a number of special projects to be introduced in 19 countries, including the provision of supplementary food and micronutrients; improvements in antenatal and obstetric care delivery; the provision of malaria medicines and long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito bed nets; the rehabilitation of infrastructure and equipment; medical and legal assistance to rape survivors; Best Interest Determination procedures for children; and the establishment of safe houses. Although there was improvement in acute malnutrition in some operations, the international standard of 5 per cent overall acute malnutrition for stable situations was not achieved. Micronutrient deficiencies, particularly anaemia, posed a serious health problem in many operations, with an average prevalence of 80 per cent. The UNHCR Education Strategy for 2007-2009 and the Guidelines on Safe Schools and Learning Environments were disseminated to address the main challenges with access to education, and special gender interventions were established to improve the low enrolment and retention rate of girls. Post-primary education, which was identified as one of the major gaps in education, was promoted to address the high number of out-of-school youth and included efforts to ensure that vocational training and non-formal education opportunities were available. UNHCR participatory assessments highlighted the problems of exploitation and abuse in the school environment, which affected the enrolment of girls and their transition to the secondary level. Consequently, UNHCR worked with UN agencies and NGOs to launch a safe learning environment initiative. UNHCR also supported projects that focused on the specific needs of refugee children and adolescents, including the implementation of a community-based rehabilitation project for Afghan refugee and host-community children with disabilities, the funding of the documentary film A Sporting Chance on the difficulties faced by teenage Somali girls living as refugees in Kenya when they decide to take part in sports, and the publication of a report on refugee and returnee children's perceptions and experience of violence in Southern Africa. UNHCR also collaborated on the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review on priorities for children affected by armed conflict (see p. 789).

In October [A/62/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee adopted a conclusion on children at heightened risk (see p. 1235).

**Regional activities**

**Africa**

In 2007, the total population of concern to UNHCR in Africa, excluding North Africa, totalled 10.5 million, a slight decrease from the 11 million recorded in 2006 [YUN 2006, p. 1397]. The total comprised some 2.3 million refugees, 5.9 million IDPs, 252,300 asylum-seekers and 2 million returned refugees and IDPs and others of concern.

**Report of Secretary-General.** In response to General Assembly resolution 61/139 [ibid., p. 1400], the Secretary-General in August submitted a report [A/62/316] on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, covering 2006 and the first half of 2007. He stated that successful peace processes had paved the way for the return of an estimated 2.1 million displaced persons. On the other hand, despite a slight decline in the estimated number of displaced persons in Africa in 2006, a number of new, renewed or intensified crises produced tens of thousands of IDPs and refugees, particularly in the Central African Republic, Chad, the DRC, Somalia and the Sudan (Darfur). Africa, which hosted a quarter of the global refugee population (2.4 million), and half of the world’s 24.5 million IDPs, remained the continent most affected by conflict-related internal displacement. As most of the IDPs and refugees in Africa were caught in protracted situations and dependent on limited assistance, the Secretary-General called for further measures and support to ensure that returnees could re-establish themselves in their home communities through reintegration, livelihood and development activities in countries emerging from conflict. The report also described specific areas of inter-agency cooperation, such as the cluster approach, promotion of international protection principles, durable solutions, delivery of assistance and special needs, cooperation with regional organizations, and coordination of resources.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, the humanitarian situation was of increasing concern as a combination of man-made and natural disasters affected the subregion, forcing people to flee their homes in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The situation in the Sudan remained complex with Southern Sudan struggling to rebuild itself after two decades of conflict. Since the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement [YUN 2005, p. 301], nearly 157,000 refugees had returned to Southern Sudan and an estimated 1.4 million IDPs had returned to their places of origin. However, conflict that was not resolved by the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement [YUN 2006, p. 274], and ongoing violence in the Darfur region of the Sudan, including attacks on villages and IDP camps, resulted in 2.1 million IDPs in Darfur, some 235,000 refugees in eastern Chad and the influx of another 2,600 people into the north-eastern Central African Republic. In Somalia, the conflict between the Transitional Federal Government and the Union of Islamic Courts worsened and renewed fighting, especially in Mogadishu, resulted in the displacement of some 390,000 people and the arrival of several thousands of refugees in east-
ern Ethiopia. Kenya, which hosted 185,000 Somali refugees, decided to close the border with Somalia on security grounds. In Uganda, improved security, access to land and freedom of movement encouraged some 300,000 IDPs to move out of the camps, while some 1.2 million IDPs remained in overcrowded camps with limited access to basic services.

In West Africa, efforts to consolidate peace processes continued and major parts of the region remained relatively stable. However, political and social turbulence in Guinea, clashes at the border between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, and the volatile situation in Côte d’Ivoire forced UN humanitarian agencies and partners to strengthen emergency preparedness and update contingency plans. While the March signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement (see p. 174) to resolve the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire raised hopes for the voluntary return of an estimated 709,000 IDPs and 26,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, prospects for sustainable return and reintegration of displaced persons remained uncertain due to constraints such as the lack of security, the occupation of land and the use of property by rival communities. In Liberia, efforts focused on assisting returnees to reintegrate following the June completion of the repatriation of refugees from neighbouring countries, which included the return home of 600,000 refugees and IDPs. In June, the Government of Mauritania announced that Mauritanian refugees could return home, most having been in exile for nearly 20 years, and asked UNHCR to be part of the return and reintegration process.

Central Africa and the Great Lakes region continued to be characterized by a high degree of unpredictability and remained host to the largest refugee population on the continent with some 1.2 million refugees. In Burundi, even though UNHCR took a proactive stance on voluntary returns, the level of assisted returns was lower than expected, owing to the persistence of political uncertainty, slow implementation of the ceasefire provisions, food insecurity and lack of access to land, basic services and reintegration opportunities. The worsening security environment in the border regions of Chad, the Central African Republic and Darfur led to massive displacements, particularly in Chad. Fighting between Government forces and the Chadian armed opposition, as well as inter-ethnic conflicts, forced humanitarian staff to relocate temporarily and put emergency procedures in place to assist 221,000 refugees, and subsequently caused the internal displacement of an additional 170,000 people. As rebel groups from the Sudan had been recruiting refugees, including children, in and around some camps, UNHCR continued efforts to maintain the humanitarian and civilian character of the camps. In the Central African Republic, the deterioration in security, human rights and socioeconomic conditions in the north triggered new refugee arrivals in southern Chad and Cameroon. At the same time, the number of IDPs in the country increased from 150,000 to over 212,000 people. In the DRC, more than 600,000 IDPs and 42,000 refugees returned home between July 2006 and July 2007; however, gaps in the reintegration support provided to returnees were hampering returns. Moreover, the crisis in North Kivu prompted the displacement of more than 150,000 people in North Kivu, accounting for 60 per cent of the 1.1 million IDPs in the country.

In Southern Africa, the number of refugees and others of concern to UNHCR continued to decline. The organized repatriation of Angolan refugees, through which some 450,000 refugees had returned home since 2002, was completed in March. Economic and social problems, however, remained a major challenge in the country. The voluntary repatriation operation from Zambia, which hosted 61,000 refugees from the DRC, began in May. A positive development was the increasing willingness of Governments in the region to discuss options for the local integration of long-term refugee populations, such as the refugees from the DRC in Angola and the Angolans in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia. Challenges in the subregion included increasing mixed flows of refugees and economic migrants, who were putting a strain on the asylum regime and led to tighter border controls in some countries, and the situation in Zimbabwe, where the economic structure was deteriorating and there was a political impasse.

The Secretary-General concluded that notwithstanding some positive developments in Southern Africa and West Africa, the situation in the rest of Africa, notably in Somalia and in the Sudan-Chad-Central African Republic region, remained a concern. Political instability and deteriorating security resulted in further displacement, posed major problems in some parts of Africa, limited humanitarian access and hampered the provision of assistance and protection. In addition, the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps had not always been preserved and forced recruitment had not been prevented. The Operational Guidelines on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum were being disseminated to further promote these principles. He said that partnership for the international community and concerned Governments was crucial in protecting displaced persons and that without recovery and development-oriented programmes, as well as resolute political efforts and financial support, voluntary repatriation could not be effective. He encouraged host countries to enable refugees to increase their self-reliance by providing them with access to land or other livelihood sources. He observed that durable solutions were well-defined for refugees, yet not for IDPs. With regard to policy initiatives that could significantly reinforce the protection of IDPs, such as the draft au
convention on IDPs, he emphasized the importance of well-crafted policies ensuring that IDP protection standards were adequately covered.

Subregional developments

**UNHCR report.** According to the UNHCR Global Report 2007, UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance to more than 200,000 refugees living in camps or local settlements in Central Africa and the Great Lakes subregion and facilitated the return of refugees from several States in the area, including Angola (6,000), Burundi (39,800), the DRC (59,200), Rwanda (7,000) and the Sudan (5,200). UNHCR facilitated the return of some 84,000 IDPs to their communities of origin in the DRC. In the Central African Republic (CAR) and the DRC, the Office worked within the cluster approach to improve the safety and security of IDPs. On local integration developments, the United Republic of Tanzania agreed to naturalize a large group of Burundian refugees who had been living in the country since 1972 and Cameroon was prepared to integrate the remaining Nigerian refugees in the country. UNHCR referred some 7,600 refugees for resettlement to third countries. In the DRC, renewed fighting in the North Kivu province and the northern part of South Kivu displaced more than 500,000 people, and although some 1 million IDPs returned to their villages in other areas, 1.3 million remained displaced at year’s end. The security situation in northern parts of the CAR deteriorated and the number of IDPs reached 197,000, while renewed clashes between rebel groups and the national army caused more than 50,000 refugees to flee to Cameroon. Access to refugees and IDPs in the DRC and the CAR remained difficult due to the presence of armed factions, and logistics were a challenge as most operations were in remote areas with poor transport routes. The Office continued to work closely with the AU and other regional institutions on issues concerning refugees and IDPs in Africa.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, ongoing conflict and natural disasters affected the region throughout the year, particularly in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Fighting continued in south and central Somalia and, due to security constraints, UNHCR and its humanitarian partners could not reach most of the IDPs and others in need of protection and assistance, especially in Mogadishu. UN peacekeepers withdrew from Eritrea following disagreements over the Government’s restrictions on the supply of food and fuel to them. UNHCR implemented special projects to prevent and treat malnutrition and malaria and improve health services in the subregion, which led to the reduction of acute malnutrition among the camp-based Somali refugees in Kenya from 22 to 12 per cent and among Sudanese refugees from 16 to 9 per cent. A tripartite repatriation agreement between the Government of Djibouti, the Somaliland authorities and UNHCR paved the way for the voluntary return of some 1,800 refugees to Somaliland. In central Somalia, UNHCR established an international presence in Galkacyo, the provincial capital of the Mudug region, Puntland, to monitor protection and provide assistance to some 100,000 IDPs. However, the deteriorating political and security situation hampered humanitarian operations in south and central Somalia and armed conflicts made it difficult to monitor protection and assistance to IDPs in most parts of the country. Funding constraints for programmes for protracted refugee situations affected the provision of assistance, and self-reliance and livelihood support programmes were significantly reduced. Although more than 131,000 refugees returned to Southern Sudan, including some 55,000 with UNHCR assistance, ongoing armed conflict resulted in refugee flight from the Darfur region into Chad throughout the year. All nine neighbouring countries continued to host Sudanese refugees. UNHCR strengthened protection and camp management coordination in West Darfur. In July, the Security Council adopted resolution 1769(2007) (see p. 251), which established a joint United Nations–African Union peacekeeping operation to protect and assist the population affected by the crisis.

In West Africa, the overall environment remained stable and enabled UNHCR to pursue durable solutions for refugees through voluntary repatriation and local integration. However, third-country resettlement remained a more limited option. The Office reinforced local integration programmes for some 40,000 Liberian and 13,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, mainly in the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone), as well as in Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria. In collaboration with Governments and other stakeholders, UNHCR intervened in the areas of rule of law, health, sanitation, education, and infrastructure development to pave the way for the reintegration of returnees. In Côte d’Ivoire, prospects for stability improved with the March signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, which created an enabling environment for the return of Ivorian refugees and some 700,000 people displaced within the country. On local integration, UNHCR worked with other UN agencies, Government counterparts, NGOs and regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to advance the process. UNHCR, ECOWAS and the Governments of Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone signed an agreement to ease refugees’ transition to secure-residence status. The Office assisted the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees, which was completed in July, as well as smaller movements of Togolese in Benin and Ghana, Senegalese in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and Li-
berians throughout the subregion. UNHCR collaborated with WFP to assist refugees and others through food distributions, supplementary feeding, school-feeding programmes, self-reliance activities and other projects related to food security. The Office also expanded its HIV/AIDS programmes in West Africa, focusing on integration programmes for IDPs in Côte d’Ivoire and returnees in Liberia.

In Southern Africa, with the conclusion of the repatriation of Angolans and the start of the repatriation of DRC refugees from Zambia, the number of refugees and others of concern in the region declined. Consequently, UNHCR and Governments in the region also focused on the challenge of providing protection to those of concern arriving in mixed flows. During the year, the Office assisted nearly 18,500 refugees from Angola and the DRC to return home, mainly from Zambia and the DRC, and used resettlement as a protection tool, referring 1,545 refugees to third countries. UNHCR continued to implement the registration software, proGres; undertook large-scale registration and documentation projects in both camp and urban settings; and strengthened the protection capacities of Governments in Southern Africa, particularly to manage registration and refugee status determination systems. Malawi and Mozambique improved their capacity to process asylum claims, while the quality and comprehensiveness of registration rose in all countries.

As HIV/AIDS remained a priority, UNHCR trained refugee religious leaders on HIV and AIDS prevention and control in Botswana and South Africa and integrated HIV- and AIDS-related activities into voluntary repatriation programmes in the region. Although gains were achieved, various constraints affected UNHCR work in Southern Africa, such as the issue of rejected asylum-seekers, a challenge faced by all countries in the region; the strain on the institution of asylum owing to mixed migratory flows; and the high number of people claiming international protection, particularly in South Africa, which had the largest number of individual applications received by any country globally. Although the repatriation of Congolese refugees from Zambia to the DRC began, the operation was suspended for several months in mid-year following unrest in the main areas of return in the Katanga province. Due to logistical challenges, only 7,300 were repatriated compared to the planned 20,000.

By subregion, UNHCR assisted 3.9 million persons in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, which received $216.5 million in agency expenditures. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, $206.6 million was spent on 5.2 million persons of concern, while some $90 million was spent on programmes assisting 945,580 persons in need in West Africa. In Southern Africa, $42.9 million was spent on 380,490 persons of concern.

**Other developments.** The AU Executive Council, at its tenth (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25-26 January) and eleventh (Accra, Ghana, 28-29 June) ordinary sessions, adopted two decisions, EX.CL/Dec.319(X) and EX.CL/Dec.353(XI), on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. In decision EX.CL/Dec.319(X), the Council called on the international community to increase its assistance to victims of forced displacement in Africa and requested the AU Sub-Committee on Refugees and the Commission to work with AU partners in the preparations for the Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons scheduled to take place in 2008. In decision EX.CL/Dec.353(XI), the Council requested the Commission to continue efforts to reactivate the Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons and took note of the concept paper on the AU policy on access to post-primary education for victims of forced displacements.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION**

On 18 December [meeting 76], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/62/431], adopted resolution 62/125 without vote [agenda item 42].

**Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa**

The General Assembly,

Recalling 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,

Reraffirming that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, together with the 1967 Protocol thereto, as complemented by the Organization of African Unity Convention of 1969, remains the foundation of the international refugee protection regime in Africa,

Recognizing the particular vulnerability of women and children among refugees and other persons of concern, including exposure to discrimination and sexual and physical abuse,

Recognizing also that refugees, internally displaced persons and, in particular, women and children are at an increased risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases,

1. Takes note of the reports of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
2. Notes the need for African States to address resolutely root causes of all forms of forced displacement in Africa and to foster peace, stability and prosperity throughout the African continent so as to forestall refugee flows;
3. Notes with great concern that, despite all of the efforts made so far by the United Nations, the African Union and others, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa remains precarious, and calls upon States and other parties to armed conflict to observe scrupulously the let-
ter and spirit of international humanitarian law, bearing in
mind that armed conflict is one of the principal causes of
forced displacement in Africa;
4. Welcomes decision EX.CL/Dec.319(X) on the situ-
ation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa
adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union at
its tenth ordinary session, held in Addis Ababa on 25 and
26 January 2007;
5. Expresses its appreciation for the leadership shown
by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees, and commends the Office for its ongoing ef-
forts, with the support of the international community, to
assist African countries of asylum and to respond to the
protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and
displaced persons in Africa;
6. Notes the initiatives taken by the African Union and
the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights,
in particular the role of its Special Rapporteur on Refu-
gees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Internally Displaced
Persons in Africa;
7. Also notes that the conclusion on children at risk,
adopted by the Executive Committee of the Programme
of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at
its fifty-eighth session, held at Geneva from 1 to 5 Octo-
ber 2007, is aimed at enhancing the assistance and protec-
tion provided by the Office of the High Commissioner to
children, as defined under article 1 of the Convention on
the Rights of the Child, who are asylum-seekers, stateless,
refugees, internally displaced or returnees;
8. Encourages the African Commission on Human and
Peoples’ Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the
Rights and Welfare of the Child to incorporate in their work
the Executive Committee conclusion on children at risk;
9. Affirms that children, because of their age, social sta-
tus and physical and mental development, are often more
vulnerable than adults in situations of forced displacement,
recognizes that forced displacement, return to post-conflict
situations, integration in new societies, protracted situ-
ations of displacement and statelessness can increase the
vulnerability of children generally, takes into account the
particular vulnerability of refugee children to being forcibly
exposed to the risks of physical and psychological injury,
exploitation and death in connection with armed conflict,
and acknowledges that wider environmental factors and
individual risk factors, particularly when combined, can
put children in situations of heightened risk;
10. Recognizes that no solution to displacement can be
durable unless it is sustainable, and therefore encourages
the Office of the High Commissioner to support the sus-
tainability of return and reintegration;
11. Also recognizes the importance of early registra-
tion and effective registration systems and censuses as a
tool of protection and as a means to the quantification and
assessment of needs for the provision and distribution of
humanitarian assistance and to implement appropriate dur-
able solutions;
12. Recalls the conclusion on registration of refugees
and asylum-seekers adopted by the Executive Committee at
its fifty-second session, notes the many forms of harassment
faced by refugees and asylum-seekers who remain without
any form of documentation attesting to their status, recalls
the responsibility of States to register refugees on their ter-
ritories, and, as appropriate, the responsibility of the Of-
fice of the High Commissioner or mandated international
bodies to do so, reiterates in this context the central role
that early and effective registration and documentation can
play, guided by protection considerations, in enhancing
protection and supporting efforts to find durable solutions,
and calls upon the Office, as appropriate, to help States to
conduct this procedure should they be unable to register
refugees on their territory;
13. Calls upon the international community, including
States and the Office of the High Commissioner and other
relevant United Nations organizations, within their respec-
tive mandates, to take concrete action to meet the protection
and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced
persons and to contribute generously to projects and pro-
grames aimed at alleviating their plight and facilitating
durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons;
14. Reaffirms the importance of timely and adequate
assistance and protection for refugees, returnees and dis-
placed persons, also reaffirms that assistance and protec-
tion are mutually reinforcing and that inadequate material
assistance and food shortages undermine protection, notes
the importance of a rights- and community-based approach
in engaging constructively with individual refugees, return-
ees and displaced persons and their communities so as to
achieve fair and equitable access to food and other forms of
material assistance, and expresses concern in regard to situa-
tions in which minimum standards of assistance are not
met, including those in which adequate needs assessments
have yet to be undertaken;
15. Also reaffirms that respect by States for their protec-
tion responsibilities towards refugees is strengthened by in-
ternational solidarity involving all members of the interna-
tional community and that the refugee protection regime is
enhanced through committed international cooperation in
a spirit of solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing
among all States;
16. Further reaffirms that host States have the primary
responsibility to ensure the civilian and humanitarian
character of asylum, calls upon States, in cooperation with
international organizations, within their mandates, to take
all necessary measures to ensure respect for the principles
of refugee protection and, in particular, to ensure that the
civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps is not
compromised by the presence or the activities of armed ele-
ments or used for purposes that are incompatible with their
civilian character, and encourages the High Commissioner
to continue efforts, in consultation with States and other
relevant actors, to ensure the civilian and humanitarian
character of camps;
17. Condemns all acts that pose a threat to the personal
security and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers,
such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion and physical at-
tacks, calls upon States of refuge, in cooperation with inter-
national organizations, where appropriate, to take all neces-
sary measures to ensure respect for the principles of refugee
protection, including the humane treatment of asylum-
seekers, notes with interest that the High Commissioner
has continued to take steps to encourage the development
of measures to better ensure the civilian and humanitarian
character of asylum, and encourages the High Commissi-
oner to continue those efforts, in consultation with States
and other relevant actors;
18. **Deplores** the continuing violence and insecurity which constitute an ongoing threat to the safety and security of staff members of the Office of the High Commissioner and other humanitarian organizations and an obstacle to the effective fulfilment of the mandate of the Office and the ability of its implementing partners and other humanitarian personnel to discharge their respective humanitarian functions, urges States, parties to conflict and all other relevant actors to take all necessary measures to protect activities related to humanitarian assistance, prevent attacks on and kidnapping of national and international humanitarian workers and ensure the safety and security of the personnel and property of the Office and that of all humanitarian organizations discharging functions mandated by the Office, and calls upon States to investigate fully any crime committed against humanitarian personnel and bring to justice the persons responsible for such crimes;

19. **Calls upon** the Office of the High Commissioner, the African Union, subregional organizations and all African States, in conjunction with agencies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community, to strengthen and revitalize existing partnerships and forge new ones in support of the protection system for refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons;

20. **Calls upon** the Office of the High Commissioner, the international community and other concerned entities to intensify their support to African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities, including training of relevant officers, disseminating information about refugee instruments and principles, providing financial, technical and advisory services to accelerate the enactment or amendment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees, strengthening emergency response and enhancing capacities for the coordination of humanitarian activities, in particular those Governments that have received large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers;

21. **Reaffirms** the right of return and the principle of voluntary repatriation, appeals to countries of origin and countries of asylum to create conditions that are conducive to voluntary repatriation, and recognizes that, while voluntary repatriation remains the pre-eminent solution, local integration and third-country resettlement, where appropriate and feasible, are also viable options for dealing with the situation of African refugees who, owing to prevailing circumstances in their respective countries of origin, are unable to return home;

22. **Also reaffirms** that voluntary repatriation should not necessarily be conditioned on the accomplishment of political solutions in the country of origin in order not to impede the exercise of the refugees' right to return, recognizes that the voluntary repatriation and reintegration process is normally guided by the conditions in the country of origin, in particular that voluntary repatriation can be accomplished in conditions of safety and dignity, and urges the High Commissioner to promote sustainable return through the development of durable and lasting solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations;

23. **Calls upon** the international donor community to provide financial and material assistance that allows for the implementation of community-based development programmes that benefit both refugees and host communities, as appropriate, in agreement with host countries and consistent with humanitarian objectives;

24. **Appeals** to the international community to respond positively, in the spirit of solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to the third-country resettlement needs of African refugees, notes in this regard the importance of using resettlement strategically, as part of situation-specific comprehensive responses to refugee situations, and to this end encourages interested States, the Office of the High Commissioner and other relevant partners to make full use of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement, where appropriate;

25. **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 affected by refugees in countries of asylum;

26. **Urges** the international community, in the spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing, to continue to fund generously the refugee programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner and, taking into account the substantially increased needs of programmes in Africa, in particular, as a result of repatriation possibilities, to ensure that Africa receives a fair and equitable share of the resources designated for refugees;

27. **Encourages** the Office of the High Commissioner and interested States to identify protracted refugee situations which might lend themselves to resolution through the development of specific, multilateral, comprehensive and practical approaches to resolving such refugee situations, including improvement of international burden- and responsibility-sharing and realization of durable solutions, within a multilateral context;

28. **Expresses grave concern** about the plight of internally displaced persons in Africa, notes the efforts of African States in strengthening the regional mechanisms for protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, calls upon States to take concrete action to pre-empt internal displacement and to meet the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons, recalls in that regard the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, takes note of the current activities of the Office of the High Commissioner related to protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, including in the context of inter-agency arrangements in this field, emphasizes that such activities should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not undermine the refugee mandate of the Office and the institution of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his dialogue with States on the role of his Office in this regard;

29. **Invites** the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons to continue his ongoing dialogue with Member States and the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, in accordance with his mandate, and to include information thereon in his reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly;

30. **Requests** the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum, under the item entitled
Refugees and displaced persons

“The Americas

UNHCR activities in North America and the Caribbean focused on the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, resettlement and mobilization of support for refugees.

During the year, the United States accepted some 31,800 individuals for resettlement, which was more than half of the refugees resettled globally under UNHCR auspices, while 11,200 people were resettled in Canada. The United States was also the leading asylum destination, with 49,200 new claims. The Government continued to strengthen its refugee protection capacity, especially through its Asylum Division and the Refugee Corps, and Congress enacted legislation that expanded the Administration’s authority to exempt refugees and asylum-seekers from terrorism-related bans. However, the country’s focus on national security had an impact on its asylum policies and an anti-immigration sentiment continued to be pervasive among some segments of the media and the public. Asylum-seekers in the United States continued to be detained in penal facilities, affecting their ability to access the asylum system. At the end of the year, the Department of Homeland Security issued new guidelines on the parole of asylum-seekers from detention, which favoured the release of asylum-seekers who had established their identity and were not liable to flee or present a danger to the community.

Some 28,500 people sought asylum in Canada, where the acceptance rate rose from 23 to 42 per cent. More than 99 per cent of asylum-seekers who met the exceptions to the Safe Third Country Agreement were allowed entry into Canada and had access to refugee status determination (RSD) procedures. UNHCR made recommendations on management and operational issues, which led to better treatment and processing of asylum-seekers, and conditions of detention improved for those held on immigration charges, particularly in provincial jails. However, public confidence in the refugee system in Canada was lost due to perceived misuse by undeserving claimants. As the Immigration and Refugee Board was the only body that conducted RSD and there was no merit-based appeals mechanism, a new backlog of asylum claims was created, with some 37,500 asylum-seekers awaiting a decision, nearly double the total in mid-2006.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR improved the capacity of Government and civil society partners to identify asylum-seekers within migration movements to ensure that they had access to asylum procedures. The Office conducted RSD for more than 100 asylum-seekers and assessed options for durable solutions for more than 50 refugees. Caribbean States received asylum claims from nationals of 19 countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, and most of the asylum-seekers arrived individually within larger movements of mostly undocumented migrants. However, progress in the Caribbean was limited by the complexity of mixed migratory movements, the low political priority given to asylum issues, and constraints on UNHCR human and financial resources. Systematic interception, detention and return policies were widely implemented in the region, to the detriment of asylum-seekers and refugees, due to the lack of appropriate asylum safeguards. In the Dominican Republic, a micro-credit programme for Haitian refugees and asylum-seekers was expanded.

In Latin America, UNHCR advised Governments to ensure that national legislation complied with international standards, sought to ensure that asylum-seekers within mixed migratory flows had access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, promoted the adoption of refugee legislation, monitored legislative and policymaking processes, and provided legal advice to Governments. The number of asylum applications in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile increased significantly due to improved asylum procedures. Asylum-seekers and migrants from outside Latin America were found within mixed migratory flows in Central America, including thousands of unaccompanied children who were vulnerable to human rights violations and often victims of smugglers and traffickers. In Central America and Mexico, efforts to improve border security, guard against terrorism and counter human and drug trafficking led to stricter control of the movements of undocumented migrants. The use of interception, detention and deportation increased, and Mexico reinforced its military presence in border areas. Nonetheless, migration issues remained on the agenda through the Puebla Process, a regional forum on migration in which Mexico and Central American countries participated. Durable solutions were found for 124 refugees who were resettled in Argentina (36), Brazil (48) and Chile (40). The Brazilian Government approved the resettlement of the entire remaining population of some 109 Palestinian refugees in the Ruwaished camp at the border between Jordan and Iraq, which had not been allowed to enter Jordan from Iraq and had been confined to an enclosed camp for four years. Regional protection networks were expanded and consolidated, including two new cities in Argentina and Chile joining the network of Cities of Solidarity to support the reception and integration of resettled families. Progress was also achieved with regard to national refugee laws and decrees in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, where national refugee commissions were established to process asylum applications and find durable solutions. In Brazil, the Government ratified the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, enabling 200,000 children to acquire nationality,
and sanctioned a constitutional amendment to allow the registration of children born to Brazilian parents abroad. However, the poor socio-economic situation in many Latin American countries hampered the local integration of refugees. Even in Brazil, which had solid economic growth, the living conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers had not improved.

The humanitarian crisis in Colombia was the worst in the Western hemisphere, and at the same time the country was host to one of the largest IDP populations in the world, with more than 200,000 newly displaced people registered by the Government in 2007. The Government increased support for IDPs and passed a law proclaiming 2008 as the “Year of the Promotion of the Rights of Displaced People”. In other initiatives, more than 80,000 IDPs in Colombia received identity cards and over 2 million hectares of land from which IDPs had fled was kept safe for their eventual return, which benefited 71,000 families. Tensions rose between Colombia and its neighbours, Ecuador and Venezuela, over the aerial spraying of coca crops and the deterioration of security in border areas. Nearly 500,000 Colombians had fled to neighbouring countries, living in poor areas on the outskirts of cities and towns or in remote rural communities. Approximately 15,000 Colombians applied for asylum, while the majority remained unregistered. Ecuador launched a development and peace plan to address the humanitarian situation on its northern border, which would improve the asylum regime in the area and address the needs of Colombians in need of protection. UNHCR conducted surveys in Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela to estimate the number of unregistered Colombians in those countries, identify their protection needs, and design registration and documentation procedures for them.

In 2007, total UNHCR expenditure in the Americas and the Caribbean for the year was $39.2 million for a population of concern of 4.2 million.

**Asia and the Pacific and the Arab States**

In 2007, UNHCR spent $76.7 million on activities in Asia and the Pacific for a population of concern of 3.4 million. Expenditures for operations in Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East amounted to $285 million for a population of concern of 9.7 million.

**South Asia**

In 2007, UNHCR led the collective humanitarian response in Sri Lanka, where insecure conditions resulted in new displacement and affected the safety of humanitarian actors and the delivery of assistance. Increased military activity and tougher security measures, as well as the frequent closure of crossing points into areas of UNHCR operations, curfews and the presence of landmines, hampered the implementation of planned activities in the country. The number of IDPs peaked at 308,000 in the first half of the year. A permanent field presence helped to secure displacement sites and contributed to the safe return of some 158,600 people to their areas of origin. The Office’s field presence and protection work, including extensive monitoring and advocacy, helped to uphold the rights of IDPs and ensure the voluntary nature of returns, while legal assistance benefited more than 12,000 people. In India, UNHCR promoted new solutions for the long-staying Afghan refugee population, negotiating a combined approach of resettlement for ethnic Afghan refugees and local integration for Hindu and Sikh refugees from Afghanistan. Nearly half of the 8,000 Afghan refugees of Hindu and Sikh origin in the country expressed interest in naturalization. The Office explored new areas of collaboration with the Indian Government, which agreed to high-level bilateral consultations slated for 2008. In 2007, some 600 urban refugees, mainly from Afghanistan (230) and Myanmar (360), departed for resettlement from India, a threefold increase from the previous year. UNHCR was concerned about the protection of some 300 newly arrived Palestinian refugees, formerly resident in Iraq, and submitted some of their cases for resettlement. In Bangladesh, UNHCR cooperated with the interim Government, the UN country team and a steering group of engaged stakeholders to improve camp conditions for 27,500 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar’s northern Rakhine State. UNHCR’s new and expanded activities included the construction of 85 shelters, benefiting some 405 refugee families; the installation of solar-powered street lights; and the introduction of energy-efficient cooking stoves. In Nepal, UNHCR and the Government moved closer to finding solutions for more than 100,000 long-staying refugees. Other developments in the country included the completion of a census of the entire camp population, the distribution of identity cards to all refugees, improvements in camp security, and the Government’s agreement to permit the resettlement of those refugees who wished to accept offers from third countries. Despite Government support for resettlement, the growing hostility of groups of refugees opposed to resettlement delayed work on finding durable solutions.

**East Asia and the Pacific**

In 2007, UNHCR focused on the search for durable solutions, through resettlement, for refugees in Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. In Malaysia, the Office reached a landmark of 10,400 resettlement submissions in a year, with nearly 5,600 people departing.
for their new homes. Despite the absence of national refugee legislation and related mechanisms in the country, UNHCR performed core protection functions for more than 39,000 registered people of concern. In Thailand, of the 30,400 resettlement submissions received, 18,230 were accepted and 14,610 refugees departed. In Viet Nam, significant progress was made in the reduction and prevention of statelessness following the Government’s decision to naturalize some 9,000 Cambodian refugees. In Hong Kong, some 2,400 asylum-seekers were awaiting RSD, which was double the number from 2006. UNHCR reduced the backlog by revising its standard operating procedures and increasing the number of staff working on RSD and registration. UNHCR assisted the Government of Indonesia to prepare for the country’s accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention [YUN 1951, p. 859] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 769]. In addition, durable solutions through resettlement were found for 50 per cent of the long-staying people of concern in the country. In Cambodia, nearly 700 individuals were under UNHCR protection in 2007, including 631 Montagnards and 63 urban asylum-seekers. Australia’s resettlement programme provided durable solutions for some 6,000 UNHCR-referred refugees. In Japan, following extensive consultations supported by the UNHCR Resettlement Service, the Government established a study group on resettlement to determine the feasibility of Japan establishing a resettlement programme. The number of asylum-seekers in Japan rose to some 1,300 by year’s end. In July, the Office ended its involvement with the IDP operation in Timor-Leste due to a lack of resources and handed over its IDP protection and coordination role to the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste. In China, UNHCR assisted 61 refugees and their families, as well as a few asylum-seekers with specific needs. Although the Office and officials from China’s State Council and its Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Public Security and Civil Affairs participated in a July meeting in Beijing on national refugee legislation, the question of which government agency would be responsible for refugee issues was not resolved. In addition, long-awaited regulations to establish a national asylum system could not be finalized by year’s end. In other developments, UNHCR developed a 10-Point Plan and capacity-building strategy to assist South Pacific States to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees. There was also increasing interest in the links between climate change and forced displacement, given the vulnerability of some States in the Pacific to the effects of climate change.

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

In Central Asia, UNHCR focused on developing sustainable asylum regimes, finding durable solutions for refugees, reducing statelessness and improving emergency preparedness. The search for durable solutions for Afghan refugees advanced, with the resettlement of some 600 individuals, mainly from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and with UNHCR advocating for the local integration of long-staying refugees. A proposal to allow legal residence and local integration for some 1,000 long-staying Afghan refugees was submitted to the Government of Tajikistan. UNHCR stepped up activities to prevent and reduce statelessness in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The Turkmen Government began the country-wide registration of some 8,500 people in a statelessness-like situation, mainly holders of former Soviet Union passports. Meanwhile, a preliminary survey estimated that there were some 10,000 stateless people in the country. In November, UNHCR and the Government of Kazakhstan signed a cooperation agreement, and the first draft of a national asylum legislation was ready by the end of the year to be discussed by Parliament. The protection situation in Tajikistan improved, as all asylum-seekers were being registered, the validity of their documents was increased to 12 months, and no cases of refoulement were reported. In other activities, UNHCR and UNDP agreed to establish a UN stock of non-food items to respond to future natural and man-made disasters. Despite advances made during the year, fragile asylum systems and a deteriorating protection environment continued to be the main constraints for UNHCR activities in Central Asia, where access to asylum procedures depended in many cases on political considerations rather than the rule of law.

In South-West Asia, UNHCR continued to assist the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran, with some 374,000 returning home during the year. However, the number of registered Afghans who returned voluntarily in 2007 confirmed the declining trend in 2006 and signalled the end of mass voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, returnee reintegration needs were made an integral part of the National Development Strategy. Initiatives such as a return and reintegration cash grant of $100 per person allowed families to meet transport costs and cover their initial basic needs on return. The Government also announced a new work visa scheme for 200,000 Afghans, whereby registered males of working age would be entitled to apply for a work visa on return to Afghanistan with their family. In Pakistan, the registration of 2.1 million Afghans was completed in February, including the issuance of “proof of registration” cards, which granted them the right of residence through the end of 2009. In Iran, the re-registration of Afghans, which began in October and would be completed in 2008, provided an opportunity to receive work permits. The worsening security across the region, particularly in Afghanistan, was a major
constraint to UNHCR work. Insecurity was also cited as the reason for the closure of refugee villages in Pakistan and restrictions in Iran. Some 19 provinces in Iran were declared “off-limits” for foreigners and more than 124,000 registered Afghans were subsequently given the choice to repatriate, relocate or face deportation. In Pakistan, Katcha Garhi refugee village, host to over 64,000 registered Afghans, closed in August, while the closure of Jalozai refugee village was postponed until spring 2008. Half of the population of Katcha Garhi and a third of Jalozai refugee villages opted to repatriate with UNHCR assistance. Economic difficulties also reduced the sustainability of return and reintegration. Returnee monitoring and needs assessments in Afghanistan indicated a growing trend of displacement in the country among 2007 returnees. Many males, and sometimes whole families, returned to the former country of asylum as they were unable to sustain themselves in their homeland.

In 2007, the number of people involved in mixed migration movements to North Africa continued to increase, posing a challenge to UNHCR efforts to provide assistance as there were no national asylum structures or strategies for dealing with the complex phenomenon in the region. Approximately 100,000 people, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, were arriving in North Africa annually. A significant number were migrants in transit, trying to reach Western Europe in search of better economic opportunities. Consequently, UNHCR efforts focused on providing access to protection for asylum-seekers; assisting refugees; building the capacity of State institutions; and advocating for States to adopt refugee legislation and establish asylum procedures consistent with international standards. Major developments in North Africa included the adoption of national refugee legislation and the establishment of national asylum procedures in Mauritania, and plans for the voluntary repatriation of some 20,000 Mauritanian refugees from Senegal. UNHCR collaborated with governmental and NGO partners to ensure that the large number of urban refugees in the region, including the Sahrawi refugees in camps in Tindouf, Algeria, received international protection and assistance. The rise in extremist violence, which led Governments to concentrate on national security, often at the expense of refugee protection, was another constraint to UNHCR work. The terrorist bombing attack in December on the UN offices in Algiers, which claimed the lives of 17 UN staff and other personnel, nearly brought the Office’s operations to a halt. Despite the difficulties arising from the attack, UNHCR maintained the assistance programme in the Tindouf refugee camps. In other developments, the Office signed a country agreement with Morocco, as well as a tripartite agreement with the Vienna-based International Centre for Migration

Policy Development and the International Organization for Peace, Care and Relief, a Libyan NGO.

In the Middle East, UNHCR continued to deal with the complex displacement of millions of Iraqis, including 2.2 million people inside the country and up to 2 million refugees. The main countries of asylum, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, were hosts to large numbers of Iraqi refugees and long-staying Palestinian refugee populations. In order to address the deteriorating situation, the High Commissioner for Refugees convened the “International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Displaced Persons Inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries” (Geneva, 17-18 April), which was attended by more than 200 delegations from over 100 States, UN system entities, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and some 60 NGOs. The Conference agreed on the need to find solutions for the particularly vulnerable, including some 15,000 Palestinian refugees who were under attack from sectarian groups, and galvanized international support for refugee-hosting countries. UNHCR programmes for displaced Iraqis, therefore, focused on providing protection and assistance to refugees, as well as support to the Governments and communities hosting them, including assistance in areas such as education, health, food, shelter, community services and counselling. UNHCR provided more than 70,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan and 150,000 in Syria with food and non-food assistance, while more than 160,000 Iraqi IDPs received non-food items. Following a slight decrease in hostilities in Iraq, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Government, assisted those refugees who wished to return home. The Office urged the Government to develop a national return policy to prepare the ground for safe and dignified large-scale returns and offered to conduct return assessment missions in the areas of return. Mixed migration movements continued to dominate the UNHCR operation in Yemen, with thousands of people arriving at its shores, fleeing violence in their countries or seeking better economic opportunities. The Office assisted those of concern who suffered human rights abuses during the voyage across the Gulf of Aden, as well as IDPs uprooted by sectarian conflict in the northern part of Yemen. In Egypt, the protection environment for Sudanese refugees improved and UNHCR shifted its focus to promoting self-reliance, providing community-based assistance and searching for durable solutions. In Israel, as the growing numbers of Sudanese, Eritreans and others arriving in the country were straining the capacity of UNHCR, the Office strengthened its presence to support the Government in registration and RSD procedures. UNHCR signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Saudi Red Crescent Society, which laid the foundation for the establishment of partnerships with civil society in Saudi Arabia.
Europe

In 2007, UNHCR expenditure for activities in Europe totalled $107.8 million, for a population of concern of 4 million. More than one third of the amount ($41.6 million) was for 508,590 persons of concern in South-Eastern Europe, while $30.5 million was for 1.3 million persons of concern in Eastern Europe.

Western, Central and Eastern Europe

Although Europe, in general, remained free of refugee camps, a widespread and diverse number of refugees, IDPs, stateless people and others of concern in long-term situations of displacement required attention. The number of asylum applications in Western European countries declined in 2007, except for Greece. However, there were more applications from Iraqis than in previous years. Malta had the highest number of applications in the region, followed by France, Greece and Sweden. In Greece, which received some 25,100 applications for international protection, UNHCR worked with the authorities to address the increased number of asylum-seekers (more than 20,000) arriving in the country, and, with EU support, the Office strengthened monitoring and counselling on four Aegean islands receiving steady migratory flows. UNHCR added more resettlement countries to its list as France and Portugal became resettlement countries during the year, with annual quotas of 30 and 100 cases, respectively. The Office resettled 12 refugees from Malta to Portugal and referred another 261 to the United States. Nordic countries, particularly Norway, continued to provide resettlement as a protection solution, including emergency resettlement, while the United Kingdom met its target to resettle more than 500 refugees and the Government agreed to consider resettlement of some 550 refugees from the Middle East, including some 350 who were facing risks of persecution as a result of their affiliation to operations in Iraq. UNHCR participated in the process of developing national asylum laws in a number of countries, including Denmark, Finland, Greece, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, ensuring that criteria for EU asylum-related directives were met. The process led to a new immigration law in Germany that raised the possibility of local integration for people without firm legal status. UNHCR expanded its operational partnerships with national authorities, undertaking monitoring missions at entry points in Italy, Greece, Malta and Spain to witness the first instance of asylum claims. In Italy and Spain, the Office built relationships with the authorities and NGOs to better identify people of concern within mixed groups of migrants. In Belgium, a new asylum procedure was instituted in June, which allowed UNHCR to visit the detention centre for people arriving at air and sea ports. In other developments, Norway passed one of the most progressive asylum laws in Europe that would come into effect in January 2010: it introduced a single status for Convention refugees and included reference to the 1951 Refugee Convention, thereby formalizing cooperation with UNHCR.

In Central Europe and the Baltic States, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in January, and the expansion of the Schengen zone to the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in December were important milestones towards the creation of a common European asylum system. Throughout the Baltic States the number of people in need of international protection continued to decrease and the number of asylum-seekers remained small, with 83 at year’s end. Only 2,800 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, while the issue of stateless people in the region required continued attention. In contrast, in Central Europe, the total number of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia increased from 11,200 in January to more than 15,400 at the end of the year, which could be attributable to the expansion of the EU and Schengen zone. UNHCR continued to move gradually away from material and legal assistance and towards advocacy in its efforts to strengthen asylum systems. As the challenges of mixed migration became greater with the abolition of restrictions on movement within the EU, the Office increased its capacity to monitor EU borders and ensure that people with protection needs could access the territory. UNHCR’s protection-sensitive migration and border policies, including the framework set out in the 10-Point Plan, were recognized in a new tripartite agreement on border monitoring signed by Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In addition, cooperation between UNHCR and the EU External Border Agency, Frontex, was enhanced. Nonetheless, UNHCR faced some challenges in the region, such as a trend towards xenophobia and a more restrictive interpretation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In addition, one of the most serious constraints to the Office’s activities in Central Europe was the general confusion between asylum-seekers and economic migrants, which gave rise to increasingly negative attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers and made it difficult to find durable solutions for refugees in Europe.

In Eastern Europe, most countries recorded strong economic growth, which provided more resources to address the specific protection needs of asylum-seekers and refugees, yet also drew more economic migrants. In response, Governments were more aggressively preventing undocumented workers from taking up jobs, which also affected refugees, asylum-seekers and people with temporary protection status who were trying to meet their basic needs while in exile. One of the
most pressing challenges in Europe pertained to the rights of asylum-seekers potentially being jeopardized in mixed migratory movements. Of the nine States that entered the Schengen zone in December, five bordered Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. While many people in transit were economic migrants, some were in need of international protection. The economic growth in Eastern Europe was often accompanied by inflation and unfavourable exchange rates, which also affected the Office’s ability to provide assistance. Despite the constraints, UNHCR addressed the winter needs of refugees and IDP families in Armenia and Georgia. In Armenia, more than 500 Iraqi refugee families received food, winter clothing, medication and heating, while more than 4,900 refugees and naturalized former refugees living in communal centres received material and social assistance. In Azerbaijan, the Office provided basic monthly assistance to nearly 3,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and other people of concern. An age, gender and diversity exercise was undertaken among the IDP settlements in rural and urban areas in the country, which highlighted that early marriages were a significant protection concern. Progress was also made in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, safe houses and hotlines were established, and UNHCR cooperated with the national authorities to distribute information booklets in local languages. However, security concerns remained in and around Georgia, Chechnya and North Ossetia-Alania. No progress was made in resolving the conflicts in the subregion, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia. In Ingushetia, Russian Federation, security incidents in March led to the closure of UN offices. As the Russian Government did not approve UNHCR’s plan for a presence in Grozny, Chechnya, the Office had to rely increasingly on its implementing partners. Xenophobic trends in some Eastern European countries, particularly in Ukraine, were also a concern as the Office received reports of racially motivated incidents, beatings, murders and other displays of xenophobia. On the positive side, the number of racially motivated attacks in the Russian Federation fell for the second consecutive year to only three reported cases. The Russian Federation strengthened its asylum regime by allowing unfettered access to national asylum procedures and providing immediate documentation to every asylum applicant, which law officials recognized as legitimate proof of residence and as work permits. In June, UNHCR adopted a 10-Point Plan of Action for refugee protection and mixed migration for countries along the eastern and southeastern borders of EU Member States, which was a platform for dialogue between UNHCR and the Governments of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. At the request of those Governments, UNHCR conducted a study on local integration of refugees, with a view to prioritizing the study’s recommendations and raising funds for their implementation.

South-Eastern Europe

In 2007, South-Eastern Europe was host to some 494,000 persons of concern, of whom 117,000 were refugees and 377,000 were IDPs. In view of the decrease from 504,000 in 2006 and the small scale of repatriation, UNHCR reoriented its efforts towards other durable solutions, such as local integration and the naturalization of refugees unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin. For refugees, local integration remained the preferred durable solution, while resettlement to third countries was a solution for a small number of refugees. UNHCR increased its resettlement efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where some 120 people, many of them Roma, departed for resettlement in 2007. The Office assisted over 1,000 people to return to Croatia under the Regional Refugee Return in Western Balkans project, which supported returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. By the end of the year, more than 130,500 Croatian Serb minority returnees were registered in Croatia, and, with a partner, UNHCR assisted 13,000 returnees to regain their citizenship and social rights. Repatriation activities continued in Serbia. Some 190 refugees were helped to return to Croatia, while 70 Roma IDPs were assisted to return voluntarily to their new homes in Roma Mahala, Kosovo. In addition, refugees from Croatia (11,000) and IDPs from Kosovo (4,800) obtained free legal assistance, information and counselling on return-related activities. In Montenegro, progress was made in developing the legal framework, as implementation of the country’s asylum law began in January and its asylum adjudication bodies came into existence during the year. Internal political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, including parliamentary elections and the formation of new parliaments and Governments, slowed down the adoption of laws that would have a direct impact on durable solutions for refugees, IDPs and asylum-seekers. It also delayed progress in returns to the region within the framework of the Sarajevo Declaration [YUN 2005, p. 1320]. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office focused on protection, legal assistance and social outreach, both before and after refugees returned. Some 1,500 people benefited from sustainable-return grants. Negotiations on the legal status of Kosovo continued, yet uncertainty about its final outcome prevented some 245,000 Kosovar IDPs from making decisions on return. In January, UNHCR and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government authorities in Kosovo signed an agreement to build the capacity of municipal authorities to address return and reintegration issues. Joint teams in all 30 municipalities conducted protection and assistance assessments of
spontaneous voluntary returnees. UNHCR also submitted a regional proposal to address the problem of documentation for Roma, which would be implemented in 2008. Age, gender and diversity assessments were undertaken to identify the needs of women, children, the elderly and residents of collective centres, which were accommodating refugees with specific needs. Despite improvements in Kosovo and in some areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, security remained an obstacle for return. Slow economic growth, high unemployment rates and limited livelihood opportunities hampered integration and reintegration and reduced the sustainability of returns. Moreover, some ethnic groups, such as the Roma, were prevented from exercising their social and economic rights.

Communication. On 2 August [A/61/1017], Turkey transmitted to the Secretary-General the “Istanbul Commitments”, which was the outcome document of the Seventh European Regional Conference of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Istanbul, 20-24 May), and outlined the commitments made by those organizations to take action in the areas of health and social care, migration and strengthening capacities and cooperation.