

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

STANDING COMMITTEE
14th meeting

Distr.
RESTRICTED
EC/49/SC/INF.2
14 January 1999

ENGLISH ONLY

THE SECURITY, AND CIVILIAN AND HUMANITARIAN CHARACTER
OF REFUGEE CAMPS AND SETTLEMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This information note reviews recent developments and initiatives with regard to the promotion of the security, and civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and refugee populated areas. It examines options to address this objective that have been developed by UNHCR and elaborated upon in consultation with the United Nations Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO) and UNHCR. These have been discussed at the Security Council and in other fora as part of the follow-up to the Secretary-General's *Report on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa* (A/52/871-S/1998/318 of 13 April 1998), hereafter referred to as the Secretary-General's Report on Africa. The document also reviews some of the measures being pursued or envisaged by UNHCR in promoting improved security in refugee camps and refugee populated areas.

II. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

2. In many cases, insecurity affecting refugee camps and refugee populated areas results from a failure to strictly respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee operations. In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, the presence among refugees of former combatants and persons involved in grave crimes against humanity has been a tragic illustration of the failure of States hosting refugees and of the international community to ensure the neutrality of camps. Insecurity can also arise as a result of several other factors, such as conflict amongst different groups within the refugee population, conflict between refugees and the local population, common crime and banditry, and, in certain cases, the deployment of undisciplined police and security forces. In many instances, camps are located too close to international borders.

3. These situations result in endangering the physical safety of refugees, whose lives and belongings are threatened, who could be the victims of external attacks against the camps and settlements they live in and who could fear either being prevented from repatriating voluntarily or, on the contrary, being forced into a hasty return to uncertain conditions. Women and children are often the targeted victims of banditry, while many men fear being forced to join fighting. Similarly, insecurity might affect the surrounding local population and exacerbate tensions between the refugees and the nationals of the host country. Finally, some situations are perceived as threats to the security of the country of origin or the whole region.

4. To effectively address the issue of ensuring the security, and civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and refugee populated areas, host Governments and the international community as a whole must ensure that a number of different security-related tasks are undertaken. These include the following:

- Maintaining law and order and creating a secure environment in refugee camps and refugee populated areas;
- Preventing refugees from engaging in subversive activities which could cause tensions between the host country and the country of origin;
- Disarming exiled groups who have access to weapons and curtailing any flow of arms into refugee populated areas;
- Separating bona fide refugees from those exiles who should be excluded from refugee status by virtue of their involvement in crimes against humanity, continued engagement in military activities or any other activity incompatible with refugee status under relevant conventions;
- Demobilizing exiled soldiers and other armed elements, and ensuring their effective reabsorption into civilian society.