

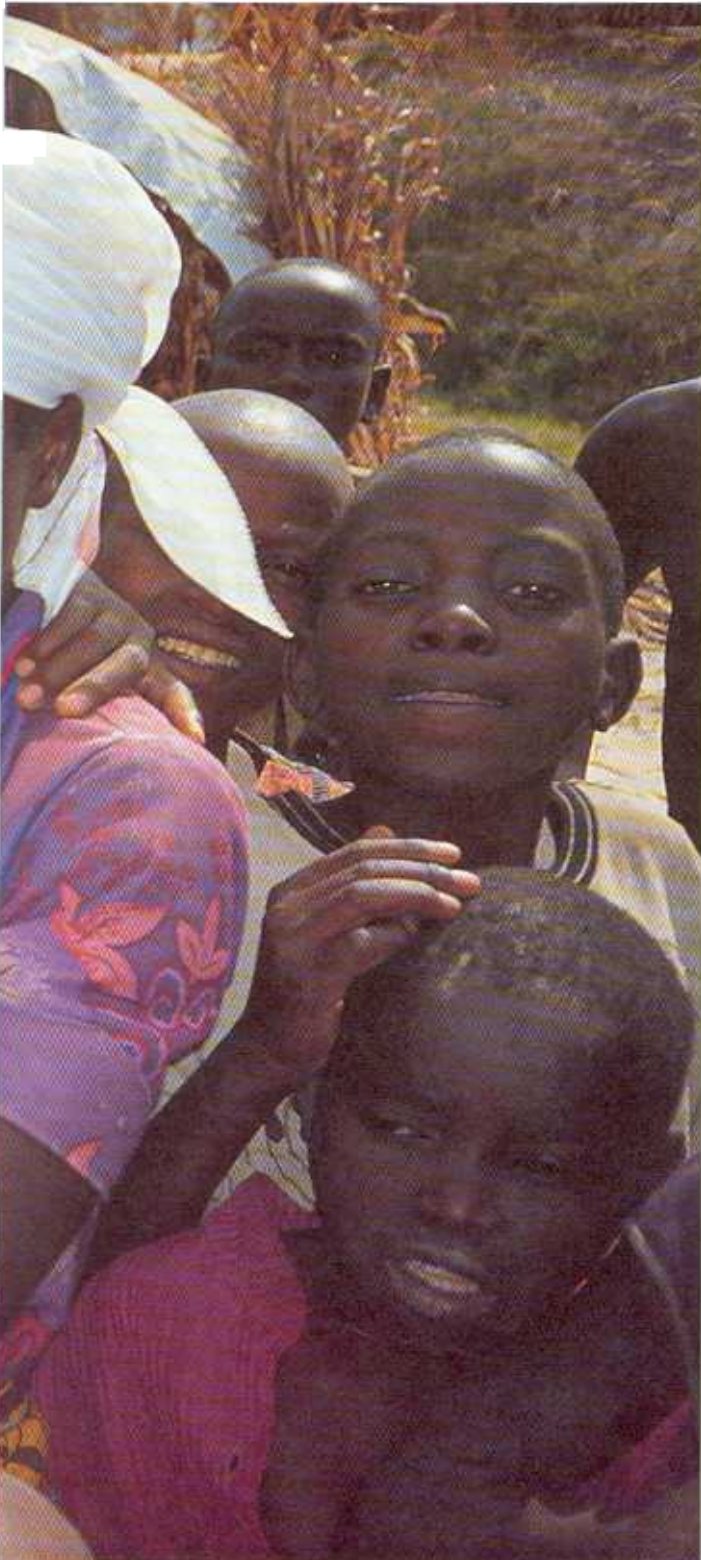
The Humanitarians



Millions of people fled the genocide in Rwanda, including one million who crossed into Zaire in one 48-hour period. Food aid is handed out to displaced Rwandans inside the country.

~ a framework for preventive action

- *A network of compassion*
- *Protecting refugees*
- *Disaster relief*
- *Contemporary challenges*



Many millions of refugees, displaced people and famine victims throughout the world rely on the United Nations to survive. Indeed, during the past 50 years, the UN's humanitarian agencies have intervened sporadically to save the lives of victims of war and starvation and its efforts have had a discernible effect on the conscience of most governments. Still, the institutional structure, the level of coordination and the effectiveness of UN humanitarian operations fall far short of how many people would like to see the UN perform in humanitarian emergencies.

If anyone needs two terrifying examples to illustrate the inadequacy of the current approach to dealing with the world's humanitarian crises, they can be found in Bosnia and Rwanda. In the former, UN attempts to protect 'safe areas' call into question the very definition of 'safe'. And in the latter, the numbers alone tell the story: hundreds of thousands of civilians butchered in genocide and millions of people displaced, including some one million who crossed into Zaire in one 48-hour period.

But while these two examples are the ones attracting the most attention today, they are far from the only ones. In recent years, the international community has been confronted with one humanitarian crisis after another, in rapid, sometimes overlapping, succession. Crises in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans and the former Soviet republics have strained the capacities of the UN almost to breaking point. Never in its history has the demand on the UN to intervene in humanitarian and refugee emergencies been higher.

History and evolution of the UN response

Organized international concern for people displaced by war and famine dates back to the aftermath of the First World War, when governments were confronted with massive numbers of stateless people devastated by the war and the break-up of multi-ethnic empires, mainly in Europe and the Middle East. In response, Western governments established the post of High Commissioner for Refugees and named Fridtjof Nansen, who proved to be a highly innovative and successful advocate for refugees. Again, after the Second World War, when millions of displaced people wandered throughout Europe and Asia, the scope of assistance operations reached a large scale, principally through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO).

The Cold War era

The contemporary UN approach to refugee problems emerged fully with the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951. Initially, UNHCR experienced difficulty defining an independent role and implementing its goals. For most of the 1950s, the refugee problem assumed an almost exclusively East-West dimension. The UN created two new agencies: the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the UN Korean Reconstruction Agency, exclusively to handle the humanitarian emergencies and massive refugee populations located in strategic conflict areas in the Middle East and Korea. It was not until the 1956 Hungarian Revolution that UNHCR was given the opportunity to demonstrate that it was the only UN agency capable of coordinating both international refugee relief and the collection of funds for emergency material assistance.

Decolonization and newly independent states

By the late 1950s, the UN faced further political problems arising not only from the Cold War and the

East-West nature of refugee flows but also from anti-colonial insurgency and post-independence civil strife and warfare in Africa and Asia. In Africa, there were at least two distinct categories of humanitarian disasters and displacements: refugees from territories under French and Portuguese colonial administration (and later from Rhodesia and South Africa) and refugees produced by internal strife, political instability, ethnic conflict and repression in several countries that had already gained independence, such as Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria and Sudan. By the end of the decade, there were over one million refugees in Africa.

*‘East-West
refugee
flows’*

African governments mounted impressive efforts on behalf of refugees from neighbouring countries, but these governments often lacked the infrastructure, resources or technical ability to deal with the emergencies they faced. Consequently, the patterns of international assistance changed radically from

the mid-1960s onwards. In every year from 1967 to 1973, post-colonial African countries received more than 50 per cent of all UN refugee aid. Until 1971, UNHCR assistance in Africa was primarily targeted towards the development of rural resettlement zones for refugees. From 1972 onwards, UNHCR's African expenditure increased significantly to cover repatriation programmes in Africa and the needs of urban refugees, especially from southern Africa.

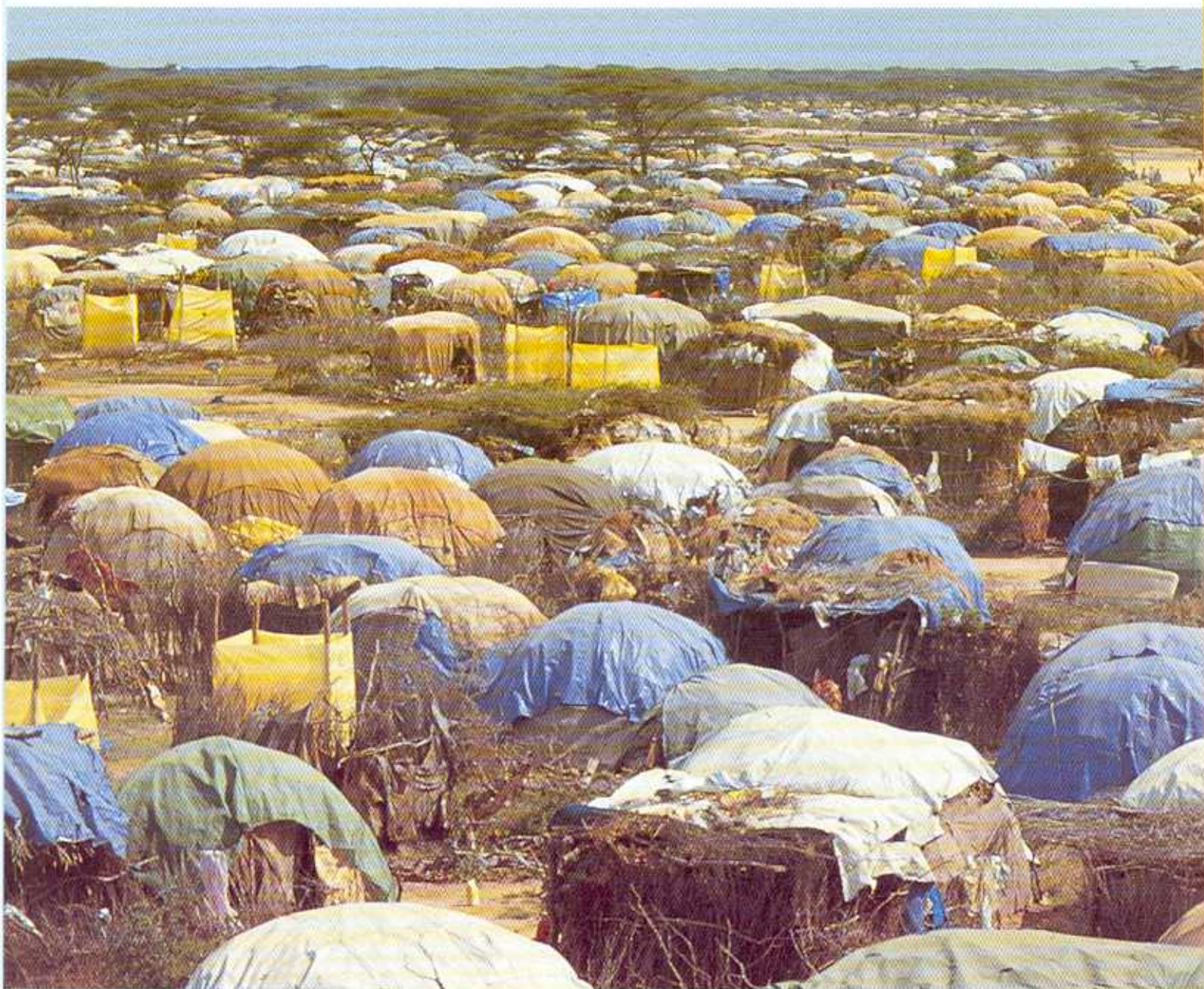
From this expansion in the 1960s, the UN embarked on ambitious assistance programmes in a number of humanitarian emergencies around the world. The first in Bangladesh occurred as a consequence of the 1971 war between West Pakistan and secessionist East Pakistan and the subsequent flight of 10 million East Bengalis to India. In response, the UN Secretary-General set up a separate international relief apparatus under a

special coordination organization. As head of this organization, Sadruddin Aga Khan coordinated the work of all the UN agencies involved - including the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), among others - and mobilized UN assistance totalling \$185 million. The success of the Bangladesh operation spurred the UN to launch similar system-wide relief efforts the following year in southern Sudan to repatriate and reintegrate over 200,000 refugees and to assist hundreds of thousands of displaced people. In 1974, the UN

set up the UN Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Cyprus to assist 164,000 Greek Cypriots from the North and 34,000 Turkish Cypriots from the South.

Never-ending humanitarian crises

From the mid-1970s until the 1990s, the UN had to cope with a growing number of complex humanitarian emergencies and increasing numbers of refugees and displaced people. In the 1970s, political and civil unrest in Latin America resulted in



*The UN estimates there are over 50 million refugees and displaced people in the world.
A Somali refugee camp in Kenya.*

widespread political repression and huge refugee movements. The Latin American crises spawned a worldwide diaspora, as the exiles were resettled in 44 different countries with the assistance of UNHCR. On the other side of the world, over 1.5 million refugees fled Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In order to rescue the Indochinese refugees, the UN organized the largest overseas resettlement programme since the Second World War. In 1979, famine and the mass exodus of Khmer people following the Vietnamese ouster of the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom Penh dominated the UN's

attention. From 1979 to 1982, the UN mounted a three-pronged emergency relief programme: inside Cambodia, along the Thai-Cambodian border and operating refugee camps inside Thailand.

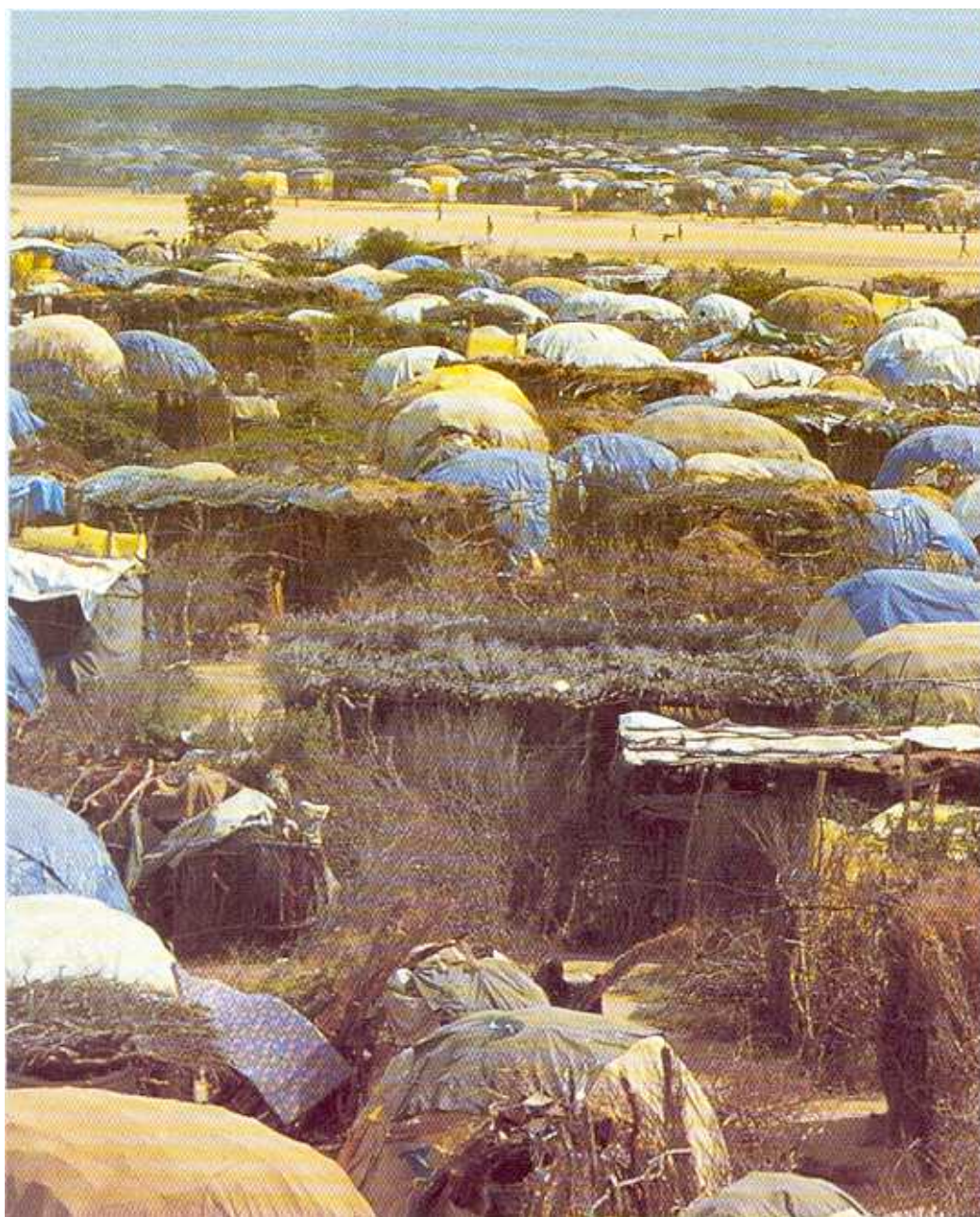
As the Cold War intensified during the 1980s, internal wars in Afghanistan, Central America, the Horn of Africa and southern Africa became protracted and debilitating affairs. These conflicts perpetuated endemic violence and caused massive physical destruction, which, in turn, generated large waves of refugees.

Consequently, over the past two decades there has been an alarming increase of refugees in the world. The total rose from 2.8 million in 1976, to 8.2 million in 1980, to over 20 million in 1995. In the same period UNHCR's expenditure rose from approximately \$100 million to nearly \$1.5 billion.

The relief network

During the past 50 years not only has the UN's global humanitarian reach extended dramatically but so too has the number of agencies involved in carrying out relief efforts. They include UNHCR, whose mandate it is to protect and assist refugees worldwide; the WFP, which coordinates food aid to victims of conflict, and UNICEF, which provides relief aid to women and children who comprise the majority of civilian victims in conflicts today.

The international community also relies on a vast network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to help in humanitarian



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emergencies. The network ranges from large international agencies to small outfits working in one particular country. Increasingly, NGOs are playing a vital role in emergency relief because of their ability to reach sources of funds, rouse public opinion and provide large numbers of technical staff willing to work under harsh conditions. As the implementing partners for the UN, NGOs shoulder much of the burden of delivering food and providing shelter, water, sanitation and health care to refugees.

UNHCR now has a staff of about 4,000 in over 100 countries and an annual expenditure of approximately \$1.5 billion. Its work in protecting and assisting refugees is done with three durable solutions in mind: voluntary repatriation, local integration, or third country resettlement.

The growth in numbers and the complexity of refugee flows in recent years, however, has presented enormous challenges to UNHCR to plan, manage and fund its worldwide network of protection and relief programmes. Recently, UNHCR has improved its overall emergency relief preparedness and response mechanisms by bolstering its standby capacity in emergency staffing, relief supplies, needs assessment and emergency programme implementation. Five Preparedness and Response Officers and attendant regional emergency response teams have been established. Stockpiles of commodities for use in emergencies have been amassed and a roster of standby technical experts and relief workers for deployment in relief situations has been established.

Despite improvements in its emergency preparedness, UNHCR is chronically underfunded and understaffed. Although the number of refugees it serves has doubled in the last decade, funding levels for basic care and maintenance have remained at a virtual standstill.

In responding to humanitarian emergencies, UNHCR collaborates closely with other UN agencies – primarily the WFP and UNICEF – as well as a number of NGOs. In most recent emergency operations, the WFP has been a principal source of food aid. Originally conceived in 1961, it is today

recognized as the world's coordinating body for emergency food aid. Although food aid for development remains a major part of its mandate, the expenditures representing emergency food aid have steadily increased in recent years.

Originally founded in 1946 to provide assistance to child victims of warfare, UNICEF now devotes a steadily increasing proportion of its efforts and resources in channelling relief and supplemental aid to women and children in emergency relief situations in Asia and Africa. The great majority of people in any humanitarian emergency are women and children, whose special needs are not always understood or are neglected in the provision of basic relief. Over the years, UNICEF has built up its rapid response capacities and its capability to respond quickly in most emergencies has been praised in several quarters. Not only has it been designated a lead agency in past emergencies but it was also instrumental in establishing 'days of tranquillity' in El Salvador and Lebanon in order to vaccinate children in these conflict areas.

Not all humanitarian crises, however, are covered by UNHCR, UNICEF or other UN agencies. Because a wide variety of people, including refugees, internally displaced people and victims of war, drought and famine, are likely to be affected in such situations, a number of agencies will necessarily be involved in response. In major emergencies, where there are sometimes hundreds of aid agencies working, effective coordination is essential to ensure that responsibilities and roles are clearly assigned and gaps in the relief response are covered.

*“days of
tranquillity”*

The post-Cold War humanitarian challenge

While explosions of political and ethnic violence, persecution and massacres have produced humanitarian crises and large-scale movements of refugees throughout history, there are many new and unique features to the contemporary humanitarian emergencies. The scale, frequency and suddenness of contemporary humanitarian emergencies have exerted enormous pressures on international response capacities.

Complex emergencies

Present-day humanitarian crises are complex emergencies, combining political instability, ethnic tensions, armed conflict, economic collapse and the disintegration of civil society. They involve not only refugees but also internally displaced people, as well as victims of war, famine and drought. With modern powerful weaponry accessible even to the very poorest country, civil war can quickly devastate its infrastructure while population density means that a single conflict can cause millions of people to suddenly flee. In conflict situations, refugee movements frequently spill over borders and aggravate existing problems, such as environmental damage or severe food shortages. Humanitarian emergencies are seldom confined to single countries but often affect entire regions, such as central or west Africa or the Balkans. In recent years, few of these crises have been fully resolved. Consequently, resources from one crisis often have not been made available for use in the next.

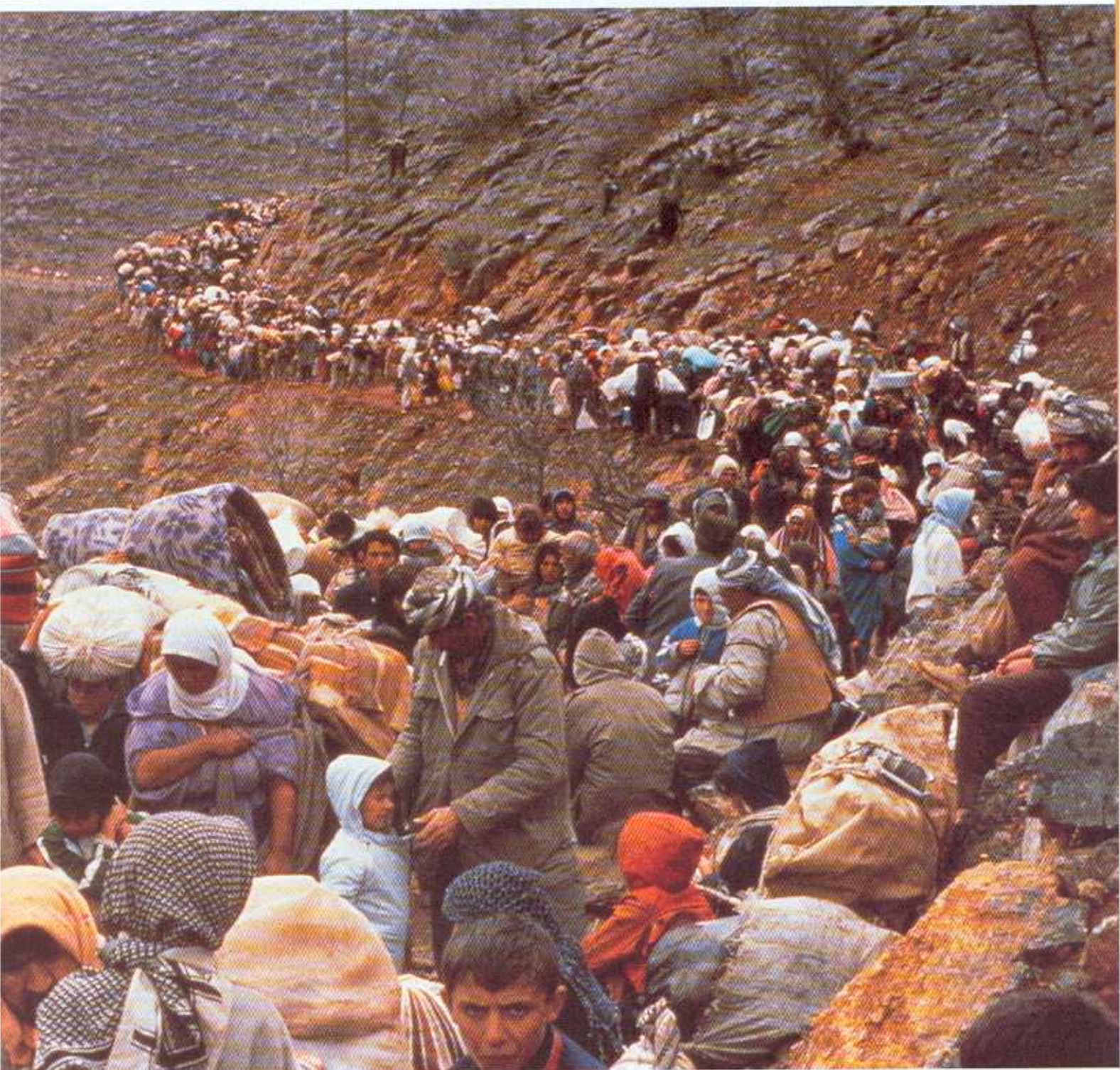
Inside the borders

A critical weakness of the international humanitarian system is that at present there is no special international organization to protect and assist the world's 25 million internally displaced people. There is an inadequate body of international law to regulate their treatment by governments. While there is a clear mandate for the protection and provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees, internally displaced people are unprotected precisely because they do not become refugees but remain within the boundaries of their own countries.

Internal wars not only displace huge numbers of people but also prevent international aid from reaching people living in conflict areas. Although



a growing number of analysts and some governments and institutions are beginning to argue that there is a right to international intervention for humanitarian purposes, the international community is frequently



Refugee crises are often full-blown before the world responds. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled Iraq after the 1991 failed uprising before the UN created 'safe havens' in northern Iraq.

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unable to assist or intervene and the ability of governments or international organizations to influence the behaviour of warring factions in such situations is limited. Former Yugoslavia is one such case. While the UN peacekeeping operation there has saved lives and salved the consciences of governments, it has also been accused of fostering ethnic cleansing by stimulating the forcible movement of unwanted populations. One of the principal lessons of the conflict in Bosnia is that the humanitarian mandate of UNHCR cannot be viewed as a satisfactory substitute for wider-ranging political solutions.

Repatriation and reintegration

UNHCR's more immediate short-term tasks include dealing with the consequences of refugee exoduses and determining when and how repatriation and reintegration is most appropriate. Even as new refugee crises emerge, there remain numerous long-standing refugee populations in the Third World – some dating back 10 years, some 20 or more years.

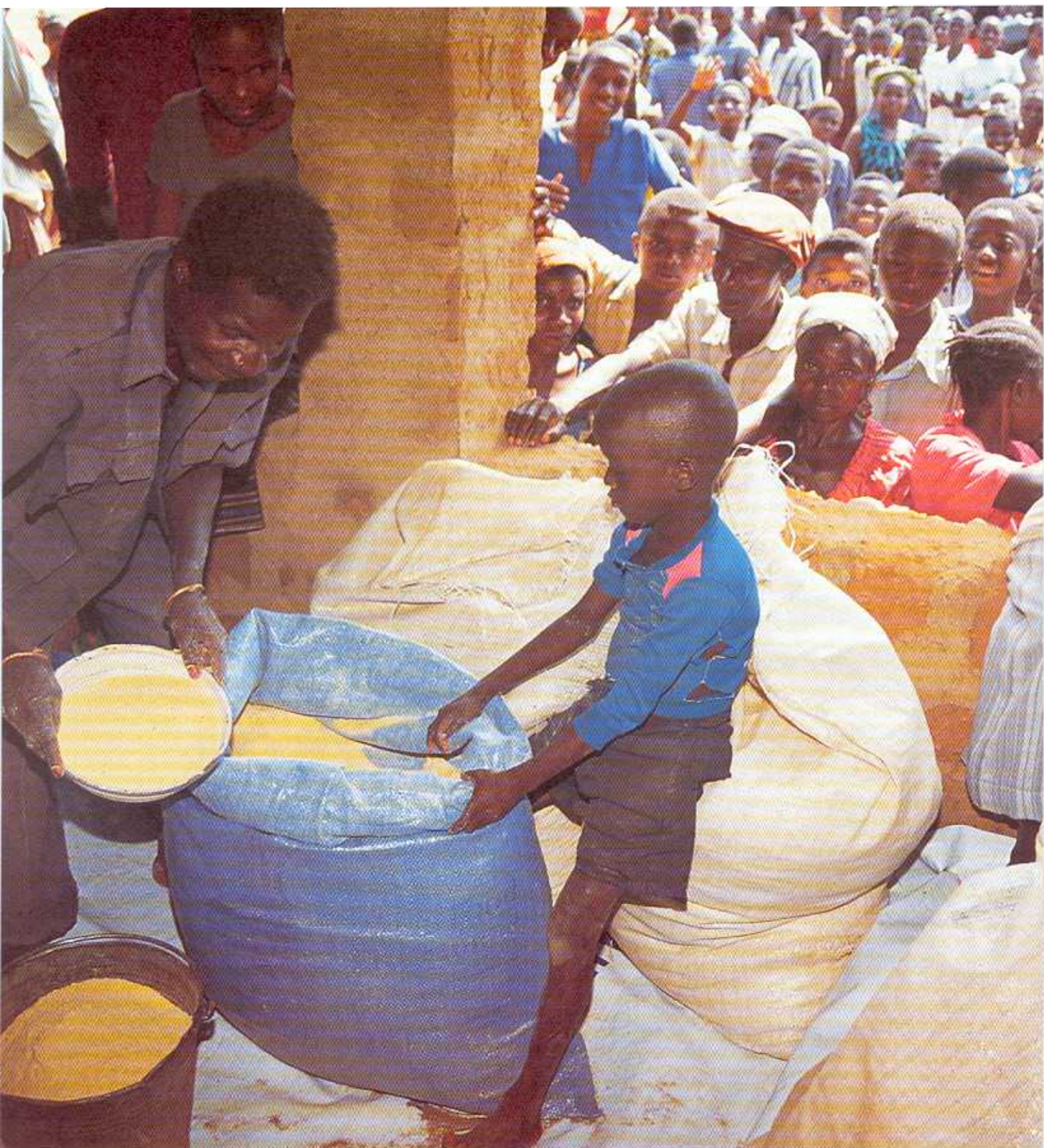
Although the international community is still dealing with immediate problems of handling sudden mass outflows of refugees and problems of reception in countries of asylum, there is much greater attention today on repatriation. Almost five million refugees have returned home since the beginning of the 1990s. If large numbers of refugees continue to repatriate at this rate, the focus of concern must inevitably shift from repatriation to more long-standing reintegration and development. It is becoming increasingly evident that in countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Rwanda one of the preconditions for successful returns is development aid and reintegration assistance aimed at alleviating poverty. Without careful reintegration and reconciliation, returning refugees will compete for scarce developmental resources which, in turn, may well result in fierce political and economic competition with local populations that did not flee.

Repatriation and reconstruction raise new and difficult questions for UN agencies. For how long should UNHCR seek to provide protection to returning refugees, particularly in situations of continuing

conflict? Does the UN Human Rights Centre have the capacity to engage in human rights monitoring in countries of origin? How much and what kinds of assistance are required for returnees to re-establish themselves successfully? Should the international economic development agencies, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), provide refugee-targeted development assistance from the early stages of a repatriation? Should assistance be extended not only to returning refugees but also to needy local populations? Although answers to these questions have yet to be found, they are of critical importance if the UN is to respond effectively in the future.

Going beyond traditional humanitarian emergency assistance to facilitating reintegration of returnees into countries of origin requires the development of new or different competencies on the part of international agencies. A focus on reintegration will involve rethinking the roles and mandates of international organizations and NGOs, the shifting of their operational priorities from receiving countries to countries of return and closer cooperation between development, human rights and refugee agencies than has hitherto been the case.

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*Neighbouring countries often shoulder much of the burden when refugees flee.
A food distribution point for Rwandan refugees in Zaire which is currently home to 857,000 refugees.*



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A framework for future action

The humanitarian emergencies of the post-Cold War era have highlighted the fact that combating the causes of internal conflicts and forced migration cannot proceed solely within the confines of international humanitarian organizations. There is a need for a better interface between the relief agencies and political and security operations on the one hand and emergency relief, development and human rights mechanisms on the other. A multi-dimensional strategy for humanitarian crises must involve practically the entire UN system, as well as regional organizations and NGOs, and requires enhancing these organizations' capacities to defuse, to deter and to mediate incipient crises before they need more serious and costly trans-sovereign intervention.

Early warning systems

Early information on impending crises is critical not only for possible preventive action but also for effective and timely humanitarian responses and for ensuring adequate preparedness. Establishing an effective monitoring body within the UN that would alert the Secretary-General, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Security Council to potential conflicts

and humanitarian emergencies could provide an early warning mechanism.

For example, the capability and mandate of the UN Centre for Human Rights needs to be strengthened to enable it to monitor and collect accurate and up-to-date human rights information; to identify situations that have the potential to produce mass refugee flows and to bring these to the attention of the international community. The UN Commission on Human Rights could assign its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to monitor the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities and to alert the Secretary-General when action is needed. Similarly, the early warning capabilities, as well as inter-agency information swapping, in both UNHCR and UNDP should be bolstered.

Among the potentially most important new instruments added to the UN's capacities is the organization's ability to send UN fact-finding missions to defuse disputes and prevent major crises from expanding. Fact-finding missions are likely to play an important role in the early stages of conflict development and may prevent the misunderstandings that escalate conflict and result in more rigid positions. Observers in the field can also serve as a deterrent for those considering actions that cause forcible displacement. NGOs, such as Amnesty International or the Helsinki Watch groups, may in some instances be more successful than UN monitors in collecting information and bringing abuses of human and minority rights to the attention of the international community. However, it is not enough for monitors to be in place and for information about potential human rights abuses and refugee movements to be widely available – there must also be the political will to act.

Early warning programmes must be connected to decision-making and response strategies both in governments and in relief, development and human rights organizations. In many recent humanitarian crises, information about impending conflicts and mass migrations was well known in advance but there was no willingness to act on this information. In Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia and former Yugoslavia,

for example, international agencies and analysts had accurately predicted what would happen well before the disasters unfolded, but there existed no mechanisms and institutions for averting conflicts or for dealing effectively and rapidly with these crises at a time when they were still manageable. In December 1993, several months in advance of the massive bloodletting in Rwanda in 1994, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions reported to the UN Commission on Human Rights: 'Lessons should be drawn from the past and the cycle of violence which has drenched both Burundi and Rwanda in blood must be broken. To this end the impunity of the perpetrators of the massacres must be definitely brought to an end and preventive measures to avoid the recurrence of such tragedies must be designed.' The international community ignored this early warning and mass murder occurred on a gigantic scale. Even after genocide in Rwanda became widely known, the Western governments failed to support calls for a UN force for Rwanda while there was still time to curb the massacres.

Unless trigger mechanisms for prompt action are established and existing tools of diplomacy, human rights and conflict-resolution are reinforced, any measures that might be taken to prepare for future emergencies are likely to be of limited use. The value of such measures depends largely on the willingness of states and international organizations to take the necessary concerted preventive action.

The UN's vision of coordination

Making the system work better requires a more effective division of labour among the actors involved in responding to the humanitarian, political and security dimensions of internal conflicts. Over 20 years ago, in 1971, the UN General Assembly created the Office of the UN Disaster Relief

Coordinator (UNDRO) which was to be the focal point within the UN system for mobilizing and coordinating relief assistance. In practice, UNDRO failed to provide the leadership required by its mandate. In order to fill this gap, the UN General Assembly, in December 1991, created the Office of Emergency Relief Coordinator, charged with providing a focal point for government, intergovernmental and NGO communication during UN emergency relief operations. In early 1992, Jan Eliasson, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, became the first Under-Secretary-General in the newly formed UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and was subsequently replaced by Peter Hansen in 1994.

The creation of DHA was an essential step in clarifying and assigning responsibilities to UN agencies in complex emergencies. This is particularly apparent in situations where mandates overlap or where no entity has a clear mandate to act; in making quick decisions on the best coordinating mechanisms to respond to humanitarian emergencies at the field level and in negotiating access for

these agencies without waiting for a formal government request. Donor states influential in the creation of DHA envision the office gathering data, mobilizing resources, orchestrating field activities, negotiating a framework of action with political authorities and providing overall leadership to humanitarian aid efforts.

Unfortunately, the vision has so far not been realized. Lack of adequate staff in the field, a rapid succession of humanitarian crises in the post-Cold War period and incompletely established and largely untested mechanisms for inter-agency coordination have caught the department unprepared, leaving it unable to assume its intended leadership role in most recent emergencies. Perhaps the greatest difficulty

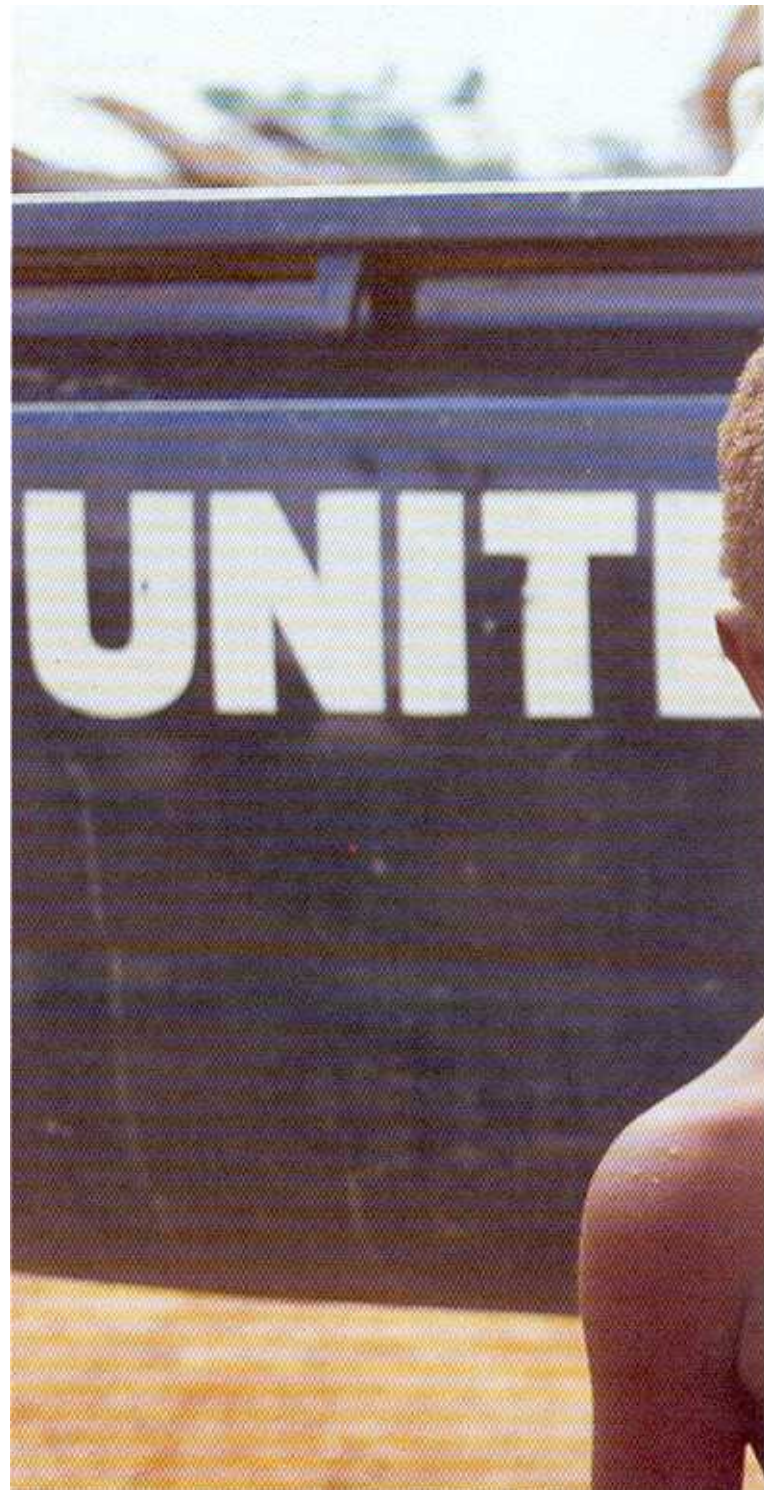
*“the
cycle of
violence
must be
broken”*

confronting DHA is that while every agency favours coordination in principle, few wish to be coordinated in practice. If DHA's presence is to lead to improvements in the response capacity of the UN, the significance of its coordinating role must be recognized by UNHCR and other agencies. The DHA must also be fully equipped both politically and financially to undertake effectively its assigned tasks.

Coordinating relief and development

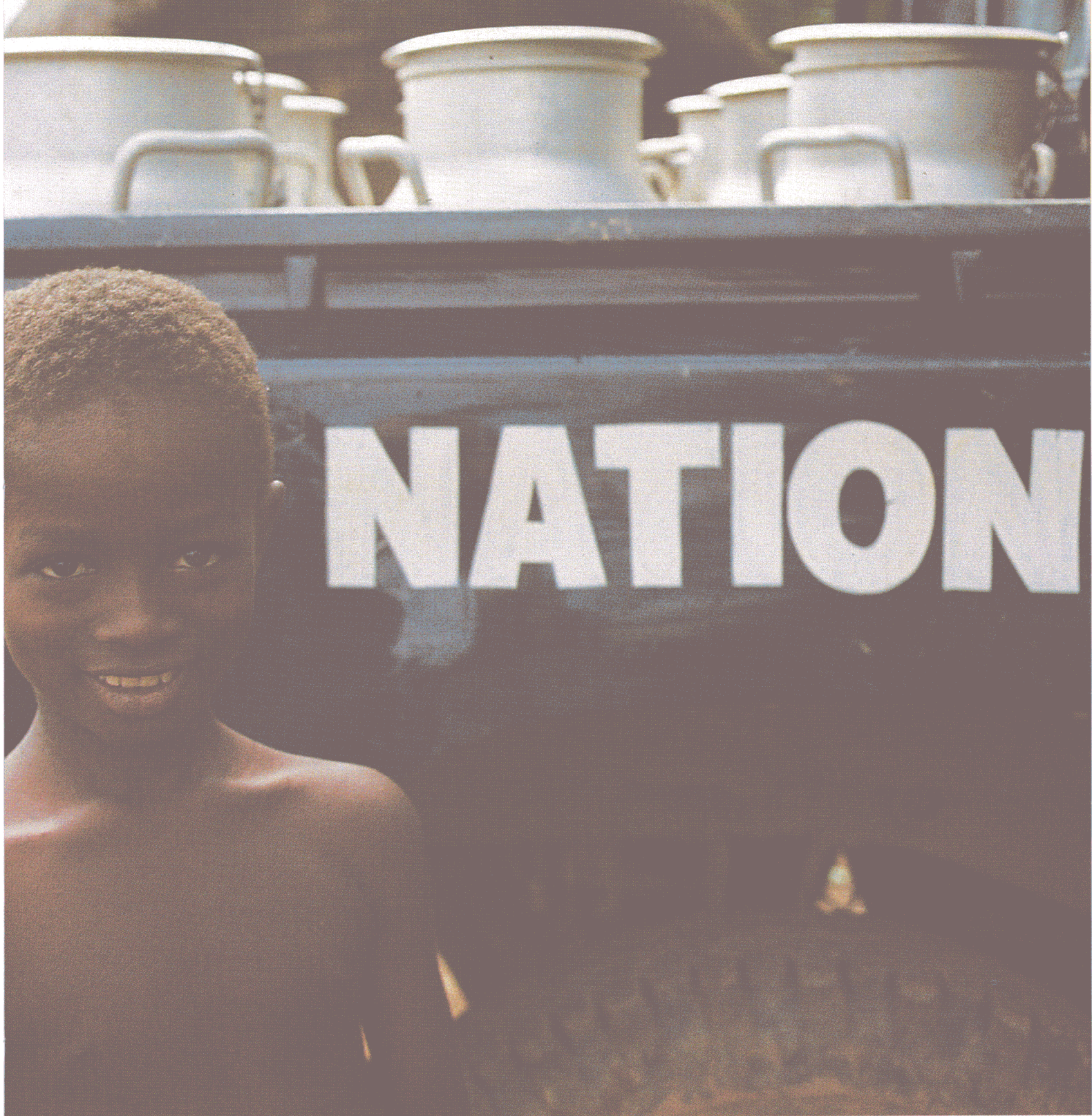
Closer coordination between UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and other UN agencies is the key to dealing with refugees, returnees and the internally displaced. Cooperation between these agencies already takes place in joint UNHCR-UNDP projects aimed at assisting a variety of displaced groups in Central America, Mozambique and Cambodia. In recent years, in the Horn of Africa, UNHCR and UNDP have established joint management structures to create preventive zones and cross-mandate programmes to stabilize and prevent displacement.

Although there have been greater efforts at UNDP-UNHCR coordination in field operations, far more effective inter-agency planning, consultation and implementation are required. Institutional constraints inhibit closer cooperation between the two UN agencies. UNHCR is not a development agency. Although UNHCR can be a catalyst in initiating development-oriented assistance, UNDP is more suited to the task. Unfortunately, in most countries, a 'development gap' exists between short-term humanitarian relief assistance and long-term development. UNHCR-UNDP joint projects attempted to fill this gap in Central America, the Horn of Africa and Indochina where there are large returnee and displaced populations, but because these projects were small in size and limited in nature they have only partially filled the gap between immediate assistance and longer-term development. The task of the overall rehabilitation of these communities must be carried out by UNDP, or by other UN agencies, which can more appropriately deal with reconstruction and development. This requires a full transfer of responsibility from UNHCR to UNDP after the immediate emergency relief phase is over – again, an idea that UNDP consistently resists because it views itself as having a development, and not even a partially emergency, focus.



Finding the funds

Greater development assistance alone is not enough to create safe conditions for refugees; international cooperation must also ensure democratization and respect for human rights. The existing UN human rights machinery needs to be strengthened and applied more effectively to deal with refugees, returnees and the internally displaced – for it is integral to the success of UN peacemaking.

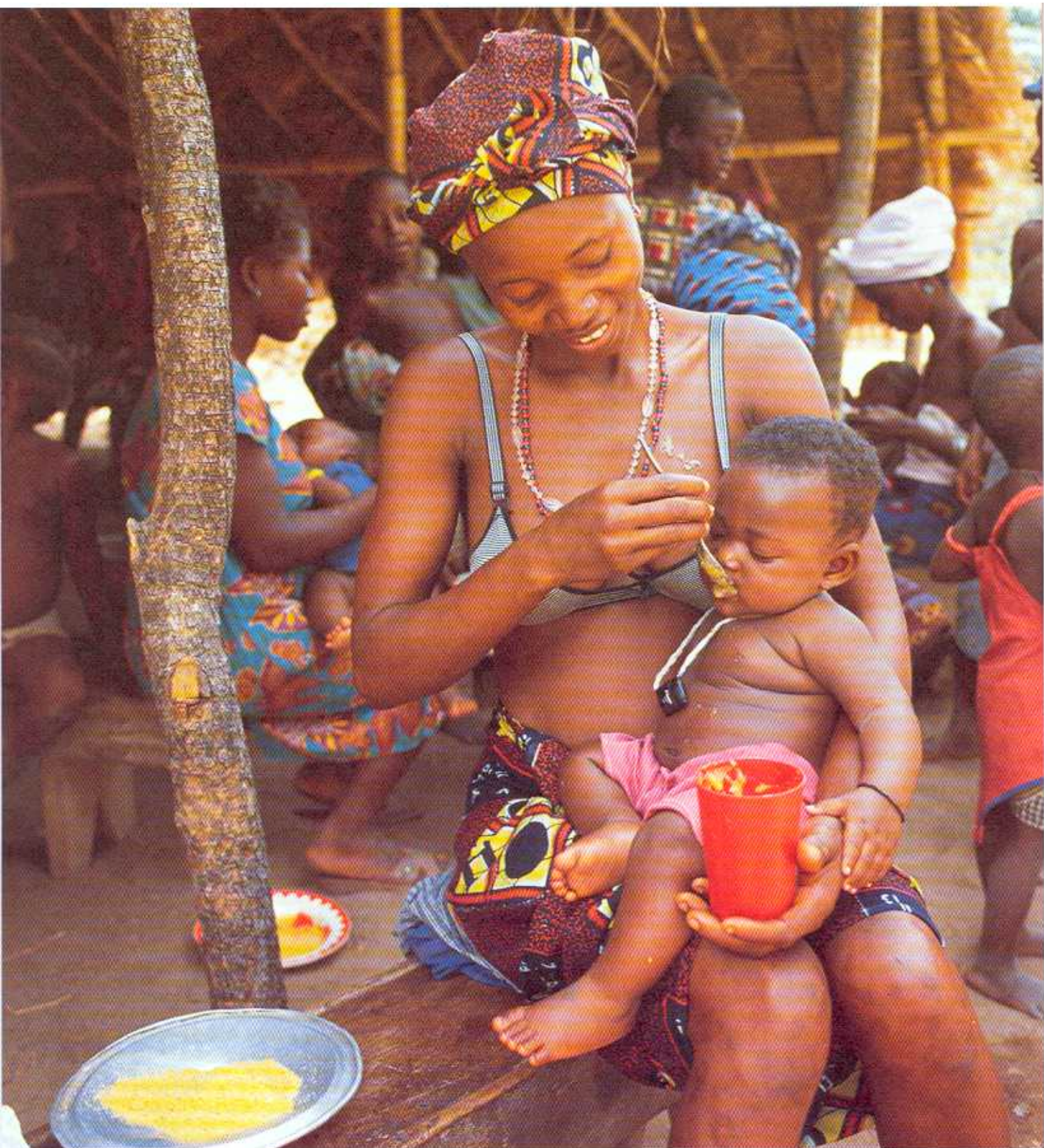


A UN food truck arrives in Upper Lofa, Liberia.

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In recent years, the UN human rights system has demonstrated its potential capabilities to respond quickly to a select number of human rights emergencies involving the internally displaced. For example, in 1992, in response to the situation in former Yugoslavia, it called an unprecedented meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights and appointed a Special Rapporteur to investigate

human rights abuses of minority populations and to make recommendations to the Security Council. Recently, international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, under Justice Richard Goldstone, have begun proceedings. In other instances, the UN human rights system has acted much too slowly. For example, it was not until after the genocide occurred in Rwanda that the UN



When disaster strikes, international efforts are mobilized across a broad front with special assistance to children at risk.

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Commission on Human Rights held a special session on Rwanda in June 1994 and appointed a Special Rapporteur to investigate the massacres there.

At the same time, the UN Centre for Human Rights, through its Advisory Services, has worked on a number of UN peacekeeping or peace-enforcement missions, providing significant technical assistance and cooperation to the UN human rights presence in the field, for example in El Salvador, Somalia and Cambodia. These actions underscore both the potentially key role of the UN human rights machinery and the growing involvement of the Security Council in humanitarian matters, and the recognition that the promotion and protection of the human rights of refugees, returnees and the internally displaced are an integral part of UN peacemaking.

If the UN hopes to respond more effectively to humanitarian crises, it must strengthen its capacity to monitor developments in human rights issues. The creation of the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in late 1993 is an important initial step in this direction. However, a greater protection role in the field should be granted to UN human rights personnel. At present, the UN Centre for Human Rights has country expertise but no field presence. Despite widespread recognition of the need for more human rights monitors in civil war situations, the UN still has enormous political and financial difficulties placing adequate numbers of observers in such obvious places as Burundi and Rwanda. At a minimum, the Centre can strengthen its coverage in the field by the continued expansion of its advisory services and technical cooperation. In addition, by offering services such as training judges, strengthening electoral commissions, establishing ombudsmen, training prison staff and advising governments on constitutions and legislation regarding national minorities and human rights, the Centre is likely to be more successful in its activities and less threatening to governments than in more straightforward, fieldwork-oriented human rights monitoring.

There is much discussion about the creation of special human rights machinery for the internally displaced. At its 1993 session, the UN Commission on Human Rights reappointed the Special

Representative on the Internally Displaced, Francis Deng, to monitor mass displacements of people, collect information on violations of their human rights and help sustain a positive dialogue toward achieving solutions with governments of the country of origin. But the Special Representative must be given proper political support and funding to carry out his tasks effectively. A General Assembly resolution confirming the role and mandate of the Special Representative is now required to institutionalize this office further. A significant first step towards trying to deal with the problem would be to designate a permanent representative for the internally displaced. This representative could undertake fact-finding missions, intercede with governments, embark on activities which strengthen institutions that sustain democracy and civil society, publish reports and bring violations to the attention of human rights bodies and the Security Council.

Recently, there have been attempts to create closer linkages between UNHCR and the human rights organs and activities of the UN system. In 1992, for example, the UN Centre for Human Rights and UNHCR drafted a memorandum of

“a greater protection role should be granted to UN human rights personnel”

understanding so that human rights information collected by UNHCR could be forwarded to the Centre for Human Rights. At the end of 1992, UNHCR and the Centre established a joint working group to study mechanisms and approaches for enhanced and continuous collaboration. Such consultation should be strengthened to ensure that displacements emanating from human rights violations are brought to the attention of the UN Commission on Human Rights and that the work of the Centre's Advisory Services section adequately addresses human rights issues associated with refugee movements and internal displacements.

The need for preventive political action

In the post-Cold War era, there is an urgent need to re-examine UN humanitarian action and to understand better the possibilities and limitations of the

UN system. While greater efforts at coordination are crucial, the challenge for the international community in the next decade will be to respond not only to the immediate humanitarian problems of growing numbers of human rights victims and displaced people but also to confront the conditions which lead to these crises. These are political tasks requiring a more active role from national policy-makers and a greater willingness to utilize fully the UN mechanisms on security, peacekeeping, peacemaking and human rights in anticipating as well as reacting effectively to humanitarian disasters around the world. Humanitarian aid must not be used as an excuse to hide the political decisions needed to avoid future humanitarian tragedies. Future stability and security depend on new approaches which will bring together conflict-resolution capacities, humanitarian relief agencies and human rights networks and observers.

*UN peacekeeping forces are increasingly needed to protect humanitarian convoys in conflict zones.
An Italian UN soldier plays with children orphaned in war.*

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