

Rwanda Returnee Operation

General

1. The political and inter-ethnic violence in the early part of 1994 in Rwanda generated the rapid exodus of over 2 million Rwandese into neighbouring countries. Additionally, between 2-3 million Rwandese have become internally displaced.

2. Since then a cease-tire has been declared and a new Government established. The Rwandese authorities are now inviting those who fled to neighbouring countries to return home. The new Government of Rwanda has provided UNHCR with guarantees for the return of refugees in conditions of safety.

3. In view of these developments, the early return of the refugees, particularly of those in eastern Zaire, to their places of origin is the most viable response to their plight. Their return, however, must be closely monitored, both in terms of the guarantees provided by the Rwandese authorities, as well as in its voluntary nature. In addition, a comprehensive assistance programme must be in place to facilitate the re-start of their lives in Rwanda and early move to self-sufficiency.

Beneficiaries

a) An initial caseload of 500,000 is the preliminary planning figure for UNHCR's overall assistance inside Rwanda.

b) The potential returnee population falls into three broad categories:

i) populations on the move, or "spontaneous" returnees;

ii) populations requiring UNHCR's assistance with their return, among these, vulnerable groups e.g. orphans, unaccompanied minors and the elderly, which should be given special consideration;

iii) refugees who fled Rwanda prior to the events of April 1994.

Implementation of activities

The actions proposed for countries of asylum and country of origin are being implemented simultaneously.

In countries of asylum:

1. UNHCR is informing refugees of the Government of Rwanda's assurances of safety, and of assistance and services available in the country of return. Periodic meetings with refugees are being planned for this purpose. In Zaire, in order to

provide wide dissemination of information to refugees, UNHCR is benefitting from the services of independent radio stations installed by Reporters sans Frontieres.

2. Visits to Rwanda to verify the security conditions by refugee representatives, or organised groups will be assisted by UNHCR as a means of encouraging the voluntary repatriation.

3. Mechanisms to ensure the voluntary nature of return and for registering the candidates for the return are being established by the UNHCR offices in the countries of asylum.

4. Tripartite meetings between representatives of country of origin, country(ies) of asylum and UNHCR will solve specific problems which may arise related to the voluntary repatriation operation.

In country of origin:

1. UNHCR is the agency responsible for the voluntary repatriation of refugees. UNHCR has increased its staff in Rwanda to 42 internationals. In addition to the Branch Office in Kigali, 4 Field Offices have been already opened: In Gisenyi, Gikongoro, Butare and Cyangugu. A further Field Office is expected to be opened today in Kibungu, while the establishment of a field presence in Byumba is being considered. Protection staff, logistical experts and programming specialists have been deployed to participate in the operation.

2. UNHCR staff are monitoring the return of refugees. This return should take place in conditions of safety and dignity. Guarantees given by the government should be applied and respected. UNHCR and UNAMIR joint activities are being coordinated on the ground: mainly on security issues, as well as on demining, convoy escorts and communications. Working relations will also be established with Human rights Observers and Monitors which will play a key role in the normalisation of the life in Rwanda. Links with the ICRC, NGOs and others are also essential for the protection of vulnerable groups, in particular unaccompanied minors and orphans, as well as for tracing relatives.

3. Logistics capacity is being developed. 20 trucks and 46 buses will arrive in Kigali over the next few days. An agreement is being prepared with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the transport of returnees requiring such assistance. Any organized movement from the neighbouring countries will require a reliable logistical capacity as well as a reliable garage facilities.

4. "Way stations" are being established along return routes, particularly near the border entry points. Six are already established in North-West Rwanda, between Rubavu (gathering point on the Zaire border) and Ruhengeri. Several more are in a planning stage between Gikongoro, Butare and Gitarama. At each of the "way stations" emergency facilities are established. These "way stations" are providing returnees with medical assistance, water and food. In order to avoid the formation of camps surrounding the "way stations", the establishment of other distribution points for food is currently being studied.

5. Until the required supplies are available and as an interim measure, UNHCR is providing returnees with soap, jerrycans and blankets. However, once the required supplies are in place UNHCR will provide returnee families with a repatriation package comprising:

a) **Domestic items:**

Blankets:	3 per family
Jerry Cans:	2 per family
Soap:	250 grams per family
Mats:	3 per family

b) **Tools and Seeds:**

With the imminent arrival of the rainy season, the rapid distribution of tools and seeds is of crucial importance to enable returnees to progress quickly to self-sufficiency. 1 hoe per family, together with beans, maize, cabbage, carrot and tomato seeds, will be distributed to all families of rural origin.

6. Radio-equipped mobile teams are monitoring return movements and ensuring that returnees on the move are availing themselves of the relief available at the "way stations". The teams are assessing community needs and will ensure that returnees reach their homes and receive the assistance envisioned in the programme.

7. The number of vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors, separated families with households headed by single women, the isolated elderly and the war-injured, cannot at this time be estimated. It is however safe to state that there are hardly any families left intact after the events of the past few months. There is a consensus among the humanitarian organizations already in Rwanda that emphasis must be placed on the tracing of the parents or relatives of unaccompanied children before assessing the number of "orphans". UNHCR plans, in close coordination with ICRC and other specialised entities, to support tracing programmes, and social welfare institutions.

8. Initial assessments already made by UNHCR in communities of return, indicate that the health sector presents one of the gravest problems in the country: all medical infrastructure has been destroyed, trained personnel have left the country and no medicines or medical equipment are available. UNHCR, in close cooperation with specialised agencies, is planning to intervene in the rehabilitation of some remote facilities in the major areas of return. The initial provision of drugs and basic health equipment is also being considered.

9. In view of the impending rainy season, UNHCR is distributing plastic sheeting to returnees in order to provide some temporary shelter while they are rehabilitating their homes using local materials.

10. Returnees coming back to Rwanda after 20 or 30 years of absence are confronted with greater difficulties than those who fled recently. These particular problems, most especially the lack of adequate agricultural land for their

resettlement and rehabilitation, is being carefully discussed with the authorities. The Government of Rwanda is very concerned about this potentially explosive land ownership issue, but has yet to develop a defined policy. UNHCR is ready to support the government's efforts to find a solution to this very sensitive problem so as not to endanger the already fragile agricultural land distribution in the country.

Programme Delivery

11. Among the UN agencies, a special relationship is being established between UNHCR and the UN Human Rights mechanism. UNHCR field protection officials will work in close cooperation with the Human Rights Observers and Monitors, sharing with them information and concerns related to the overall security situation of returnees. UNHCR has already established a close relationship with WFP in Rwanda, the agency responsible for all basic food aid for returnees. UNHCR is also utilising WFP empty truck capacity as much as possible for returnees in need of transport assistance. UNICEF inputs in the water sector, in health care, as well as in the area of unaccompanied minors, are also of crucial importance to the success of the voluntary repatriation operation.

12. Regarding other international organizations, an agreement with IOM is currently being prepared. IOM will assist UNHCR with the transportation of returnees to their villages of origin or other destination. Numerous fields of action are shared by ICRC and UNHCR. More concretely, ICRC has already set up a programme for tracing unaccompanied children, an issue of great concern to UNHCR. Specific collaboration mechanisms are being set up.

13. Other implementation agreements have already been signed with several NGO's as Care international, for the distribution of non-food items to returnees in the North-West of the country; and with African Humanitarian Aid for the provision of health care at the "way stations". The number of NGOs operating in Rwanda is increasing by the day and UNHCR plans to establish agreements with one major NGO in each region of UNHCR concern. At the same time specific agreements will be concluded with specialised/sectorial NGOs to cover all areas of UNHCR intervention.

Conclusion

1. For the time being, UNHCR activities consist of life-saving measures for returnees on their way home, as well as for IDPs in need of such assistance. However, given the massive destruction in the country, focus should be placed, as soon as possible, on activities aimed at community rehabilitation in order to help returnees, displaced persons and other needy groups to re-start their lives in Rwanda and promote an early progression to self-sufficiency. It is only if these populations manage to achieve some degree of well-being that voluntary repatriation can be considered a durable solution.

2. UNHCR's initial rehabilitation activities will be part of the comprehensive assistance programme, to be developed following a needs assessment, within the overall coordination framework of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/UNREO.

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