

Backgrounder

CANADA AND THE UNHCR

The Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1951 with the mandate to provide refugees with international protection and to seek permanent solutions to refugee problems, including resettlement and repatriation.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person outside the country of his or her nationality who is unable to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Since the Convention's implementation, persons of concern to the UNHCR have come to include those who are outside their countries of origin in refugee-like situations, for example neutral victims of war.

In the past year, through the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada has helped the UNHCR cope with the tragic human legacies of civil unrest and war around the world. For example, it has contributed toward the UNHCR's efforts to provide care and maintenance to refugees from Ethiopia, Sudan and Myanmar, as well as Mozambican refugees living in camps in Malawi. Other contributions have gone toward the UNHCR's efforts in the repatriation of refugees returning home to Guatemala, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

At the request of the UN Secretary-General, the UNHCR is providing humanitarian aid to people affected by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia: refugees, displaced persons and local residents in need. The UNHCR has assumed the lead for the entire UN relief operation in the former Yugoslavia. Canadian peacekeeping efforts there, in co-operation with the UNHCR, have been instrumental in making humanitarian relief possible. Since July 1992, Canadian Forces have airlifted more than 6,000 metric tons of food and medical supplies into Sarajevo, where Canadian peacekeepers successfully opened and secured the airport. Canada's total contribution in humanitarian assistance for the victims of the conflict since July 1991 exceeds \$36 million, including \$1.75 million for the victims of sexual violence. A large portion of this funding was provided through the UNHCR, with some of it being channelled through other UN agencies as well as various Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Canada is one of the principal refugee resettlement countries in the world. In close co-operation with the Office of the UNHCR, Canada provides assistance to refugees through resettlement