



The Year in Review

The war on terror dominated the refugee situation in the world, permitting some refugees to return, provoking others to flight, and sometimes undermining refugee protection. *Survey* Editor Merrill Smith evaluates the trends.

by Merrill Smith

Throughout 2002, the war on terror reverberated for refugees worldwide. In some cases, it had positive consequences for people displaced by violence and persecution. In other cases, however, the ironic consequence of the war on terror was increased suffering for uprooted victims of terror. Around the world, governments used the threat of terrorism—actual and exaggerated—as pretexts for generalized crack-downs on ethnic discontent, religious non-conformity, and political dissent, resulting in widespread displacement.

The war's most notable positive consequence for refugees was the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, enabling millions of Afghans, at long last, to return home. Unfortunately, their country remained physically devastated and politically unstable, leaving many of those who returned vulnerable and inhibiting many more from returning.

Peace in the Middle East, moved farther out of sight, leaving millions of Palestinian refugees unsettled even after 50 years. As suicide bombings sharply increased, the Israeli military conducted attacks in several refugee camps. Palestinian gunmen had already compromised the civilian character of the camps, but Israeli soldiers were not above using civilians as human shields and carrying out collective punishments.

Most of the wealthy countries of Europe, North America, and Australia, citing security concerns, tightened their asylum systems and refugee admissions programs. The United States severely restricted the number of refugees it admitted; resettling only 27,000

in fiscal year 2002, the lowest number in the program's history. The U.S. government also cited terrorism to justify the detention of Haitian asylum seekers, even though no Haitian had been implicated in terrorism.

Russia's war on terror included mass sweeps of young men in civilian areas of Chechnya. Chechen rebels did carry out at least one terrorist act in 2002, but the Russian military summarily executed, disappeared, tortured and/or kidnapped for ransom hundreds of people. The ongoing fighting and human rights violations were a major obstacle to return for Chechens who had fled to neighboring Ingushetia.

In Colombia, the United States became more directly involved in the conflict, authorizing the use of U.S. military aid not only for the war on drugs, but also for the Colombian armed forces' counter-insurgency activities. The shift risked intensifying the conflict and possibly leading to even greater internal displacement. The United States cited as a rationale its designation of Colombia's three main insurgent groups as terrorist organizations.

Characterizing it as part of the war on terror, China conducted a campaign since the September 11 attacks that included executions and sweeping arrests of minority Uighurs and Tibetans, and intensified suppression of their languages, cultures, and religions. With crucial U.S. backing, the Chinese prevailed upon the UN Security Council to endorse their contention that one of the Uighur separatist groups was terrorist, but the United States was soon compelled to caution China not to use the war on terror as an excuse to suppress dissent.

In the Philippines, the rebel group Abu Sayyaf's reported links to Al Qaeda led to joint U.S.-Filipino military actions. The Armed Forces of the Philippines re-

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portedly engaged in disappearances and summary executions, looting and destruction of homes, and indiscriminate bombardment of schools and evacuation centers, resulting in the displacement of thousands. Landmines placed by the rebels also endangered civilians and hindered return.

Bangladesh responded to reports of an Al Qaeda presence on its eastern frontier by compelling some 800 Muslim Rohingya refugees to repatriate to Burma. The Burmese military, in turn, also cited the reports to justify its ongoing repression of the Rohingya.

With the international community's attention focused on the war on terror, African refugee camps were attacked in several countries with impunity. The limited international intervention that did take place produced hopeful results in Sierra Leone and Eritrea, enabling thousands to return. But the most positive development for refugees on the continent—peace in Angola, which en-

abled 900,000 displaced persons to return—was made possible purely by the death of the country's top rebel leader.

Terrorists pose real threats to peace and security, not only because of their violent attacks on innocents, but also because of their opportunistic attempts to infiltrate and co-opt broader movements of ethnic, religious, and social dissent. Governments have rarely needed encouragement to violate human rights in suppressing such movements, but the international community, instead of upholding human rights, has increasingly issued a blank check of complicity in their violation, drawn on the war on terror. The consequences have included the further internal and external flight of victims and an even more precarious situation for them after they become uprooted.

Governments have a duty to protect their citizens from acts of terror on the part of nonstate actors, but they must also protect them from human rights violations on



North Korean asylum seeker rushes into Japanese consulate in Shenyang, northeastern China in May 2002; police officers hold back one of his relatives. *Photo: AP/Yonhap*

the part of their own agents. Governments need to distinguish refugees from terrorists, but their duty is to protect refugees as well as the security of the state. As strategic interests and *realpolitik* become dominant modes of thinking in the new world order, states and the international community are failing to strike this crucial balance.

In fact, full refugee protection generally includes refugee status determinations, entailing individualized scrutiny of refugee claims. This can be a far more effective way to isolate and intercept terrorists and other security risks than generally excluding or cracking down on asylum seekers. The durable solutions to displacement—voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement—are also more constructive long-term approaches than the false expedients of indefinite human warehousing in festering isolation, harassment, and/or forcible return to persecution. Policymakers might consider which approach constitutes the more genuine victory over terrorism.

Below are more general summaries of the situations that faced refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons around the world in 2002.

Africa

Two trends dominated 2002 in Africa, where some 3 million refugees and approximately 10.7 million internally displaced people struggled through the year.

The first trend—armed assailants often repeatedly attacking defenseless uprooted people living in camps and settlements—struck at the heart of the refugee system, which if nothing else is supposed to provide physical protection to frightened populations in need of refuge. The year's second trend—refugees and displaced persons in countries emerging from long, bloody civil wars going home in unexpectedly large, rapid, and voluntary returns—offered hope that at least some of the continent's previously intractable conflicts have ended.

In Uganda, an armed rebel group known as "the Lord's Resistance Army" killed some 60 Sudanese refugees and an even larger number of displaced Ugandans in a series of attacks against camps and displacement sites. Rebels have killed at least 180 Sudanese refugees since 1996.

In Liberia, combatants on all sides of the country's renewed civil war repeatedly attacked sites sheltering Sierra Leonean refugees and displaced Liberians, forcing already-uprooted families to flee again. Soldiers robbed, raped, and killed unknown numbers of uprooted people and de-

stroyed Liberia's largest refugee camp. Combatants extorted money from civilians trying to flee the country, trapping thousands of people at the border in an insidious pay-to-escape racket.

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In Côte d'Ivoire, three new rebel groups materialized virtually overnight in late 2002 and launched a civil war against the government, pushing tens of thousands of Liberian refugees from villages where they had lived for a decade or more. At year's end, some 8,000 Liberian refugees remained trapped at the country's main camp, thousands of others were unaccounted for, and UNHCR was desperately trying to arrange the transfer of Liberian refugees to a safer location.

In Congo-Kinshasa, up to 20,000 Sudanese refugees fled into the bush when ethnic violence among local residents overtook two refugee settlements in the country's remote northeast corner. It was the second time in five years that vio-

lence in Congo-Kinshasa forced Sudanese refugees to flee from their place of refuge.

Although armed attacks against refugees and internally displaced populations were the most dramatic occurrences during 2002, other forms of pressure and abuse undermined the protection of Africa's uprooted.

Authorities in Tanzania used harsh rhetoric and artificial deadlines to pressure 75,000 refugees to repatriate to neighboring Burundi and Rwanda. In Rwanda, government officials forced nearly 10,000 refugees to repatriate to an unstable and potentially dangerous area of Congo-Kinshasa. In Congo-Kinshasa, rebel soldiers and their supporters reportedly forced Rwandan refugees and asylum seekers to repatriate without allowing UNHCR to screen them to ensure the returns were voluntary.

In West Africa, security officials, local merchants, refugee leaders, and even some humanitarian aid workers sexually exploited refugee women and children on a regular basis. Although investigators disagreed about the pervasiveness of the problem, UNHCR and private humanitarian organizations established new codes of conduct and acknowledged privately that sexual exploitation of vulnerable refugees is chronic and not confined to West Africa.

Despite the sobering reality that safe havens remain unsafe or unreliable for hundreds of thousands of African refugees, 2002 also brought a welcome reminder that seemingly interminable wars can eventually come to an end, enabling long-term refugees and displaced families to return home voluntarily—often with surprising abruptness.

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An estimated 340,000 African refugees repatriated and about 1.3 million displaced persons returned to their homes during the year.

The guns suddenly fell silent in Angola's civil war when the main rebel leader died in combat in early 2002, enabling 900,000 uprooted Angolans to head home to restart their lives in areas that had been cut off from the outside world for many years. Even larger numbers of Angolans are expected to return home during 2003.

Sierra Leone enjoyed its first full year of peace since civil war erupted there in 1991. A democratic presidential election and the presence of 17,000 UN peacekeeping troops gave approximately 90,000 Sierra Leonean refugees confidence to repatriate—one-third more returnees than originally expected for the year—joined by nearly 500,000 internally displaced persons who also reintegrated. Humanitarian aid organizations in Sierra Leone raced to keep up with the large homeward population movements and marveled as destroyed towns sprang to life.

On the other side of the continent, 20,000 Eritrean refugees repatriated from Ethiopia and Djibouti after a generation in exile, marking the beginning of a final stage of

national reconciliation after the 30-year war for Eritrean independence, which ended in 1991. In neighboring Somalia, some 20,000 refugees ended a decade of exile by repatriating to the country's relatively stable northern region, known as Somaliland.

Events of 2002—good as well as bad—did not significantly change the roster of countries most affected by the continent's population upheaval. The five largest sources of uprooted people in Africa at year's end were Sudan, Angola, Congo-Kinshasa, Burundi, and Somalia, accounting for more than two-thirds of all uprooted people in Africa. The five African countries providing shelter to the largest refugee populations were Tanzania, Sudan, Congo-Kinshasa, Zambia, and Kenya.

East Asia and the Pacific

The plight of North Korean refugees in China was the year's major refugee story of the East Asia/Pacific region, and for the first time captured more than fleeting international attention. Policymakers and officials from several countries



Rwandan mother and son repatriate from Tanzania. They were among 30,000 Rwandan refugees given by the authorities until December 31, 2002 to repatriate or be removed by force.

Photo: USCR/J. Frushone

took action in support of the refugees, particularly after dozens of North Koreans, in separate incidents, sought protection at diplomatic missions in China. While China eventually allowed most of the asylum seekers to travel to South Korea, it also took steps to prevent future incidents.

In previous years, nongovernmental organizations estimated that as many as 200,000 to 300,000 North Koreans lived underground in China, mostly in the border region. In 2002, however, China's reported *refoulement* of thousands of refugees may have reduced that number. China regards all fleeing North Koreans as economic migrants despite the likelihood of imprisonment, torture, or death upon return to North Korea.

Although little progress toward the refugees' protection had been made by year's end, North Korean refugee activists worldwide mobilized behind a perceived opportunity for a breakthrough. International media increasingly focused on North Korea, driven by the nuclear weapons standoff and potential destabilization of the Korean peninsula.

During the year, Australia solidified its restrictive new approach toward asylum seekers, initiated in September 2001. Under the "Pacific Solution," as it has become known, Australia transfers unauthorized boat arrivals to Nauru and Papua New Guinea, where they are detained in Australian-run camps pending resolution of their refugee claims. During the year, Australia and UNHCR decided the claims of some 1,500 asylum seekers—mostly Afghans and Iraqis—on those "offshore" processing locations. About 700 prevailed in their claims, and most were resettled in Australia or elsewhere. Australia offered US\$1,100 to each Afghan denied asylum or with a pending case to agree to return home, resulting in about 300 going back. Australia also continued, on an ad hoc basis, to remove islands from its territorial migration zone in order to deny asylum seekers who arrive there access to Australia's domestic asylum laws, which include the right to appeal.

On May 20, East Timor achieved independence after more than 20 years of Indonesian occupation and 31 months of UN stewardship. In September, the new country joined the United Nations as the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. In December, it became the 145th nation to ratify the UN Refugee Convention. Also in December, UNHCR invoked the Convention's cessation clause with respect to East Timorese refugees. Some 32,000 returned home, mostly from the Indonesian province of West Timor. UNHCR estimated that 28,000 East Timorese remained

there at year's end, and Indonesia said it would grant them citizenship.

Indonesia itself had some 600,000 to 1 million internally displaced persons at the close of 2002, a reduction of at least 300,000 from the previous year. In December, separatists from the province of Aceh—one of many areas of displacement—signed a peace agreement with the government, giving rise to cautious optimism that the 26-year-old armed struggle might end. At year's end, however, sporadic political violence was still occurring.

In neighboring Malaysia, the government began enforcing new immigration laws mandating harsh penalties, including whipping, for undocumented migrants. No excep-

tions were made for refugees or asylum seekers. Subsequently, Malaysian police arrested at least 125 asylum seekers—Indonesian Acehnese and Burmese Rohingya—as well as some UNHCR-approved Acehnese refugees.

In the Philippines, ongoing conflict between the government and Islamic separatists on the southern island of Mindanao, coupled with joint U.S.-Phillipine military operations in the war on terrorism, uprooted more than 90,000 people.

Thousands who fled in previous years were able to return to their homes on Mindanao in 2002, but landmines, destruction, and ongoing fighting prevented others from returning. The government officially closed some evacuation centers, leaving many displaced persons stranded without assistance.

In early 2002, UNHCR signed an agreement with Vietnam and Cambodia to repatriate some 1,000 Montagnard asylum seekers who fled a government crackdown following ethnic unrest in Vietnam's central highlands during 2001. The agreement soon collapsed, however, the two governments coerced refugees to return and Vietnam reneged on a commitment to allow UNHCR to monitor conditions of return. After the United States resettled the remaining Montagnards and Cambodia said it would accept no more, UNHCR closed its camps. At year's end, reports of ethnic persecution in the Vietnamese highlands continued.

The political, human rights, and displacement situation in Burma remained grave throughout 2002, despite hopeful signs in May when authorities released democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi after 19 months of house arrest. During the year, the military junta systematically raped Shan women and girls and committed other abuses against ethnic minorities. At year's end, many of the 500,000 Burmese refugees had been outside of their country, particularly in Thailand, for nearly 15 years.

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South and Central Asia

Afghan refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers faced dramatic changes: the invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 2001 by U.S.-led coalition forces, the defeat of the Taliban regime, the hot pursuit of remnant Al Qaeda fighters, tentative steps toward nation-building in Kabul, and a new, internationally-supported government.

In effect, the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States led, in 2002, to the largest refugee repatriation in decades. More than 1.8 million refugees ventured back into Afghanistan—1.5 million from Pakistan and 300,000 from Iran—nearly double the number anticipated by UNHCR. Several thousand Afghan refugees also returned—some spontaneously, others with UNHCR help—from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan.

Afghan asylum seekers faced stringent new security measures and governments tightened immigration controls throughout the world, concluding that Afghans could now return to Afghanistan. Many who did found that the fighting had destroyed their homes, villages, pastures, and

farmlands. During the year, the international community failed to deliver adequate security and reconstruction assistance—two essentials for full and sustainable refugee repatriation.

Most Afghans abroad remained ambivalent about returning. UNHCR reported at the end of 2002 that some 3.5 million Afghans remained outside the country, including an estimated 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran and 1.5 million in Pakistan.

At the end of 2002 some 700,000 Afghans remained internally displaced throughout the country, although UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and other agencies helped organize the return of more than 250,000 Afghans to their home areas. An additional 200,000 internally displaced Afghans returned home on their own.

In Pakistan, authorities closed the southwestern border post of Chaman, trapping an estimated 80,000 without shelter, sustenance, or protection on bleak and parched terrain just inside Afghanistan.

In India, Hindu nationalists, with support from local and provincial authorities, rampaged through Muslim



Afghan refugees wait in Kabul, Afghanistan, for transportation back to their homes in Mazar-i-Sharif in May 2002. More than 1.8 million returned last year.

Photo: AP/M. Sezer



One of the houses in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, heavily targeted by Israeli fire in April 2002. As a curfew restricted movement, garbage piled up for days.

Photo: A. Jabri

communities in northwest Gujarat State in the worst communal violence in India in more than a decade, costing at least 2,000 lives and forcibly displacing as many as 100,000 Indian Muslims from their homes.

The Sri Lankan government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam signed a cease-fire accord in February after decades of civil war, raising prospects for the resolution of the plight of some of Sri Lanka's 1.5 million uprooted persons. Subsequently, more than 230,000 internally displaced Sri Lankans returned spontaneously to their homes, and some 1,000 refugees returned from India. More than 700,000 Sri Lankans, however, remain uprooted.

Government forces and a Maoist insurgency battled each other in Nepal, killing hundreds of civilians and displacing at least tens of thousands in a full-scale civil war.

In Kazakhstan, 20,000 refugees from various regions of the Russian Commonwealth of Independent States and Asia, including a large number of Chechen families, lived without recognition of their status. Turkmenistan also continued to host some 12,000 Ethnic Turkmen refugees from Tajikistan.

Middle East

The year 2002 ended with more turmoil and bloodshed in many parts of the Middle East, especially in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. National security concerns and the ongoing global war on terrorism also restricted the flight of asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

In the West Bank and Gaza, the cycle of violence reached new levels. Suicide bombers killed hundreds of Israeli civilians in 2002, nearly twice as many as in the previous year, with the number spiking dramatically in March and the attacks occurring predominantly within Israel's pre-1967 borders. The Israeli military conducted assaults in several refugee camps and towns in the territories, causing several hundred civilian deaths, thousands of injuries, further displacement of Palestinians, and the destruction of homes and means of livelihood. A UN fact-finding mission was not allowed to visit the Jenin camp, where some of the worst fighting took place in April, and access to humanitarian goods and personnel was blocked for weeks.

Palestinian refugees in UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) areas of operations remained the only

refugee population in the world categorically excluded from international protection. (See "A Refugee is a Refugee: 50 Years of Excluding Palestinians from International Protection", p. 40).

Iraq had the highest number of internally displaced persons in the Middle East—between 700,000 and 1 million. Iran hosted more than 200,000 Iraqi refugees, while 400,000 other Iraqis, who may also have left Iraq for fear of persecution, were living in countries throughout the region, most without refugee status.

Iraq also hosted some 100,000 Palestinian and 20,300 Iranian refugees. There were also some 13,700 Turkish refugees, mostly Kurds, in northern Iraq.

Syria and Lebanon together continued to host more than 800,000 Palestinian refugees. In Syria, there were approximately 6,000 other refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, including 4,200 Iraqis and hundreds of Afghans and Somalis. Nearly 500 Yemeni refugees repatriated with the assistance of UNHCR from Syria during 2002. In Lebanon, there were also more than 3,000 non-Palestinian refugees registered—mostly Iraqis, although Sudanese, Sri Lankans, and persons of other nationalities also had pending claims.

Yemen, the only state in the Arabian Peninsula party to the UN Refugee Convention, hosted more than 82,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly Somalis who continue to flee their war-torn country. Moreover, there were thousands of persons living in refugee-like situations who were not registered with UNHCR, including 2,000 Iraqis.

Jordan, home to 1.7 million Palestinians with Jordanian citizenship, hosted an estimated 300,000 Iraqis, but it is unclear how many qualified for refugee status. UNHCR recognized some 2,000 Iraqis as refugees in Jordan, while more than 4,000 others had asylum applications pending.

In Saudi Arabia, more than 5,200 Iraqi refugees remained in Rafha camp, as they had since the 1991 Gulf war. The Iraqis were mainly Shi'a Muslims who had heeded the first President Bush's call to rise up against Iraq's government in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Saudi Arabia offered to integrate some 2,200 of them contingent upon the United States leading the resettlement effort for the remaining 3,000. The United States refused, and UNHCR was unable to find other countries to accept them. During the year, 108 of the camp's residents returned to Iraq. Saudi Arabia also hosted some 240,000 Palestinians not assisted or recognized by UNHCR and more than 100 Afghan refugees.

In Israel, a new government committee, the Na-

tional Status Granting Body (NSGB), assumed responsibility for reviewing asylum claims from UNHCR. The NSGB granted asylum to about one hundred refugees, mainly from Africa and the Middle East. Asylees from countries designated as hostile to Israel received only temporary protection.

Europe

Although the open borders within the European Union (EU) were set to expand in 2002, the doors to asylum seekers were closing. EU members and their neighbors sought

to discourage asylum seekers through a variety of means. In Denmark, strict new immigration laws came into effect that reduced assistance to refugees and ended the granting of asylum at Danish Embassies abroad. Swiss voters narrowly rejected a new law that would have resulted in the summary rejection of applicants who passed through designated safe third countries. In an attempt to harmonize its laws with the EU, the Czech Republic tightened its asylum law; rejected asylum seekers had to wait two years before reapplying and applicants were prohibited from working for the first year their claims were pending. In Brit-

ain, a new Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act was introduced late in the year and was passed in early 2003. This law required asylum seekers, including children, to remain segregated in accommodation centers, and reintroduced a list of safe countries from which asylum claims are presumed to be manifestly unfounded.

The EU continued efforts to formulate a common asylum policy. The Council of Ministers agreed to a directive on minimum benefits for asylum seekers, including education, health care, documentation, and, in a limited number of cases, the right to work. The EU also reached political agreement on new rules known as Dublin II, which assign primary responsibility for processing asylum claims to the member state in which the applicant first arrived. After a year, however, responsibility would switch to the state where the applicant has stayed for over five months, with special provision for asylum seekers who have family members in other EU states. (See "Dublin Convention" box, p. 176) EU officials argued that the changes, were necessary to restrict illegal immigration. In response to critics' charges, Bertel Haarder, the Danish Minister for European Affairs, stated, "to those of you who say they are building a fortress Europe, yes, but remember it is a very kind fortress Europe."

“Palestinian gunmen had already compromised the civilian character of the camps, but Israeli soldiers were not above using civilians as human shields and carrying out collective punishments.”



Bosnian Muslim beaten by police officers who evicted 50 refugees from temporary camp in Tuzla in January 2002. The police attempted to compel the refugees to return to their homes in Zvornik, now under Bosnian Serb control. Photo: AP/A. Emric

Russia pressured its own internally displaced persons to return to Chechnya despite continuing conflict and pervasive human rights violations there. Russian officials used threats, harassment, and incentives to compel return, including shutting off gas and electricity to areas where Chechens lived, promising housing in Chechnya, or about 62¢ (20 rubles) per person per day. Russian officials allegedly pressured Georgian officials to return several thousand Chechen refugees who fled there, but the Georgian authorities refused. The Russian government claimed that all returns to Chechnya were voluntary, and that it was safe to return. In December, members of the Russian Presidential Human Right's Commission were sent to Ingushetia to investigate the situation.

An estimated 268,000 Croatian Serbs remain displaced due primarily to property disputes, destruction, and discrimination. In Bosnia, authorities continued to resolve property disputes, but illegal occupations, including by public officials, persisted. Unidentified assailants shot and bombed the homes and cars of Bosnian Mus-

lim returnees, most notably in the majority Serb areas of Bosnia.

In both Serbia and Macedonia, authorities and local groups attacked, evicted, and discriminated against refugees and displaced persons from Kosovo, particularly ethnic Roma.

Returns to Kosovo remained low, particularly among refugees and displaced persons of non-Albanian ethnic origins who feared return. Although the situation in Kosovo has improved, freedom of movement, security, employment, and property disputes remain hurdles to return.

Americas and the Caribbean

The two most notable developments in the Americas concerning refugees and displaced people were the escalation of forced displacement in Colombia and the continuing impact of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on U.S. refugee policies and programs.

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Right-wing paramilitary groups and left-wing guerrillas perpetrated massacres, executions, kidnappings, and threats against civilians, causing an estimated 320,000 Colombians to become displaced, a 14 percent increase over last year's total. This brought the total number of people forced from their homes since 1985 to some 2.5 million. Local human rights groups attributed a majority of the displacement to the actions of the paramilitary groups.

Colombians elected Alvaro Uribe Vélez, who promised to get tough on the guerrillas and bring security to the country, as their new president in May 2002. In the weeks following Uribe's election, left-wing guerrillas launched a wave of attacks that left hundreds dead and thousands more displaced. On the day of Uribe's inauguration, August 7, guerrillas fired rockets near the Presidential Palace in Bogotá, killing 14 people. Shortly after taking office, Uribe declared a State of Emergency permitting him to impose curfews, restrict freedom of movement, and curtail other rights.

While a large majority of Colombians who abandoned their homes in 2002 due to political violence remained displaced within Colombia, others fled the country altogether, most to the United States. The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) called upon the United States to grant Colombians Temporary Protected Status.

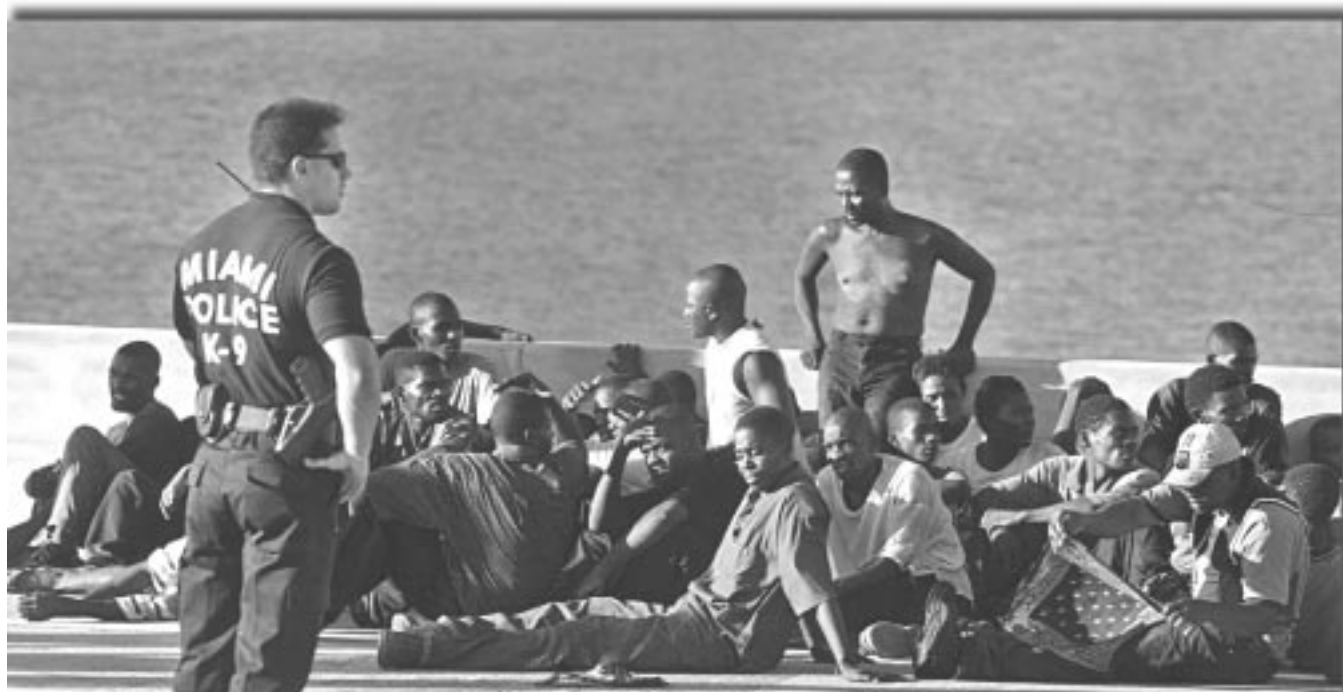
More than 2,000 Colombians applied for asylum during the first four months of the year in Costa Rica, one of the few countries to admit Colombians without visas. In April, however, Costa Rica changed this policy, prevent-

ing some Colombians from seeking asylum there. As another result, three times as many Colombian refugees already in Costa Rica sought UNHCR's help to bring family members to Costa Rica as in the year before.

Ecuador received an average of 500 new Colombian asylum seekers every month during 2002—a three-fold increase. Most applications were approved. During one four-month period, some 37,000 Colombians crossed into Ecuador through its northern border, but most did not seek asylum. In Venezuela, as well, more than three times as many Colombians applied for asylum as did the year before, averaging 80 persons per month.

Although President Bush authorized the admission of 70,000 refugees to the United States in fiscal year 2002, the government only resettled some 27,000, due in part to delays in the implementation of new security measures.

The U.S. and Canadian governments also signed a Safe Third Country Agreement, although it had not been implemented by year's end. The agreement would bar most individuals from applying for asylum at Canadian land borders if they had transited through the United States or vice versa. Typically, as many as 15,000 asylum seekers per year transit the United States en route to Canada, while some 200 pass through Canada to the United States. An unusually large number of asylum seekers sought to enter Canada from the United States at year's end in fear of the agreement's impending implementation and in response to the special registration program of the United States.



More than 200 Haitians jumped overboard off the coast of Florida and were apprehended on a major Miami highway in October 2002; unlike Cubans, all were placed in detention.

Photo: AP/N. Herald, P. Portal