

INVOLUNTARY Returns and Expulsions - 2002

INVOLUNTARY The Refugee Convention prohibits governments from forcibly returning refugees to places where they would be persecuted (a violation known as *refoulement*). Governments rarely *refoule* persons they acknowledge to be refugees. More commonly, they forcibly return people who have been denied access to a fair refugee determination procedure, whether they arrive by land, are interdicted at sea, or are turned back at airports. Not all listed here are refugees, but these are some of the more egregious cases of return or expulsion under circumstances that could result in *refoulement*. This is not a comprehensive list, so no total is provided. For further information, see the country reports.

- ◇ China forcibly returned tens of thousands of North Koreans who face certain imprisonment back home for illegal departure. Should they have made contact with South Koreans or Christians in China, they may be executed.
- ◇ Rwandan authorities, along with the rebel group Rally for Congolese Democracy, forced some 7,000 ethnic Tutsi back to Congo-Kinshasa. To discourage their return, Rwandan authorities destroyed more than 1,000 of their homes.
- ◇ Guinean soldiers turned back thousands of Liberian boys and young men at the border to serve as porters for Liberian rebel groups. As civil war erupted in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, Guinean authorities closed the border for weeks, blocking thousands more.
- ◇ Venezuelan authorities returned about 3,000 Colombians fleeing civil strife in Tachira state in February, without providing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to the group.
- ◇ Despite upsurges in human rights violations in Haiti and Cuba, the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted and summarily repatriated about 1,500 Haitian and 700 Cuban boat people. (Cubans were screened for potential asylum claims.)
- ◇ In March, Cambodian authorities forcibly returned about 100 Vietnamese Montagnards. The Vietnamese authorities later renewed a crackdown on Montagnards and those who helped them flee. By year's end, possibly more than 1,000 had been returned, and as many as 100 were reportedly hiding in the forested border region.
- ◇ Even as former returnees again fled forced labor and religious persecution in Burma, Bangladeshi authorities repatriated nearly 800 ethnic Rohingya Muslims—providing the Burmese military with lists of the refugees' names prior to their return. UNHCR said it would discontinue its involvement in the process in 2003.
- ◇ Thai officials forced back some 600–700 ethnic Mon and Karen who had fled fighting between government troops and rebels in Burma and barred UNHCR and nongovernmental organizations from the area.



U.S. Coast Guard turns intercepted asylum seekers over to Haitian authorities, November 2002. Photo: AP/D.Morel