



CROSSING BORDERS

international refugee campaign

RESOURCE PACK

PART TWO


SCI

A SOLIDARITY & PUBLIC AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGN

BY SERVICE CIVIL INTERNATIONAL


THE WORLD
OF REFUGEES

2



*I lost my house
my toys
my bicycle
I lost my street
my friends
my neighbours
I lost my city
the church and the hospital
I lost my country
I am a refugee
Can I enter your place
Can I have shelter
Can I cry in your arms
Can you hold me tight
I don't want to flee anymore*

Danella, 11 years
(Ex-Yugoslavia)



Part 2: The World Of Refugees

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Acknowledgements

SEED would like to thank the following for their contributions:

Kris Berwouts

Muzammil Cader

Erica Gürke

Photos courtesy of:

UNHCR

Ingrid Danckaerts

Why Are There Refugees?

The Third World is witnessing a flow of refugees which is constantly growing. The reasons for these population movements are to be found in the tensions and conflicts that continue to worsen in the southern part of the world. Some 93% of the refugees in the world live in the south.

Refugee flows and migration waves are not a new phenomena; they have occurred throughout the ages and they have given form to the world. Europe has also known (and is currently experiencing again) different waves of refugees from religious, ethnic or political minorities persecuted in their own country.

In southern countries colonisation has often provoked brutal and massive migrations. As soon as a region was "discovered" by the colonial powers, local communities risked being forcibly relocated to leave the most fertile land to colonists and to seek out an existence in less hospitable zones.

The western powers' fixation with nationalism and international borders, (very often arbitrary and not taking into account the precolonial divisions between peoples and cultures), has created numerous ethnic and religious conflicts. A lot of the new states started when they obtained political independence and thus inherited a totally artificial national identity. One of the most important migratory waves history has seen followed Indian independence and the subsequent partition of that subcontinent; eight million Indian muslims fled to Pakistan in 1947, and six million Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan for India.

On top of these fragile national identities, a huge number of southern countries, especially in Africa and southern Asia, dispose of very few natural resources; their

development therefore was heavily mortgaged from the beginning.

Economic exploitation

In the end the evergrowing economic disproportion between the north and the south is fundamentally responsible for the ruined state of the economy of a large number of southern states. In the last 30 years, these countries have endured a dramatic recession. The markets for their export products have been crushed and the prices fallen. Enormous loans have been taken, often following the "advice" of Western commercial banks, without any realistic hope of repayment.

There are often no other options open to such countries but to appeal to the International Monetary Fund, which then imposes harsh readjustment programmes for new loans. The burden of these programmes is invariably carried by the most vulnerable and the poorest of the community. In other words in order to survive people and whole communities have to work even harder merely to repay the cost of their governments debt accumulation.

National & International Conflicts

Without any doubt conflicts between nations are responsible for important flows of refugees. But the causes of these flows are as much to be found in the internal conflicts of southern states; the power struggle between classes or ethnic groups, political instability, repression etc..

An enormous number of southern countries find themselves in a vicious circle of violence. Their governments are only preoccupied with the privileges of a small elite. Opposition groups have no other choice than to take up arms, and the result is violence, guerilla

activities, counter-violence from the military and government authorities who are only representing themselves. Again it is the most vulnerable who lose each time, often with their lives. Violence and repression sow terror within the population and force thousands of people to seek refuge elsewhere.

Natural disasters & the degrading of the environment

Catastrophes such as floods, droughts and earthquakes are also responsible for the flight of a growing number of refugees. One of the most dramatic examples is the famine which occurred on several occasions during the last decade in the Horn of Africa. Combined with merciless civil wars and conflicts, it created a massive stream of refugees within and outside the territories of each national state.

But such disasters are very often no caprices of nature, or bad luck of people. People and governments are interfering in their environment in such a short-sighted and malicious manner that it is becoming more and more vulnerable. Overpopulation, overexploitation of soils and deforestation are very important causes of drought and floods. Those who are affected are, once again, the most vulnerable in society; nomads, peasants, landless laborers, shanty town inhabitants. For them there is no choice but exodus.

Development, rural exodus and overpopulation

It is generally known to the larger public what is happening to the indigenous communities of the Amazonian rainforest, but the same type of scenarios are being recreated on all continents.

Big and sometimes megalomaniacal development projects can also be responsible for the uprooting of a mass of refugees. For certain governments in southern countries, the construction of dams, highways, geothermal projects, nuclear plants etc..., can seem indispensable to guarantee the growth of the economy. To make this happen, local communities are

often considered by political and industrial circles as embarrassing obstacles. Such communities receive an order to go or face being displaced by force. They have to go to other areas where they are considered by the inhabitants as a disturbance, or they are placed in agriculturally poor or inaccessible areas.

Urbanisation is taking dramatic forms in the south. There is barely any future in living in rural areas for many people. Peasants do not have very much land or they are forced to grow cash crops for export. Governments deliberately favour cities and industries, and the countryside is politically and economically neglected. What follows is a massive rural exodus to the towns, which hold a certain fascination for people because of the perspective of better services, abundant consumer goods and plenty of jobs and opportunities. But most often the country people try in vain to build up a new life and a better existence in towns.

Tackling the problem at the roots

The problem of the refugees of the south will never be resolved if the problems are not tackled by the roots. They are diverse and complex. As long as wars rage in the south, and as long as the Third World is suffering from persecution, internal violence and external conflicts, the flows of refugees will never end. If nothing is done to restore the growing economic imbalance which exists between the north and the south, if the deterioration of the living conditions in the south is not stopped, if the destruction of the environment and the process of urbanisation continue to spiral out of control, if the mechanisms of global trade are not rectified, the numbers of refugees will continue to multiply. The south will never have a chance unless the north is prepared to share its material wealth and its welfare. Until that day individuals and communities will be forced to move in their legitimate search for a decent living.

Where do refugees come from?

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the situation of refugees in different regions and continents in the world. It is



impossible with such limited space to be completely exhaustive, but we do want however, with the help of some examples, to demonstrate that the phenomenon is a very complex one, and that it is not limited to certain conflict areas or to relatively small groups.

1. In Africa

Nobody knows how many refugees live in Africa, and the differences between the various estimates are enormous. This imprecision is partly due to the African context. Tensions are multiple and complex, communication is difficult and the information often slow and inaccurate. But masses of refugees come and go, fleeing civil wars, armed conflicts, famine and drought.

The problem is probably at its most acute in the Horn of Africa: Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. Sudan has been at war between 1955 and 1972, and since 1983 up to today. The North, Arabic and Islamic, dominates the animistic or Christian communities in the South. Some 450,000 Southern Sudanese have left their country for Kenya, Uganda or Ethiopia. From the latter they have been sent back after the fall of president Mengistu. Another 150,000 people have gathered at the border in the hope of being able to leave the country

when the need arises, and around 500,000 dwell in rural areas, trapped by battles. Some years ago, one million Ethiopians found refuge in neighbouring countries. Since the fall of Mengistu in 1992 a return process has slowly started. Somalia is a country that no longer exists, where the state has ceased to function. Its infrastructure has crumbled, the country is divided between clans and sub-clans producing a displaced population of 1.4 million people. Half of these seek refuge in neighbouring countries, the rest dwell in their own country.

The largest groups of refugees in southern Africa come from Angola and Mozambique. These two former Portuguese colonies won their liberation struggles in 1975. These victories substantially changed the balance of power in southern Africa which, up until then, had been one "apartheid" bastion with the Portuguese colonies and South Africa (then occupying Namibia and Ian Smith's Rhodesia). South Africa then began an extremely violent and destructive destabilisation policy in Angola and Mozambique, supporting the armed opposition groups of Unita (in Angola) and Renamo (in Mozambique). These "civil wars" have totally destroyed the post-colonial states in these countries. Millions of people have been killed, the infrastructure has been almost completely shattered and millions of

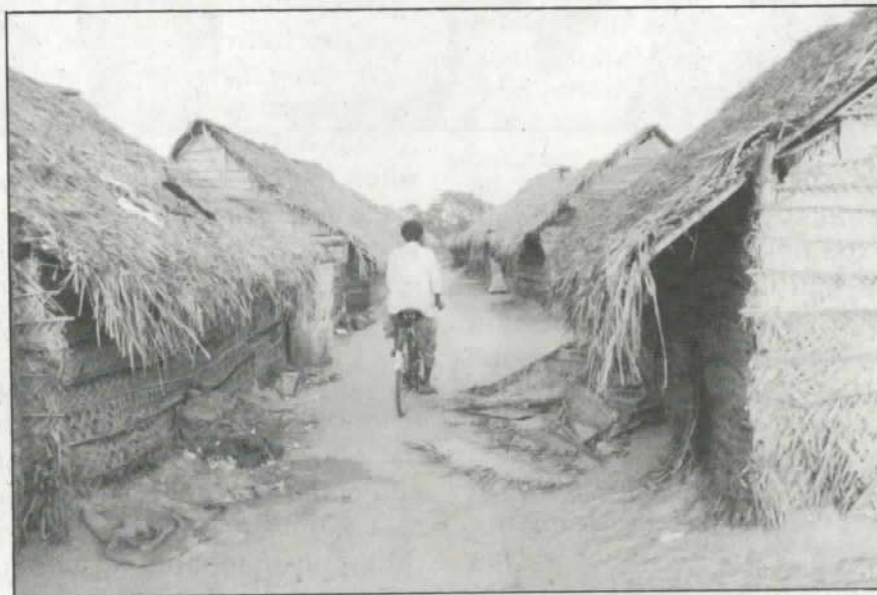
people have fled to neighbouring countries (especially Malawi and Zimbabwe), or within their own country.

Ceasefires were proclaimed in the early nineties, followed by negotiations and peace agreements. Mozambique is actually working at its reconstruction, but in Angola Unita restarted the war following their defeat in the recent general elections.

In December 1989, Charles Taylor and his NPFL army started a rebellion against president Doe in Liberia. Five years later, this

the southern Casamance province witnessed a new outburst of separatism. Another example is the situation of the Tuareg in Mali and Niger. Tens of thousands of Tuareg have fled to Mauritania where they live in refugee camps, deprived of their livelihood and traumatised.

Another case, still unresolved is that of the Sahrawi people who fled from the Western Sahara after the Moroccan occupation that followed the withdrawal of the Spanish colonisers. They live in Tindouf, on Algerian



conflict has turned into total chaos and half of the population has fled.

Elsewhere the nineties have been very confusing in a number of other African states. A lot of countries started a democratisation process which in certain cases was interrupted, leaving these countries in a structural vacuum with an unstable and uncertain situation on all levels resulting in the movement of large parts of their populations. This has for instance been the case in Togo, Burundi and Zaire and, most dramatically, in Rwanda.

Very often ethnic or regional tensions turn into armed conflicts which create sudden and massive refugee populations. This is among others the case in Senegal where

soil, vegetating in camps since 1975. The Sahrawi have been forgotten, the UN has seemingly lost interest and Algeria fails to support them as it used to, while King Hassan II slowly realises his plan to integrate the Western Sahara into Greater Morocco.

2. In Asia

The Afghan refugees are the largest group of refugees in the world today. According to the High Commissioner for Refugees one and a half million of them are registered in Pakistan, and two other million in Iran. Another million live in other countries, especially northern India. Most of them are inhabitants of the countryside who have been fleeing the cruelties imposed by the Kabul regime and Soviet occupation since 1978.

At the other end of Asia, in former Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) revolutionary changes have taken place in 1975: pro-Western regimes have had to make way for radical communist governments. This initiated a massive exodus, which only began to slow down a few years ago.

Violent conflicts between different communities in Sri Lanka have chased hundreds of thousands of people away from their homes. A lot of Tamils have sought refuge within the Tamil community of India in the state Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan Muslim community has no such place to go, and many find themselves as "displaced" people in different refugee camps in their own country.

In Myanmar (formerly Burma), the murderous repression of the student rebellion in the Summer of 1988 provoked a flow of refugees which quickly expanded into other groups in society. This flow is continuing even today. A specific group who have been forced to leave the country are the Rohingyas, the Muslim minority of Myanmar. They have sought shelter in Bangladesh, where local NGOs are having great difficulty in obtaining permission to work with them.

The small kingdom of Bhutan only counts 600,000 inhabitants. During the last few years, 70,000 of them fled to Nepal and 10,000 to India. They are Hindus of Nepalese origin and their human rights are being systematically violated, with the approval of the king, by the Bhuddist majority of the country.

3. In the Middle East

The refugees of Palestine constitute a special case. They became refugees after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and the successive conflicts in the Middle East. The largest number, more than one million, live in Jordan. Since 1952 they have had the right to Jordanian nationality and they can also hold public office. Around 320,000 Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon, half of them in 13 camps. More than 300,000 live in the Arab Republic of Syria, 30% of them in one of 10 camps, mostly around

Damascus. Some 472,000 refugees live in Cisjordan (25% in one of 20 camps). More than 580,000 refugees live in the Gaza strip. The Gaza strip moreover only measures 40 km long, and is between 6 & 10 km wide. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, (1,800 per/km) and the birth rate is also one of the highest in the world.

4. In Latin America

Latin America has gone through several migration waves. Cubans to Miami, people from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay to Europe, central Americans to neighbouring countries or Florida, people from Haiti to New York etc.. In the nineties, Latin America as a whole is still marked by poverty and the absence of real democracy. There are plenty of examples, such as the post-Sandinista misery in Nicaragua, the military repression in Haiti which has created a general sense of despair, political manipulation in Venezuela, the inextricable mixture of poverty, drugs, war and terrorism from which Peruvians and Bolivians are suffering etc... All these factors and many others will continue to force people to move in dramatic circumstances.

5. In Europe

Since the end of the Second World War a lot of eastern Europeans have asked for asylum in Western Europe. Their number has increased considerably during the last few years since the fall of the Berlin wall and the war* following the desintegration of former Yugoslavia. Often these people are attracted by the material prosperity that the free market economies of western Europe claim to guarantee. The conflicts in former Yugoslavia, but also in the Caucasus, generate refugee flows, including deserters and conscientious objectors who refuse to be part of an army which commits massacres and ethnic purification.

The number of asylum seekers from other continents also grew in the last number of years, with people coming from Turkey, Iran, Sri Lanka, India, Ghana, and Zaire. Although Europe still hosts no more than 7% of the refugees in the world, it seeks to close its doors more and more hermetically.

DEFINITIONS AND

The advent of the Cold War and subsequent political developments in Central and Eastern Europe created new waves of refugees in the late forties. As a result the General Assembly of the United Nations founded the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in 1950. The task of the new structure was the international protection of all refugees, and to search for permanent solutions to the associated problems. Their mandate was strictly humanitarian and apolitical.

1. The Geneva Convention, Protocol and the convention of the OAU

The Geneva Convention for Refugees (1951), completed by the Protocol of New York (1967), defined a refugee as: *"A person who has left his country of origin and who is not able or does not wish to return to that country owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"*.

This definition however does not take into account victims of wars, civil wars, and natural catastrophies. Those who flee famine, or are "displaced", (also called "internal" refugees because they do not cross an international border), are not included in this definition. The Convention also only makes reference to individual asylum seekers, while the reality of the Third World often forces groups, and in some instances, whole communities to flee en masse.

For these reasons, the Convention of the Organisation for African Unity

introduced a broader definition in 1969 which defined a refugee as: *"Any person who, owing to aggression, external occupation, foreign domination, or of events seriously disturbing public order, in a region of, or throughout the whole of his country of origin, or of that country of which he is a citizen, is forced to leave his place of residence to seek refuge in another country"*.

Refoulement is a technical term used to indicate the forced return of refugees to their country of origin, where their life or their liberty is endangered. The non-refoulement principle implies that a signatory country of the Geneva Convention is obliged to seriously investigate the request of an asylum seeker before sending him/her back to his/her own, or to a third country. In theory nobody can be sent to a country where he is feeling threatened. In practice however, refoulement continues to exist because there are various interpretations of what a "well-founded fear" is. Very often, a refugee is sent back to a country through which he has already passed, after having left his own country. If this country refuses him access, he becomes a "refugee in orbit", a refugee who is accepted nowhere.

2. Political refugees and economic migrants:

It would be incorrect to call all the refugees recognised under the Convention "political refugees", because political convictions are only one of the five causes accepted by the convention. Economic motives are not mentioned in the convention as a cause giving access to the refugee status. Therefore a clear

TERMINOLOGIES

distinction exists between refugees *per se* and economic migrants, within the definition of the Geneva Convention. In reality however a clear distinction between refugees and economic migrants is not always easy to make. But we can indicate some features of those different types of migration.

Waves of refugees often loom up suddenly, in very tense and dangerous circumstances. People start to move generally in large numbers, and one of the consequences of those who flee is that they lose their income and their status. Refugees leave their home for uncertain and sometimes unknown destinations, to a region where they have no relatives nor friends, and where the local population does not expect them.

Voluntary migrants often have more time to plan their migration. They may have the advantage of going to a corner of the world where they have friends or relatives, and where their labour and skills will be appreciated and rewarded.

In much of the literature on migrants and refugees, when talking about factors which determine migration, a distinction is made between "factors that push" and "factors that pull". On the one hand, everything which obliges people to leave their home and live elsewhere, on the other hand the attractiveness of a new destination, a new home for migrants. Certain migrants have positive reasons for leaving home; they seek to maximise the gains of economic dynamics in other regions, they want to continue their education, to learn new methods or simply to broaden their life experience. In the case of refugees, the push factors

are more important; they flee because their life, their freedom or their welfare is threatened.

The term "political refugee" is false because there are reasons other than political persecution which are accepted by the Convention as a valid reason for being granted refugee status. The term "economic refugee" is equally false; it indicates people who leave their home for economic reasons and who seek asylum. People who leave their home only for economic reasons are not recognised as refugees by the different international legislations and conventions as they exist today.

3. Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is a foreigner who seeks to be granted refugee status. A foreigner is an asylum seeker from the moment he arrives to ask for asylum, until the moment that the High Commission recognises him as refugee. When an asylum seeker is not given refugee status, after having used all the possibilities for appeal, he has no right to stay in that country. When he stays without the necessary documents allowing him on that territory, he becomes illegal.

4. "De facto refugees"

There are refugees who do not respond to the criteria of the Geneva Convention e.g. because there is no individual persecution, but do receive judicial protection via humanitarian status, because they cannot return to their own country for serious reasons, e.g. refugees from the war in former Yugoslavia. They are referred to as "de facto refugees".

Focus On Women Refugees

The SCI campaign statement singles out women and children as a group in need of special protection and assistance. Women and children share the protection problems of all refugees and displaced persons. However because of their gender and age they are especially vulnerable to exploitation and violence and face particular hardships during their flight. Refugee women also have specific difficulties in obtaining refugee status as well as during the process of settlement and integration in the asylum country. The fact that 80% of the 19 million refugees in the world today are women and children shows that their special needs and problems are by no means marginal issues, but are actually the concern of the majority of refugees.

Effects of displacement

Uprootedness affects refugees in many different ways: they must cope with new environments, new languages, new social and economic roles, as well as new family structures. In addition to this, they must come to terms with the often traumatic experiences that forced them to flee. Families may become separated during flight, some family members may be missing or dead. Traditional family patterns are thus disrupted and, in the absence of male family members, women often find themselves solely responsible for the welfare of the family. In intact families, women are also confronted with the changes in female/male roles. Frequently the husband is unemployed and no longer able to support the family. Women may have to take on jobs outside the household to earn some money. The new role of women and the men's failure to fully support the family can lead to serious family tensions, depression and domestic violence.

Parent/child relationships are also affected by the displacement of families. Younger family members adjust more quickly to a new environment and pick up new languages more easily. As a consequence, children can find employment that is unavailable for their parents. They also become the source of information and the translators for their parents; thus children take on the typical role of the parent. These changes in roles tend to increase tensions between the generations.

Finding a safe refuge

During their flight refugee women and children are in danger of being victimised by army and resistance units, border guards, pirates, male refugees and others. Women who have been widowed or separated from husbands and brothers are particularly exposed to physical and sexual abuse. The abuse may take the form of abduction and/or rape, or it may be an offer of protection, documents or assistance in exchange for sexual favours.

Life in large refugee camps is often problematic for women and children. Cramped conditions, ethnic tension and the collapse of community structures affect primarily the most vulnerable, since traditional protection and support mechanisms no longer function.

On reaching a country of asylum, refugee women face new problems, especially in the obtaining of refugee status. Unlike most developing countries, the majority of industrialised countries require refugees to prove that their situation conforms with the official definition of a refugee. The UN Convention Regarding the Status of Refugees does not reflect some of the gen-

der-specific forms of persecution that force women to flee. For instance, women may fear harsh or inhuman treatment because of having transgressed their society's laws or customs regarding the role of women. Or women flee their country because of severe sexual discrimination either by official bodies or in local communities. In some cases, women have to flee due to having been the victim of a crime carrying a social stigma, such as rape. Women can also be victimised because of a male relative's political activities. In all these cases refugee women have difficulty justifying their claim to refugee status.

Even where the reason for persecution clearly conforms to the official special problems, since persecution of women often takes the form of sexual abuse, the female victim may be reluctant to speak about her experiences, particularly to a male interviewer and/or interpreter.

Settlement and integration

For refugees who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin, resettlement in an asylum country has to become a durable solution. Adjustment to the new culture and society can be difficult, especially for refugees who have fled from rural areas or developing countries to industrialised nations. In addition to this, refugees may encounter racial intolerance as well as sexual and cultural discrimination. Furthermore, the host country may not be willing to give refugees easy access to language instruction, schooling and health care. This means, for example, that not all refugee children receive elementary education, although the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees explicitly affirms the fundamental right of refugee children to

education. Settling in the asylum country, women often need new skills in order to be able to support themselves and their families. Cultural constraints however, or the lack of child day-care facilities can keep them from enrolling in training courses and from accepting work outside their own household. Also, many training programmes are not accessible to illiterate women - a serious problem for those refugee women who were not able to obtain elementary education in their country of origin. But if they are qualified for employment, refugee women often have to deal with the problem of racism and sexism when they look for work. The fact that many refugee women overcome the numerous difficulties they face in the asylum country shows that they make tremendous efforts to adjust to their new situation. If they are given the necessary protection and assistance, refugee women can and do successfully rebuild their lives in a new country.

The Case of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh

The following "case-study" clearly illustrates the different dimensions of the refugee problem when masses of people flee. It analyses the situation in the country of origin causing the exodus, the effects of the refugee-presence on the wider community in the country of refuge, and points out the responsibilities towards a solution of all groups involved; the refugees, the country of origin, the hosting community and the whole world.

"We are getting rations to live. But we are as if in a prison. We cannot go outside the camps for fear of arrest. We fear being attacked." These are some typical responses of the refugees. On the other hand the local people allege that thousands of refugees have already slipped out of the camps and spread to the villages and cities. The total number of Rohingya-refugees now living in Bangladesh is about 250,000. This number in the camp region outnumbered the local population.

A. The crisis.

All began in June 1991 and has now reached its peak. As of September 1993, about 2,300 refugees had died and 3,300 have since been born. Pressure on the habitation, environment, and local resources has increased. Over and above it, the locals are frightened of the "behaviour of the refugees". On the other hand the refugees have their share of apprehension and suffering.

The Rohingyas case did not begin in 1991. In 1978 about 2000 Rohingyas took refuge in Bangladesh during the so-called "King Dragon Operation". But they returned to Arakan, Myanmar (formerly Burma) within a year and the camps were closed. But this time the case is not seen as so easy. This is because of the attitude of the Myanmar government to this issue.

The locals are a very unhappy lot with the refugees. They claim the prices of essential commodities have shot up because of their influx. The situation is rather tense. The locals who live scattered in villages are scared of the refugees who live together.

B. The case of Human Rights.

The key issue around which all others evolve is one of citizenship and of nationality. Are the Rohingyas citizens of Burma or not? If they are, then Myanmar is their home, whatever their religion.

If any person, or group, is not allowed to live in one's own country, than it becomes an issue of Human Rights. In the current crisis, it is this issue, more than any other, that needs to be tackled first.

The 1974 census showed that the Muslim population in Myanmar was growing fast, much faster than the majority population, and this especially so in Arakan. This did trigger acts of severe repression of the Rohingyas, making the whole issue a religious affair. It could be suggested that the religious angle was somewhat deliberately brought to the force by the Myanmar government, to the extent that in recent years, in spite of Myanmar being a "secular" country, it is now almost officially a country of the population of the majority. There seems to be a bit of an effort to turn Myanmar into a nation of pure Burmese, as a result of which fringe groups like the Rohingyas suffer.

One other focal point could be land, the Rohingya land itself, the Arakan. The shore-belt of Arakan is very rich in deposits of petroleum in places like Rathedaung and the Rhambres Islands. The coastal waters of Arakan are also very rich in fish, the tapping of which has only recently begun. There is also the presence of iron, coal, and possibly uranium, as revealed in recent geological surveys. All these are besides the fertile paddy and of Arakan.

The Rohingya problem must be viewed in the context of the entire human rights situation of Myanmar; not just Rohingyas but all the ethnic groups in that country. Arakan is of military importance to Myanmar, and could be used as a buffer zone in case of any war in South Asia. It must be noted that in the national development policies of Myanmar, military considerations have always been the most important. An unpublished note reveals that in 1990 & '91 the Myanmar army extended its military bases near Buthidaung township and in the Lauk-Way-Duk tract, causing hundreds of local families (mostly Rohingyas) to leave their homes, without any provision of rehabilitation. It is these families that have formed part of the initial Rohingya refugee group that migrated to Bangladesh during the current crisis.

It is worth considering the inherent weakness of the Rohingya groups taking part in the struggle for their rights. Of these, the "Rohingya Patriotic Front", once the strongest group, is not much in the headlines these days. There is a great deal of illiteracy among the Rohingyas and their leaders are thus reduced to being almost a "primitive people" by certain groups which have capitalised on the situation. With this type of leadership can the Rohingyas hope to emerge as a group strong enough to face the rest of Myanmar, to face them as a group of morally and spiritually strong?

C. Solidarity and Action.

All the human rights organisations and citizens in Bangladesh must jointly express strong concern over the human rights violations in the context of the Rohingya influx situation. Such as the right of the Rohingyas to be accepted as fullyfledged citizens of Myanmar and to be able to return to their homeland Arakan without fear. Also on the rights, especially of the women and children, in the refugee camps to health, sanitation, food, clothing and adequate shelter, and the need for the Rohingyas to be able to live as normal human beings, free from fear or harassment of any sort.

All the human rights organisation and NGO's, who are in a position to do so, should arrange to send volunteer workers, female and male, to work in the camps, especially in the field of health and sanitation. The refugee situation is an opportunity for service and a challenge to the social workers of Bangladesh.

There is an immediate need for human rights workers to be there among the people in Taknaf, Ramu, Ukhia, and the villages near the refugee camps. The cordiality on the part of the Bangladeshis is gradually loosening, due to the long presence of the refugees there, and the life of the local people is becoming harder due to this fact. The pressure on the local resources, on food supply, local employment opportunities, and on the ecological environment, can cause an explosion of tension and can even lead to strong resentment and violence. It could even be suggested that the refugees leave Bangladesh regardless of the conditions of the Myanmar government.

The Rohingya case is clearly one of Myanmar's own creation and one that really concerns that country internally. However, there is a strong international dimension to it, and Bangladesh cannot remain silent in these circumstances, nor any other country of the world. For many reasons, Bangladesh cannot afford to keep the Rohingya refugees for much longer. Whether that what has been possible in similar situations in other countries - that is, the integration of the refugees in the country of asylum - is possible or not in Bangladesh, is a big question. "If the rich west cannot afford a few thousand, how could a poor country like Bangladesh afford hundreds of

thousands?", is the question currently being asked.

There is no dispute about the consensus that all refugees must go back. But how could they go back, if the conditions at home do not allow to do so? The element that seems to run through the Rohingya refugees living in the camps is that of fear - the fear of what will happen to them when they go back to Arakan. This strong sense of foreboding tends to hold back the movement of return, or their desire to return.

A case for the "Crossing Borders" campaign to lobby for the rights of the Rohingya refugees.



The World Of Refugees in Numbers?

There is a lot of statistical material available concerning refugees; we could easily add an impressive number of pages of numbers. But we won't, because too many numbers don't make the overall picture any clearer, plus none of the statistics concerning refugees are anywhere near exact.

Let us here just give you a breakdown by continent, to give you an idea of the magnitude of the problem, and to point out, once again, that the South gets to carry the bulk of the burden of hosting refugees.

In Part Four of this Resource Pack you will find some more statistics. Bear in mind that these are only meant as examples, to give a rough idea, for they are incomplete and often incorrect.

According to the UNHCR statistics as of December 1993, there are:

IN	REFUGEES
Africa.....	7,450,100
Asia.....	5,773,500
Europe.....	6,005,600
Latin America.....	130,900
North America.....	1,290,800
Oceania.....	50,400
Former Soviet Union.....	2,280,700
For a grand total of .. 23,032,900 refugees globally	

This is the number of people for whom the UNHCR is responsible for protection and assistance, and thus the number for which they have statistics broken down by country of origin and shelter.

However, to illustrate how incorrect this information is: the same UNHCR estimates there are a total of 20 million "real refugees" (have fled their country), plus an estimated 24 million "Internally Displaced People" (fled within their own country). This second group

is barely represented in the above figure of approximately 23 million. It is estimated that by far most of these people are in the South, making the balance weigh even more towards the South than would appear out of the statistics.

Or to give a specific example: in Sri Lanka (where our local SCI-branch works actively with refugees; see case study in Part One of this Resource Pack), the UNHCR statistics show a total of 35,900 refugees, while one Irish NGO lists 600,000 refugees, and our case-study speaks of 41,000 refugees in the Puttalam region alone.

Why is it so hard to obtain exact statistical information?

- With large scale refugee movements, there is often neither the time nor the logistic means to keep track of numbers.
- Refugee populations are often "fluid": people moving in & out of camps,...
- We mostly rely on UNHCR for statistics. They are not present wherever there are refugees, plus they often depend on local governments and others to provide the information.
- Decreases in refugee numbers often go unnoticed, unrecorded or recorded much later.
- There is a natural tendency (by media etc.) to overestimate the numbers. (And a tendency by those responsible to underestimate?)
- Statistics are often quite outdated by the time they get published. For instance, while in '94 we used the statistics for '92, it now appears that the world refugee population decreased by some one and a half million in 1993, and that major shifts, both in increases and decreases, occurred in many troublespots etc...

But let us not get too caught up in statistics and their correctness: it's really all about the human faces behind them!

The World Of Refugees In Numbers?





Solidarity, Exchange & Education for Development

Published by:

SCI - SEED, Draakstraat 37, B-2018 Antwerp, Belgium

With the support of:

The European Commission (Directorate General for Development)

