

the world of refugees

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loss of livelihood caused by environmental degradation wrought by the violence of the development.

As the violation of human rights is often the main cause of forced population movements in countries of this region, the governments have been reluctant to involve the UNHCR and other international agencies in relief and rehabilitation of victimised people. Nevertheless, during the last decade UNHCR has recognised the need to expand its mandate under new challenges posed by the refugee crises, and now it has developed programs to provide support to those displaced by ethnic cleansing and communal or sectarian violence, even before they cross international borders. Now, internally displaced person (IDP) has become a person of concern for UNCHR.

with financial assistance in Pakistan. Currently there are 1.2 million Afghan refugees under the mandate of UNHCR in Pakistan. At one time the country hosted 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to UNHCR estimates, in 1998, some 93,000 Afghan refugees repatriated from Pakistan voluntarily. A total of 1.175 refugees resettled from Pakistan to third countries during the year, including 200 Afghans.

The civil war in Afghanistan following the 1979 Soviet intervention, led to an exodus of refugees to Pakistan, Iran, India and some Central Asian countries. The military government of Pakistan initially gave a big welcome to the refugees. The Afghan refugees were allowed to move about freely in the country. Reportedly, the CIA and the government of Saudi Ara-

More than 3 million Afghans fled their country and arrived in Pakistan in the 1980s. As the problem of feeding and housing 3 million refugees proved too large a burden for Pakistan, the government sought the assistance of the UNHCR, WFP, Unicef, WHO, FAO and other independent relief agencies.

The presence of a large number of Afghan refugees caused many political problems in the country, also. These included terrorism and large-scale smuggling of narcotics from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

There were sharp differences among the political parties of Pakistan on the issue of Afghan refugees and their eventual return. Even after the fall of Soviet supported Kabul regime and formation of a *mujahideen*-led govern-

programme (WFP) have substantially reduced aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan UNHCR handed over responsibility of maintenance of some of the services to refugee committees.

According to UNHCR, approximately 1,53,000 refugees were repatriated during 1995. Approximately 77,000 were repatriated with UNHCR assistance and 76,000 on their own. The majority of the returnees were from Peshawar and NWFP.

Then in 1996, nearly 20,000 refugees fled the fighting in Kabul and re-entered Pakistan. Since then, it is reported the nearly 100 families cross the border into Pakistan daily.

The camps in NWFP are now overflowing with refugees fleeing the renewed fighting in Afghanistan. These refugees in Peshawar were maltreated and apprehended by law-enforcing agencies under trumped up charges. By January 1997, the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan swelled to 1.3 million. In 1998 UNHCR determined that some 1.2 million Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan. Repatriation efforts were set back in 1998, because the UN had to remove most of its foreign staff from Afghanistan, following the US air attack on an alleged terrorist base in Afghanistan. There were no reliable estimates as to how many Afghan refugees re-entered Pakistan since then.

However, according to the UNHCR, in late 1998, more than 20,000 Afghan (mainly ethnic Tajiks and Hazaras, particularly women at risk), fled to Pakistan during the Taliban's offensive against Mazar-e-Sharif and other Northern towns. According to the UNHCR, the new arrivals from Afghanistan were "seriously traumatised".

Afghan refugees in Pakistan seriously criticised the Taliban-faced harsh treatment. According to Amnesty International there was an "alarming number of attacks" on Afghan refugees in 1998. A "hit list" of Taliban critics began circulating in mid-1998.

Four Taliban opponents were killed in November. Amnesty said "Pakistani authorities have not taken any serious measures to investigate" the attacks.

Afghan refugee women in Quetta made several attempts to hold demonstrations to urge the international community to focus on the plight of Afghan women.

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They held one rally in January 1998, but other attempts were foiled by the Taliban and its supporters. Taliban members attacked women who participated in the rally in Quetta in mid-1998. In December 1998, the women were obliged to cancel a planned rally after the Taliban threatened to attack them and break their legs. The local police said they could not guarantee the women the adequate protection.

Present scenario

It is an uphill task to provide shelter, food and other facilities to hundred and thousands of asylum seekers. It is understood that Pakistan, itself a poor country having limited resources to meet its own needs, will not commit itself to providing services and facilities to asylum seekers which it cannot provide to its own people.

The Afghan refugees were received with empathy. This humanitarian gesture of Pakistan was duly recognised and appreciated by all countries.

The government of Pakistan did not put any restrictions on the movement of Afghan refugees or their right to work or do business in any part of the country. The UNHCR, FAO, WHO, Unicef, JCRC and other international regional, and local organisations came forward to help Pakistan in caring for the Afghan refugees.

However, as the conflict dragged on, and many international agencies withdrew support, Pakistan has continued to accept and house these refugees.

Immediately after Pakistan's independence in 1947, all asylum seekers were dealt with under the Foreigners Act of 1946 enacted by the British government. According to the provision of this act no foreigner could enter Pakistan without a passport or a valid visa.

While Pakistan made laws and regulations to compensate some categories of asylum seekers and refugees, and provided for the functioning of their resettlement agencies as well as those created to distribute aid to the Afghans, it did not enact adequate legislation to fulfill its obligations to all refugees as per the international standards.

The absence of laws and a national policy for the rehabilitation of refugees has created a paradox where by the initial humane action is negated by inhuman treatment meted out to refugees and asylum seekers by the agencies of the state and unscrupulous persons. The present decision of the government of Pakistan regarding the closure of Torkham borders for the Afghan refugees indicates the complete reversal of initial policy towards Afghan refugees and looks like the the last nail in the coffin of the fate of the Afghan asylum seekers into Pakistan.

CONCERNS OVERSHADOW HUMANITARIAN NEEDS



Refugees in Pakistan

Pakistan regards all refugees, including those recognised by the UNHCR, as illegal aliens. It allows the UNHCR recognised refugees to remain pending repatriation or third-country resettlement, but does not permit them to work or to receive free health care or education.

The UNHCR provides refugees

with financial assistance in Pakistan. Currently there are 1.2 million Afghan refugees under the mandate of UNHCR in Pakistan. At one time the country hosted 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to UNHCR estimates, in 1998, some 93,000 Afghan refugees repatriated from Pakistan voluntarily. A total of 1.175 refugees resettled from Pakistan to third countries during the year, including 200 Afghans.

ment in Kabul, rival gangs of Afghan refugees continued to indulge in violent and terrorist activities inside Pakistan.

The Afghan refugees

In 1998, some 93,000 Afghan repatriated from Pakistan voluntarily. Some 200 Afghans who were mostly women at risk, were resettled to third countries. Meanwhile the UNCHR and World Food Pro-