



Regional Summaries

Africa

by Joel Frushone

During 2003, progress toward peaceful resolutions of long-term conflicts and voluntary refugee repatriation dominated the headlines, largely overshadowing fresh violence and new displacement in Africa. Although many long-term conflicts officially ended in 2003, uncertainty in the minds of refugees and internally displaced persons—primarily over continued dangerous conditions at home and lack of tangible fundamental change in returnee areas—hindered significant repatriation.

Tentative Peace In Congo-Kinshasa, the formation and inauguration of a transitional national government—an unprecedented blend of members of the previous government, former rebel groups, unarmed opposition members, and representatives from civil society—brought the country's deadly five-year civil war to an official end in July 2003. At the same time, instability and isolated pockets of violence—primarily between ethnic groups in Congo-Kinshasa's war-torn eastern provinces—forced 1 million or more civilians from their homes. The most egregious violence during 2003 occurred in the northeastern Ituri region, where fighting between rival ethnic Hema and Lendu militias killed more than 1,000 civilians and displaced several hundred thousand others, including more than 20,000 who fled to Uganda. An estimated 50,000 Congolese have died during clashes between these groups since 1999. Despite the end of major conflict, few uprooted Congolese returned home during the year. At least 3.6 million Congolese remained displaced at year's end, including more than 3.2 million internally displaced civilians and nearly 440,000 refugees.

In Liberia, sustained attacks by rebel groups to overthrow the government and mounting international pressure, including the deployment of UN peacekeepers and U.S. soldiers to the war-ravaged country, ended the deadly reign of President Charles Taylor, who was forced into exile in Nigeria in mid-2003. Taylor's regime was responsible for more than a decade of violence and massive human rights violations that uprooted 1.5 million Liberians and left at least 200,000 dead. Violence in and around the capital, Monrovia, kept hundreds of thousands of already uprooted Liberians on the run from June to August. During battles for the control of Monrovia approximately 1,000 civilians died. The clashes also displaced some 15,000 Sierra Leonean refugees who repeatedly refused offers of assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to return home. Although UNHCR stated it would not implement a repatriation program to Liberia during 2003, an estimated 10,000 Liberian refugees spontaneously returned home from Sierra Leone, Ghana, and other West African nations late in the year. Chosen by warring factions and civil society leaders, Liberian businessman Gyude Bryant was sworn in as interim president in November. Despite the new government and the presence of some 4,000 UN peacekeepers, violence continued to displace Liberians at year's end.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a French-brokered peace accord and the installation of a power-sharing government in early 2003 did little to stem unrest between the government and northern-based rebel groups. Once an island of stability in troubled West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire erupted in civil war in late 2002 and remained bitterly divided in half at the end of 2003. Separated by a 30-mile (50 km) wide "comfort zone" created and patrolled by some 5,000 French and Eco-

conomic Community of West African States soldiers, the Ivorian government controlled the south while rebel groups maintained their hold on the north. The presence of armed militias and general lawlessness prevented tens of thousands of Ivorians and third country nationals displaced during the civil war—primarily persons of Burkinabe and Malian heritage—from returning to their homes during the year. It also impeded UN and international humanitarian agencies from conducting assessment missions to areas the Côte d’Ivoire conflict affected most. Nearly 5,000 Liberian refugees who fled to Côte d’Ivoire in the mid-1990s were resettled in the United States during 2003.

In Sudan, violence in the western region of Darfur marred significant negotiations aimed at ending 20 years of civil war between Sudan’s Islamic government in Khartoum and the mainly southern Christian and animist

Sudan People’s Liberation Army. Fighting erupted in the Darfur region in February between government-backed troops and militias and the nascent Sudan Liberation Army and Justice and Equality Movement and continued through year’s end, forcing an estimated 800,000 Sudanese from their homes. Of the newly uprooted, some 100,000 fled to the eastern deserts of neighboring Chad, where humanitarian relief was slow to arrive.

In Burundi, President Pierre Buyoya, an ethnic Tutsi, peacefully transferred power in mid-2003 to Vice President Domitien Ndayizeye, an ethnic Hutu—giving hope for the return of some 400,000 refugees who fled during the past 10 years of ethnic strife. Parallel negotiations between the transitional government and the Forces for National Liberation (FNL)—Burundi’s holdout Hutu rebel group—to end the country’s civil war proved fruit-



Refugees from the Darfur region of western Sudan gather in eastern Chad. Government-orchestrated violence in Darfur forced an estimated 800,000 Sudanese from their homes during the year, including some 100,000 who fled to Chad. Photo: UNHCR/H. Caux



less, however. FNL attacks on civilians and government targets continued unabated, newly displacing 1 million Burundians from their homes during the year. At the same time, nearly 85,000 Burundian refugees repatriated from camps in western Tanzania, including some 45,000 who returned home spontaneously and with no international assistance to areas deemed unsafe by UNHCR.

Fresh Violence and New Displacement Violence and instability forced more than 4 million people from their homes in Sudan, Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa, Uganda, and Liberia. Unresolved as well as new conflicts in several other African countries newly uprooted 400,000 other Africans during 2003.

In Uganda, an armed rebel group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) repeatedly attacked refugee camps and sites for internally displaced Ugandans, raping, abducting, and killing innocent civilians. Intensified and sustained LRA attacks—primarily in northern Uganda during mid-2003—uprooted some 600,000 Ugandans, pushing the total number of internally displaced Ugandans to over 1.4 million by year's end.

In Central African Republic (CAR), a successful coup launched in mid-March by armed supporters of former army chief of staff General Francois Bozize ousted President Ange-Félix Patasse. The violence forced more than 40,000 mainly northern CAR residents into southern Chad, where UNHCR constructed three camps to accommodate the new arrivals.

In Ethiopia, increased ethnic tensions erupted into violence for the second consecutive year in and around camps hosting Sudanese refugees. In mid-December, eight people, including three officials of the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, were murdered when their vehicle was ambushed in western Ethiopia's Gambella region. Reprisal attacks forced several thousand ethnic Anuak Sudanese refugees and ethnic Anuak Ethiopians, who were blamed for the murders, into Sudan. Violence in western Ethiopia has killed at least 100 Sudanese refugees during the past two years.

Refugee Repatriation Approximately 300 thousand African refugees repatriated during the year.

In Angola, refugees long displaced from 27 years of civil war, which abruptly ended in early 2002, repatriated steadily during 2003. Some 100,000 Angolans returned to their war-devastated homeland—primarily from Zambia and Congo-Kinshasa—from June to November 2003.



Top: Angolan returnees walking to a market in Zaire Province, northern Angola, November 2003. Some 100,000 Angolan refugees returned to their areas of origin during the year.

Above: A Liberian refugee hauling firewood in Lainé refugee camp, southeast Guinea, July 2003. Although the deadly reign of President Charles Taylor ended mid-year, Lainé and other camps for Liberian refugees in Guinea remained swollen at year's end.

Photos: USCR/J. Frushone

The presence of hundreds of thousands of landmines and the lack of government-provided basic social services, including potable sources of drinking water, primary schools, and health clinics, prevented more refugees from repatriating.

In Rwanda, some 22 thousand refugees returned home during 2003. Most Rwandan refugees had fled to neighboring countries after Hutu extremists launched a genocide against the Tutsi population in 1994. UNHCR and refugee advocacy agencies, including the U.S. Committee for Refugees, expressed concern during the year that while Rwanda is regarded as safe, repatriation must be voluntary. Several hundred Rwandans fearing involuntary repatriation attempted to enter Uganda from Tanzania, but

were refused entry. Some may have been associated with the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In late 2003, the Rwandan government and UNHCR signed Tripartite Agreements with several African countries, providing for registration, distribution of repatriation assistance packages, and customs and entry arrangements for the voluntary repatriation of some 45 thousand Rwandans who remained refugees at the end of 2003.

In Sierra Leone, two years after the conclusion of more than a decade of brutal civil war, some 35,000 Sierra Leonean refugees repatriated from neighboring West African countries.

The ebb and flow of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa during 2003 did not significantly affect the total number of uprooted Africans. At year's end, Sudan, Congo-Kinshasa, Angola, Burundi, and Somalia were the largest sources of uprooted people in Africa, as they were in 2002, accounting for more than 75 percent of all uprooted Africans. Tanzania, Sudan, Congo-Kinshasa, Zambia, and Uganda were the leading refugee hosts at the end of 2003.

East Asia and the Pacific

by Veronika Martin

China and North Korea Following Nepal's *refoulement* to China in 2003 of three Uighurs recognized as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), China executed one of the returnees, pro-independence activist Shaheer Ali, in October 2003 after convicting him of "separatism" and "organizing and leading a terrorist organization" in what Amnesty International called "an apparently unfair trial." Human rights groups reported that China tortured the other two. China arrested thousands of Uighurs, including political dissidents and Muslim religious leaders, on the pretext of fighting crime and terrorism during its "Strike Hard" campaign.

In a joint operation with the Chinese authorities, Nepal forcibly returned 18 Tibetan asylum seekers, including minors in May 2003. Later in the year they deported 21 more Tibetans. The International Campaign for Tibet and the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala, India reported that China detains, harasses, and interrogates asylum seekers for indefinite periods of time, beating and torturing some upon return. In 2003, some 3,500 Tibetans fled religious, social, and political repression in China—seeking asylum in Nepal and India.

Under a treaty with North Korea, China continued to forcibly return North Korean asylum seekers. North Korea regards unauthorized departure as an act of opposition and treats it as a criminal offense, punishable by imprisonment or, in some cases, death. According to the UN, two million people have died in North Korea due to starvation and 50 percent of the population is malnourished. Experts estimated that China forcibly returned an average of 150 North Koreans per week during the year. North Ko-

reans continued to storm embassies in China, seeking asylum in South Korea and other countries. An estimated 100,000 North Korean asylum seekers reside in China—mostly in hiding.

In June of 2003, a Chinese ambassador told UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers that China would no longer deport North Koreans unless they had committed crimes in China. Nevertheless, China still did not allow UNHCR to process North Korean asylum claims in China, even though China is a party to the UN Refugee Convention. South Korea recognizes all North Koreans as citizens and took in over 1,500 of them during the year, including those who sought asylum by entering diplomatic compounds in Beijing and those who transited through other countries in the region.



Chinese military police touching up barbed wire fencing installed throughout Beijing's embassy district to prevent North Korean refugees from seeking asylum, July 2003.

Photos: AP/G. Baker



Internally displaced ethnic Karen and Karenni flee attacks by the Myanmar army during ceasefire talks in January 2004. The junta blocks emergency humanitarian aid to the roughly one million internally displaced persons in the country.
Photo: Free Burma Rangers

Southeast Asia In August, Malaysian authorities conducted the biggest crackdown on asylum seekers in years, arresting 289 Acehnese outside the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur. Of these, 182 received temporary protection letters while 107 either declined UNHCR assistance or had already been forcibly deported before the arrival of UNHCR protection officers. Malaysia removed 49 more without notifying UNHCR. In October Malaysia deported another 402 Acehnese to Indonesia. The World Organisation Against Torture reported some disappearances from this group. Malaysian authorities beat and threatened Acehnese asylum seekers in detention centers who resisted deportation; they also beat individual Acehnese in informal settlements and destroyed their homes.

The Indonesian government reinstated martial law in Aceh province in May following military operations against separatist rebels. Authorities severely restricted access by foreign aid agencies, but local human rights groups reported cases of extrajudicial execution and torture in the province. Since the beginning of the offensive, 120,000 Acehnese have been internally displaced, many to ill-equipped government camps as a counterinsurgency tactic. Beyond Aceh, 600,000 internally displaced persons lived in government-run camps, while an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 remained displaced outside the formal camp system.

The military regime of Myanmar (also known as Burma) targeted minority ethnic groups residing in the east on the Thai border and in the west on the borders of India and Bangladesh for forced labor and relocation, extortion, torture, rape, recruitment of child soldiers, and extra-judicial executions. In May agents of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) attacked members of the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD), reportedly resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of detentions. Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel laureate and a leader of the NLD, was again placed under house arrest. An estimated one million are internally displaced, mostly in the ethnic regions of eastern Myanmar where sporadic fighting continues. Malnutrition and life-threatening disease are common in ethnic areas where the SPDC does not allow international aid.

Myanmarese refugees fled to Thailand at a rate of over 2,500 per month, joining the estimated 140,000 already residing in camps and approximately two million so-called illegal migrants. An estimated 260,000 are unrecognized refugees without international protection or assistance. Under Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Thailand has restricted Myanmarese refugees' freedom of movement, expression, and assembly, closing several offices of Myanmarese activist organizations and threatening additional closures—including of nongovernmental organiza-

tions working with Myanmar—in order to limit their ability to support democracy-building initiatives and cross-border humanitarian assistance. Thai officials moved two refugee camps housing a total of 34,500 refugees to within five miles (8 km) of the Myanmar border, in close range of Myanmar troops. Over 1,000 refugees chose not to resettle in the new camp locations and attempted to return to their areas of origin inside Myanmar.

Thailand requires that all persons carry identification cards, making all undocumented asylum seekers outside of camps subject to arrest and deportation. However, 20,000 unregistered refugees have entered refugee camps since the Thai authorities terminated the official screening process for entry three years ago. In 2003, Thailand deported an estimated 10,000 migrants per month and handed over an additional 400 to SPDC authorities, including Convention refugees. In one incident in March, 120 refugees from Mae La refugee camp were handed over to SPDC authorities. The Thai government denied all incoming Myanmar consideration for access to refugee camps, labeling them illegal migrants and denying them basic protection and assistance. Thailand openly insists on its right to violate the international law against *refoulement*. General Winai Phattiyakhul stated, “From now on, Thailand will force refugees to go back to where they came from. Thailand will not welcome refugees from Burma and other neighboring countries anymore.” The Thai government does not allow UNHCR to process new arrivals into camps nor, as of January 2004, conduct refugee status determinations.

In Cambodia, authorities forcibly returned more than 100 Montagnards to Vietnam during the year. According to Human Rights Watch, Vietnam arrested or detained close to 300 Montagnards during 2003. Since the government crackdowns increased in the Vietnamese Central Highlands in February 2001, at least 124 Montagnards have been sentenced to prison terms of up to 13 years for claiming land rights and religious freedom, organizing Christian gatherings, or attempting to seek asylum in Cambodia.

On the Philippines’ second largest island of Mindanao, the military displaced over 400,000 civilians by engaging in indiscriminate bombings, burning and looting of homes, forced evacuations, and forced recruitment as it pursued Islamic separatist rebel groups.

Australia and the Pacific The Australian government continued to detain asylum seekers overseas, often on remote territories as part of its “Pacific Solution,” to prevent them from reaching Australian shores. Even so, several boats of asylum seekers reached Australian waters in 2003, including one containing 53 Vietnamese, the first boat intercepted in Australian waters since 2001. Authorities denied asylum to all of them and refused them the right to appeal by detaining them on Christmas Island, a remote Australian territory legally excised from Australia’s “migration zone.” In

November, a second boat carrying 14 Turkish Kurds was intercepted off of Melville Island and rerouted to Indonesia. Indonesia, which is not party to the UN Refugee Convention, deported six men from among the boat’s passengers and detained the rest while UNHCR examined their claims for asylum.

In June, the Australian federal court intervened to prevent the government’s Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) from deporting as many as 60 Iranians of the Sabian Mandaean faith, stating that the court had ignored key evidence of violence and persecution against members of that faith. At year’s end, as many as 40 remained in danger of deportation. Another Australian court ruled that holding the children of asylum seekers in detention centers was il-

“**Malaysian authorities conducted the biggest crackdown on asylum seekers in years, arresting 289 Acehnese outside the UNHCR office in Kuala Lumpur,... deported hundreds to Indonesia,... beat and threatened Acehnese asylum seekers in detention centers.**”

legal, allowing 108 children to take legal action to leave the centers, pending a final ruling of the high court. Authorities closed the isolated Woomera Refugee Detention Center, where asylum seekers had been held for years; however, detention centers remain in other remote locations in South Australia.

Also in June 2003, in response to concerted lobbying by the government of East Timor and the Catholic Church, then Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock announced that 379 East Timorese would be allowed to stay in Australia. This reversed the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs’ efforts to deport all of the remaining 1,600 East Timorese in Australia who had been seeking asylum for more than a decade. Ruddock also agreed to review 200 more East Timorese cases that had been previously denied and noted that the RRT was processing an additional 1,000.

At the end of 2003, Australia had detained approximately 1,100 asylum seekers in centers, including those on excised Australian territories such as Christmas Island. The territories are legally beyond Australia’s “migration zone,”



Urban Afghan refugee children outside Islamabad, Pakistan, October 2003. Over two million Afghans remain in exile in Iran and Pakistan, some for decades.

Photo: USCR/M. Berg

thus many of Australia's laws protecting refugees and asylum seekers, such as those providing for legal assistance, appeal, and family reunification, do not apply.

In 2003, the island state of Nauru detained 284 individuals, the majority from Afghanistan, pursuant to an agreement with Australia to host its asylum seekers. The detainees held hunger strikes through the end of 2003, protesting Australia's denial of their asylum claims. Some sewed their lips together to protest their lack of opportunity to discuss detention center conditions with outsiders.

In the Solomon Islands, supporters of warlord Harold Keke and the government displaced 1,300 people and killed at least 50 in 2003. Armed supporters of Keke initiated most of the violence, razing villages and using villagers as human shields. The strife stemmed from ethnic tension between Guadalcanal residents and migrants from neighboring Malaita islands. Australian-led intervention forces arrived in July, helping the government control and stabilize the country.

South and Central Asia

by Michelle Berg

During 2003, South Asia remained a tinderbox as rebels, insurgents, and governments engaged in military offensives. In Afghanistan, Taliban insurgency appeared to be on the

increase. Conflicts threatened to destabilize Nepal, Bangladesh, India, and Bhutan; and, although fragile peace continued to hold in Sri Lanka, it remained tense. Rebels were active in 14 out of India's 28 states; most notably in Kashmir where secessionists continued to fight to join Pakistan.

An estimated 1.1 million Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan and 1.1 million in Iran, some of who have been displaced for decades. About 612,600 Afghans returned in 2003, fewer than the 1.8 million who returned in 2002. Although progress toward stability in Afghanistan edged slowly forward after the passing of a constitution, insurgents, mostly thought to be Taliban, attacked, kidnapped, and killed for-

eigners and Afghans who worked with them, and shot a UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) staff member from France in November and injured her driver. After the attack, UNHCR suspended its operations in central and eastern Afghanistan, as well as its repatriation operations from Pakistan. Taliban-orchestrated bombings also killed and injured many more people. Although the UN Security Council authorized the expansion of the NATO-led peacekeeping force, it had not extended beyond Kabul at the end of the year.

In Central Asia, tensions continued in the Ferghana Valley, which borders Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In January, residents of the border region in Tajikistan destroyed a Kyrgyz border post, Kyrgyz residents retaliated by sacking a Tajik post, and both sides harassed and extorted money from those crossing the border. Over the past few years, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, seeking a theocratic government, has staged raids and caused authorities from all the bordering countries to deploy troops to the region and mine the area.

In Kyrgyzstan, the government began integrating Tajik refugees and giving them citizenship. In Turkmenistan the government allowed refugees to work, provided education and healthcare, and allocated land to Afghans settling in rural areas of the country. President Niyazov, however, also urged the country's police and military officials in Janu-

ary to relocate “unworthy people” from the Uzbek border as provided by a November 2002 decree. He also decided to resettle about 2,000 “unworthy” citizens, mostly of Uzbek ethnicity, to a desert region bordering on Kazakhstan with no water or arable land, and he proposed to relocate other Uzbeks from a small border village in Turkmenistan to Uzbekistan. Uzbeks make up only nine percent of the population, but the President views them as potential dissidents. The government also forcibly relocated religious minorities, political opponents, and their families to desert areas in northern and northwestern areas of the country. In August, the government forcibly relocated Sazak Begmedov, whose daughter had founded a Turkmen human rights organization in Bulgaria. The government restricts the activities of nongovernmental organizations and international monitors, making accurate information about the numbers of people relocated difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, the

determine their citizenship. (See “Unending Limbo,” p. 74).

The government of Bhutan launched its first military operation in 140 years, pursuing Indian separatists hiding in the kingdom. The separatists, known as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), are seeking independence for India’s northeastern state of Assam. Analysts speculate that the Bhutanese government acted, after six years of threatening to do so, because it feared some Bhutanese refugees in Nepal had aligned with the group to form their own rebel group to act against the Bhutanese government.

In November, Indian police used water cannons, electric batons, and canes to disperse about 500 Myanmarese refugees who were demonstrating outside the UNHCR office in New Delhi in protest of cuts in their subsistence allowances. Police injured at least 25 demonstrators and detained several hundred demonstrators for the night. In addition, authorities sent 24 persons to jail charged with rioting and obstructing the police. UNHCR had cut the allowances by as much as 60 percent, with the stated goal of promoting self-reliance. The Indian government does not allow Myanmarese refugees to work.

Nepal continued to *refoule* refugees from China in 2003. In May, Nepal forcibly returned 18 Tibetans to China, including children. Following international criticism of that action, however, in July 2003, Nepalese authorities handed over another 19 Tibetans to UNHCR instead. In October, however, China executed a Uighur, whom Nepal had forcibly repatriated even after UNHCR had granted him refugee status. And at the end of the year, according to *Radio Free Asia*, the Nepalese border police forcibly returned another 21 Tibetans to China.

In Sri Lanka, fragile peace held, but return remained uncertain for many displaced by the conflict, as relations between the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government broke down in November. Peace talks stalled following a power struggle between Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and President Kumaratunga, and in November, Norwegian diplomats active in brokering the peace suspended their activities indefinitely, pending clarification of election results. The President claimed that the Prime Minister had given too much ground to the LTTE at peace talks. The President declared a state of emergency one day after suspending Par-



Repatriated Afghan refugee carries her brother at a UNHCR distribution camp in Kabul, June 2003. Over two million returned since the fall of the Taliban.
Photo/R. Maqbool

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stated in March that the threat of displacement of opponent’s relatives was “quite real.”

Although Kazakhstan allowed UNHCR-recognized Chechen refugees to remain, the authorities refused to register them, preventing them from working or attending school. Officials in some parts of the country reportedly tried to force Chechens to leave.

In South Asia, the governments of Bhutan and Nepal released the results of their initial verification exercise of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, which was intended to



liament and removed the ministers of defense, the interior, and media from office, causing the Prime Minister to state that he could no longer take responsibility for the peace process. The President justified her actions saying they were to prevent insecurity.

Before the power struggle, the LTTE had officially dropped their claims for independence, opting for autonomy instead. Later in January 2004, the Prime Minister stated that the truce with the LTTE was invalidated, since it was premised on his control of the defense ministry, and the President's actions had undermined that. Aid donors had made the \$4.5 million pledged for reconstruction conditional upon substantial progress in the peace process. Although lack of fighting allowed increased movement between government and LTTE-controlled areas, with over 300,000 displaced persons returning since the cease-fire was signed, some 500,000 people remained displaced at the end of the year. In High Security Zones (HSZ) controlled by the army, authorities continued to block returns. Civilians could not enter the HSZ, and the government refused to dismantle them during peace negotiations in January 2003. Rebel and government forces extorted money from and harassed residents, and forcibly recruited and abducted children in areas of return, while squatters occupied returnees' land. Returnees also lacked water, sanitation, and medical care. Many homes in the northeast were destroyed or were uninhabitable because of landmines.

In Bangladesh, the government stopped supplying rice rations to approximately 65,000 internally displaced persons from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, collectively known as the Jumma, claiming a lack of funds. The government action, in addition to the army's continued possession of 9,000 acres of Jumma land, sparked protests. In August 2003, the Jumma and Bengali settlers clashed, ransacking 274 houses and 3 Buddhist temples.

Some Rohingya refugees returned from Bangladesh to Myanmar during the year. *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) accused the Bangladeshi government of harassing thousands of Rohingya refugees, and threatening them with physical abuse to coerce their return to Myanmar, documenting 550 such cases. UNHCR acknowledged some coercion, but stated that it was not at the level MSF reported. Other groups, however, also reported that camp officials reduced food and medical services to the refugees, and that authorities beat and threatened to jail refugees to force their return.

In Nepal, a January 2003 cease-fire agreement between the government of Nepal and Maoist rebels broke down in August after the administration refused rebel demands to redraft the constitution. Despite the cease-fire, the rebels continued to forcibly recruit soldiers and kill those it accused of being government informants, including nine teachers in June. After the breakdown of the peace, many who had returned during the cease-fire fled back to India for fear that the Maoists would forcibly recruit them

or accuse them of being government informants and abduct or kill them. Some 100,000-200,000 Nepalese remained displaced at year's end.

In November, Pakistan and India entered into a cease-fire agreement and agreed to talks, raising hopes for peace in the Kashmiri region, racked by ethnic, religious, and secessionist conflict for decades. Although Pakistani and Indian troops stopped shelling each other, violence and fighting continued in India's northern province of Jammu-Kashmir. Both India and the rebels stated the border truce between Pakistan and India did not affect their operations inside Indian Kashmir. A total of 185 persons died from conflict in Kashmir between the date the cease-fire was signed (November 26) and the end of the year. Approximately 250,000-450,000 Kashmiri Hindu Pandits remained displaced in India at the end of the year.

Middle East

by Lisa Raffonelli

The March 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the occupation of Iraq by U.S. military forces created the most upheaval during the year in an otherwise relatively static Middle East. Bracing itself for a near repeat of the 1991 Gulf War in which two million refugees fled Iraq, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) prepared to assist up to 600,000 people expected to leave the country. Instead, a rash of suicide bombings targeting U.S. armed forces, the interim government and its security structures, the UN, and non-governmental organizations—in addition to the spontaneous movements of more than 800,000 internally displaced persons—presented the greater challenge to aid workers and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).

Mid-year, UNHCR appealed to Iraq's neighbors to postpone the repatriation of Iraqi refugees, expressing concern about safety and the lack of international representatives inside the country. Following the August bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad that killed 23 people, including UN Special Representative for Iraq Sergio Vieira de Mello, aid organizations scaled back their operations.

U.S. military commanders studied the urban warfare strategies used by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and applied them in Iraq—imposing curfews, demolishing the homes of suspected insurgents and imprisoning their relatives, sealing off villages with barbed-wire fences and military checkpoints, and requiring all men between 18 and 65 to carry U.S.-issued, English-only identification cards. Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Nathan Sassaman characterized the strategy, stating, "With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them."

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and resulting power vacuum sparked irregular but rising episodes of violence across the country, specifically targeting those seen as

collaborators with the occupation or loyalists to the old regime. Bombings killed as many as 650 new Iraqi police officers, and armed local militia singled out refugees in a wide swath of intimidation.

The former Iraqi government had provided Palestinian refugees with housing and special protection, but an estimated 4,000 found themselves displaced anew when their Iraqi landlords demanded exorbitant rents or evicted them outright. Approximately 1,500 turned Baghdad's Haifa Sports Club into a makeshift refugee camp in April, pitching hundreds of tents on the soccer field. UNHCR relocated about 100 families to subsidized apartments, but the UN pullback forced many refugees to return to the camp.

Syrian refugees who settled in Baghdad in the 1960s and 1970s also lost their homes and belongings in the widespread looting and lawlessness. Many Iraqis resented the privileges the Syrian exiles enjoyed from the former regime, including apartments and monthly stipends. In its first registration week in Baghdad, UNHCR recorded more than 600 Syrian refugees seeking protection and assistance.

Prior to the invasion, al-Tash camp near Baghdad housed some 12,000 Iranian Kurd refugees from the Iran-Iraq war; however, half the population may have fled the camp in 2003. One group of 1,200 became stranded in the no-man's-land between the Iraqi and Jordanian borders when Jordanian officials refused to let the refugees enter the country. UNHCR helped another 3,800 Iranian refugees repatriate during the year. In Southern Iraq, Iraqi militia forced some 1,000 of the estimated 6,000 Iranian Arab refugees from homes where they had lived for nearly 20 years.

Turkish officials, UNHCR, and U.S. representatives discussed returning 12,700 Turkish Kurds from northern Iraq. The third largest refugee group in Iraq, these refugees fled fighting between the Turkish army and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party. Some 9,200—mostly women, children and elderly refugees—have been living in Mahmour camp since 1997; another 3,700 live in seven smaller camps and cities in Kurdish northern Iraq.

In the West Bank and Gaza, Yasser Arafat bowed to international pressure and named Mahmoud Abbas as the Palestinian Authority's first Prime Minister in March 2003. The United States, European Union, United Nations, and Russia revealed their new "Roadmap to Peace," which envisioned an independent Palestinian state by 2005. In July, Palestinian factions unilaterally pledged a *hudna*—a cessation of violence—for three months.



Top: A Palestinian boy calls to his friends outside a refugee camp at the Haifa Sports Club near Baghdad. Iraqi landlords evicted hundreds of Palestinians from rent-controlled apartments.

Photo: Ben Granby, *Electronic Iraq*

Bottom: Iraqi refugees wait to leave the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia in July 2003 where 5,000 have lived for 12 years.

Photo: EPA/Stringer

The calm ended in less than one month when an IDF raid on suspected militants in a Nablus refugee camp killed two Palestinians, setting into motion a new cycle of violence and targeted assassinations. In August, Israeli troops assassinated an Islamic Jihad military leader in Hebron. Two days later, a suicide bombing of an Egged bus in Jerusalem killed 21, prompting the IDF to assassinate Hamas leader Ismail Abu Shanab. Palestinian groups ended the *hudna* after just 50 days. Tension between Arafat



and Abbas over the Roadmap, specifically regarding the rights of refugees, led Abbas to resign in September. The peace talks came to a halt as Arafat formed a new government with Ahmad Qureia as the new prime minister.

Israeli raids on refugee camps and other locations in the occupied territories escalated. In early October, the IDF sealed off Rafah camp in southern Gaza for almost two weeks, while they cut electricity and water supplies and destroyed some 130 homes, leaving more than 1,400 Palestinians homeless and 15 dead.

By year's end, the Palestinian death toll stood at 882, including more than 100 children. The IDF assassinated 37 Palestinian leaders, and suicide bombers conducted 26 attacks. A total of 1,817 Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks crossed the territories. Still, the level of violence against Israeli targets decreased by 30 percent from the previous year, and the number of Israeli casualties—213—dropped by half.

Israeli and Palestinian peace activists launched the unofficial Geneva Accord in December as critics on both sides labeled it unworkable and unfair. The Accord proposed a shared Jerusalem, Israeli turnover of 97 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, and a limit to refugees' right of return.

Meanwhile, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) tried to rebuild the more than 700 homes and shelters in the West Bank and Gaza destroyed in IDF raids during the year. A funding shortfall of roughly 60 percent coupled with the daily burden of occupation—roadblocks, closures, curfews, and military operations—impeded the effort.

Israeli construction of the separation barrier resumed in October, when the United States vetoed a UN Security Council draft resolution declaring it a violation of international law. UNRWA estimated that the barrier, when completed, will block more than 163,000 Palestinian refugees from reaching schools, hospitals, and other humanitarian services. Conversely, the situation for non-Palestinian refugees in Israel improved: the Interior Ministry extended the right to work to asylum seekers with pending cases.

As the United States prepared to invade Iraq, Jordan sealed its borders against new refugee flows. For refugees transiting through the country en route home, the Government of Jordan and UNHCR set up Ruweishid and one other refugee camp inside Jordan's borders near the frontier with Iraq. In August, Jordan permitted some 400 Palestinian refugees from Ruweishid with Jordanian spouses to enter the country.

By year's end, nearly 600 refugees—mostly Palestinians, Sudanese, and Somalis—remained in Ruweishid. The International Organization for Migration returned 10 Somalis and Sudanese to Iraq, and 14 others planned to repatriate after the New Year. Of the more than 150 Somalis and Sudanese in the camp, UNHCR recognized 90 as refugees and expected to repatriate the rest. In addition,

427 Palestinians and 5 Iranians remained, most carrying Iraqi documents, although 26 held Egyptian documents and 3 others had Lebanese papers.

In a last minute decision, Jordan extended by one or two months its December 31 deadline to close the camp, shelving plans to transfer the population to another camp located in the no-man's-land between Iraq and Jordan. The border area held nearly 1,200 refugees—mostly Iranian Kurds from al-Tash camp—who fled Iraq at the height of the fighting in April.

“UNHCR appealed to Iraq’s neighbors to postpone the repatriation of Iraqi refugees, expressing concern about safety and the lack of international representatives inside the country.”

Jordan continued to host more than 150,000 Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip, and UNHCR processed some 2,100 applications for asylum, recognizing 225 Iraqis and 134 others as refugees.

More than 1,600 Iraqi residents in Syria besieged UNHCR offices in Damascus at the start of the war, seeking the temporary protection letters needed to apply for asylum. During two operations in April, Syrian security forces returned a total of 44 Iraqi refugees from El Hol refugee camp near the Iraqi border, believing that the refugees—who originated from Tikrit—were loyalists of Saddam Hussein. While Iraqis constituted more than 60 percent of Syria's 2,400 asylum applicants in 2003, some 270 Somalis and 235 Sudanese also applied during the year.

Syria and Lebanon together continued to host more than 800,000 Palestinian refugees (see: “With Palestine, Against the Palestinians,” p. 66). Lebanese authorities re-examined a 1994 naturalization decree, placing the citizenship of thousands of Lebanese of Palestinian origin in jeopardy.

Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding signed with UNHCR in September, Lebanon's General Security Office will issue identity cards granting the freedom of movement to refugees registered with UNHCR. In August, 46 Iraqi Kurds who illegally crossed into Israel from Lebanon were returned to the no-man's-land between the borders by the Israeli army. UNHCR helped 16 to repatriate voluntarily, while the others awaited resettlement.

Thousands of Iraqis spontaneously began to return from Iran after more than 20 years of exile. At the

beginning of 2003, Iran hosted 202,000 Iraqi Shi'a refugees from the Iran-Iraq war—some 48,000 in refugee camps, the rest in urban communities. The refugees—eager to return home—risked landmines, extreme temperatures, and possible arrest by coalition forces, ignoring UNHCR appeals to delay their return until security inside Iraq improved. By November, officials estimated that at least 50,000 had left Iran on their own, prompting UNHCR to facilitate the repatriation with organized convoys that helped about 500 refugees return by year's end.

Throughout the year, some 269,000 Afghan refugees returned home from Iran. It was unclear how many refugees died in the December 26 earthquake in Bam, but early estimates counted some 1,100 to 1,200 survivors out of 5,120 Afghan refugees listed with UNHCR prior to the disaster.

In Saudi Arabia, more than 4,500 Iraqis returned from Rafha camp to Iraq in 14 UNHCR-assisted convoys. At year's end, approximately 700 Iraqi refugees and 100

rived each month, but Ethiopians made up more than 80 percent of the new arrivals after September. Historically, Yemen granted *prima facie* refugee status to Ethiopian Navy officers and cadets who fled Ethiopia in 1991; they and others continue to arrive, and UNHCR reported nearly 2,000 Ethiopians, plus several hundred registered Palestinian, Iraqi, Sudanese, and Eritrean refugees, seeking assistance. In 2003, Yemeni coastal patrols arrested and deported 1,200 Ethiopians and more than 500 Arabs and others caught trying to enter Yemen illegally. Several thousand persons not registered with UNHCR live in refugee-like situations, including an estimated 100,000 Iraqis.

Europe

by Michelle Berg

Rising anti-asylum and anti-immigration rhetoric echoed throughout Europe in 2003. Harsher laws in many countries, combined with moves by the European Union (EU) to lower protection standards, made the continent increasingly less welcoming to those who sought asylum on its shores.

Right-wing politicians increasingly blamed asylum seekers for Europe's ills. In Denmark, the leader of the Danish People's Party stated that Denmark should consider withdrawing from the UN Refugee Convention. Jörg Haider, the leader of Austria's far right, urged Austria to tighten its already stringent asylum laws and take in only "respectable" foreigners who would conform to Austrian society. He stated, "We only want people here who will play by our rules, and we certainly only want people who work." The Swiss People's party ran its election campaign with ads linking asylum seekers to increased crime, rape, and other social ills. One ad stated, "Here are the results of the policies of the left and its friends: pampered criminals, shameless asylum seekers and a brutal Albanian mafia." In the United Kingdom the media fueled fears of Britain being overrun by asylum seekers and equated them with criminals with language such as, "The flood of shirkers, scroungers and criminals—with their drugs, guns and vice—has to be

stopped." The *Daily Mail* began a series on "Asylum Britain," claiming in an editorial that the United Kingdom was a "haven" for "Albanian gangsters, Kosovar people-smugglers and Algerian terrorists."

Many European countries detained asylum seekers in poor conditions. The European Human Rights Commissioner chastised Malta, which is set to join the EU in May 2004, for forcing asylum seekers to live in overcrowded facilities for excessive periods of time—one to two years—



An internally displaced Chechen woman, who lives in a nearby tent, looking into a house *Medecins Sans Frontières* built for Chechens in Ingushetia, Russia, May 2003. To induce them to return to war-torn Chechnya, however, the government forbade the Chechens from moving in and ordered the houses torn down.

Photo: AP/M. Sadulayev

Afghans awaited repatriation from the camp, where they had lived since the 1991 Gulf war. The Iraqis are predominantly Shi'a Muslims who had heeded the first President Bush's call to rise up against Iraq's government in the aftermath of the first Gulf War.

Yemen, the only state in the Arabian Peninsula party to the UN Refugee Convention, hosted more than 70,000 refugees in 2003—mostly Somalis granted *prima facie* refugee status upon arrival. Nearly 1,000 Somalis ar-



while their claims were processed. Greece detained asylum seekers under conditions that, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “did not meet minimum standards.” Greek authorities detained single men and women together and did not exempt children and victims of torture from detention. British prison inspectors also reported that a detention facility for asylum seekers near Heathrow airport in London was “unsafe” for workers and detainees due to violence and understaffing at the facility. In Scotland, a report from the inspector of prisons described Dungavel detention center, where children were detained for protracted periods, as unfit to house and educate them. The inspector found that the children had insufficient access to play areas and the outdoors, and that the education program was designed only for short-term stays. Belgium placed undocumented migrants, including asylum seekers, in airport transit zones for weeks without recourse.

Other countries, although not jailing asylum seekers, made survival difficult for them. Spain’s northern African enclave of Ceuta had limited resources to assist asylum seekers, leaving many to survive on the streets. Spain prohibits asylum seekers from working for the first six months of their stay, preventing them from supporting themselves. With Ceuta’s only asylum reception center filled beyond capacity, UNHCR estimated that approximately 500 asylum seekers were living outside the center, 300 of whom were unassisted by any agency, a violation of the EU directive requiring states to “to provide material reception conditions to asylum seekers...adequate for health and to enable subsistence.” The United Kingdom passed a law that denied state support to asylum seekers who failed to claim asylum immediately upon arrival or “as soon thereafter as practicable.” The government proposed measures to further erode laws that protect asylum seekers. The measures would significantly reduce access to legal aid, take children of denied asylum seekers into state care, create new criminal offences for undocumented asylum seekers, and slash appeals, which the prime minister reportedly referred to as “judicial interference.” The government also pledged to halve the number of asylum seekers coming to Britain.

Austria too, moved to tighten its asylum system, passing perhaps the most draconian laws in the EU, including provisions to deport most asylum seekers whose cases are pending appeal—where approximately one in five cases is overturned—and to refuse to accept asylum applications at land borders. The latter could lead to chain deportations and, ultimately, *refoulement*.

Failed Afghan asylum seekers in Belgium, fearing being returned to Afghanistan, staged a hunger strike in a Brussels church. After about three weeks, the Belgian government agreed to grant them a reprieve, allowing them to stay until early in 2004 when the security situation in Afghanistan would be reassessed. Many EU states offered Afghans cash to return. Many nations also threatened or used force to return failed asylum seekers if they refused to return. In December, following the murder of one of its staff in Afghanistan, UNHCR called for countries to reconsider forced repatriation of failed Afghan asylum seekers.

In the drive to reach a common asylum system, the EU member states only agreed to minimum standards of protection, providing many member states with the option of lowering their standards. Many proposals member states put forth during the year sought to erode refugee rights and severely limit asylum. Although ultimately rejected, Britain sought to create “asylum zones” outside of the EU where

“Rising anti-asylum and anti-immigration rhetoric echoed throughout Europe in 2003. Harsher laws in many countries, combined with moves by the European Union to lower protection standards, made the continent increasingly less welcoming to those who sought asylum on its shores.”

asylum seekers’ claims would be adjudicated or where refugees would be housed until the circumstances causing their flight ended, blocking them from entering the EU.

In a draft directive for asylum procedures, the EU states proposed the creation of a list of “safe third countries” applying to all member states. This would enable EU states to return asylum seekers to the last country they transited if deemed safe, or a safe country that agreed to admit them, even if the asylum seeker had not been there and did not have links to the country. The proposal would severely reduce the rights of asylum seekers to remain during appeals, allowed 15 different categories of cases to be put into accelerated procedures, and limited legal assistance for minors and asylum seekers who arrived irregularly. In addition, under the proposal, asylum seekers who arrive at the border could be detained for up to four weeks without any possibility of review. The UNHCR criticized the draft legislation for its “danger of succumbing to the ‘lowest common denominator’ effect that could erode international standards for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.” During his six-month tenure, the Italian president of the EU also proposed that the EU set an annual quota on the number of asylum seekers who could be accepted into the EU. None of these proposals was enacted by the end of the year.

The EU passed minimum standards providing for family reunification for those who had refugee status, but not for those with other forms of protection. Refugees must apply within three months of receiving status, or prove they have sufficient income, health insurance, and accommodation to sponsor a family member. Family reunification can be denied on ill-defined grounds of “public policy, public security, or public health.” Member states may also limit the application to family relationships predating the refugee’s entry. Furthermore, the right is limited to nuclear family members, with admission of unmarried partners, adult unmarried children, de facto family members, and others left to the discretion of the member states. Each member state may establish a minimum age, for reunification of spouses and their children, not to exceed twenty-one. Member states may deny family members the right to work for up to one year for “reasons related to the situation of the labor market.” In December, Pat Cox, the President of the European Parliament, formally applied to the European Court of Justice to have the directive declared null and void on grounds that it was adopted through improper procedure and that its contents violated EU law.

In May, Macedonia closed the Shuto Orizari refugee camp, causing the Kosovar Roma refugees with temporary status who lived there to flee to the Greek-Macedonian border claiming they feared repatriation. UNHCR and the government had offered them housing with host-families, but the Roma wanted a more secure asylum in the EU. The Roma claimed the Macedonians might deport them individually over time, without notice or censure, if they were dispersed among host families. Macedonian officials reportedly blocked their entry to Greece, and Greece sent riot police to the border to prevent their entry. The Roma remained at the border until August, when Macedonia announced it would allow them to remain and apply for asylum pursuant to the newly passed asylum law. Observers, however, questioned whether the new law would be implemented properly based on past practice of the Macedonians, and whether Kosovar Roma would be fully integrated given the poor conditions they lived in during their four year stay, as well as the discrimination facing Roma in Macedonia. In Kosovo itself, ethnically motivated violence against non-Albanians discouraged internally displaced persons and refugees from returning. Those who did return to their homes, both non-Albanians and Albanians, lacked adequate shelter, food, clothing, and jobs and had only limited freedom of movement.

Russia’s brutal treatment of Chechens continued in 2003. Both sides in the conflict continued to commit



Six hundred Roma refugees attempted to leave Macedonia and seek asylum in the European Union but were blocked at the Greek border in May 2003. Photo: EPA/G. Licovski

human rights violations, including several suicide bomb attacks linked to Chechen rebels and disappearances of Chechen civilians by Russian forces. In addition, Russia continued its policy of shutting camps for Chechen internally displaced persons in Ingushetia, forcing many to return to Chechnya against their will. Russia prohibited Chechens from living in other parts of the country, despite the fact that Chechens are Russian citizens. Although non-governmental organizations obtained permits and tried to construct alternate shelters for those forced out of the camps, the government of Ingushetia deemed these shelters illegal and prohibited the displaced from living in them.

On a positive note, the Turkish Republic of North-



ern Cyprus opened its border, allowing the free movement of all Cypriots across the Green Line that has divided the north and south of the island for almost 30 years. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot governments, however, remained unable to reunite the country. At the end of the year, it appeared that only the Greek-controlled Republic of Cyprus would gain entry to the EU in May 2004. Approximately 265,000 Cypriots remain internally displaced after almost 30 years.

In Belgium, a Brussels court convicted four former police officers of assault, battery, and negligence in the case of Semira Adamu, a failed asylum seeker who died during her deportation.

The United Kingdom took small steps toward increasing refugee resettlement. Prior to 2003, only Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Ireland resettled refugees. All together, these countries resettled about 4,000 refugees in 2002, ranging from a high of 1,270 in Norway to 23 in Ireland. In 2003, Britain began its first resettlement effort, agreeing to resettle about 500 Liberian refugees, although none had arrived by the end of the year.

Americas

by Doug Ford

Colombia continued to be the primary source of uprooted persons in the Americas with an estimated 2.73 million displaced persons, typically in nearby cities, 200,000 refugees in neighboring countries, and another 34,000 in more distant countries such as Costa Rica (8,300) and the United States (19,400). In fiscal year 2003, the United States resettled 28,400 refugees—a near all-time low for the U.S. resettlement program. The U.S. government imposed additional restrictions on asylum seekers, forcibly returning thousands from Cuba and Haiti. By year end 2003, 30,000 refugees had fled Cuba, and 26,000 from Haiti. Some 12,000 persons were internally displaced in Mexico, chiefly due to the conflict in Chiapas.

As a whole, with the exception of uprooted Colombians, the Americas hosted more refugees and others in need of protection than it displaced. Within the region, the United States and Canada hosted the largest numbers of refugees. In 2003, Canada resettled 10,700. Brazil and Chile resettled 16 and 12 refugees, respectively. In 2003, Argentina hosted 2,300 refugees and asylum seekers and Mexico, 2,900.

During Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Vélez's first full year in office, the government escalated its offensive against guerrillas and paramilitaries. The increased fighting uprooted at least 250,000, increasing Colombia's total uprooted to 2.96 million. The rate of displacement in 2003 decreased from 2002, during which more than 400,000 people were newly uprooted—the greatest number recorded in a single year. Citing these figures, the Colombian government continued to promote the return of

displaced people and announced overall reductions in human rights violations and displacement. Human rights groups challenged the government's claim that human rights conditions had improved, noting that the number of uprooted people still increased and that the government did not provide adequate security to returning people.

For several reasons, the figures for the uprooted likely underestimated the actual total. First, many displaced Colombians did not register with the government out of mistrust. Second, the government did not register the tens of thousands displaced by the U.S.-backed fumigation program that destroyed more than 133,000 hectares of coca and legal crops. Third, neither the government nor independent groups could track the many people who fled homes in isolated border regions. Fourth, the government has never adequately counted those displaced earlier in the conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s when this surge in displacement began.

The Colombian government increasingly militarized the civilian population and blurred the lines between combatants and civilians. The government formed networks of civilian informers and patrols. President Uribe criticized human rights advocates as "politickers at the service of terrorism." These actions increased the likelihood that military operations on all sides would target civilians.

Armed groups on all sides restricted residents' movements into or out of communities, blockaded supplies, and limited access to health care and humanitarian aid. Armed factions justified the confinement, which affected possibly 100,000 people, as a necessary measure to maintain control over communities and cut off perceived support for the opposition. The restrictions disproportionately affected indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples. The government concluded a demobilization agreement with the main paramilitary group, but this did not result in a notable reduction in paramilitary violence.

The government offensive against the guerrillas and paramilitaries, the fighting between the paramilitaries and guerrillas, as well as the associated human rights violations forced at least 35,000 Colombians to seek refuge in Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

Panama's government violated the law against *refoulement* by forcibly returning more than 100 Colombian refugees in April. Panama promoted returns in other situations where human rights agencies questioned whether the returns were voluntary. The United States denied Temporary Protected Status to Colombians, despite urging from the Colombian government and an extensive coalition of human rights groups. In 2003, Venezuela worked with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to fully implement its newly passed refugee law, but had not yet established a legitimate process for refugee status determinations.

United States In Fiscal Year 2003 (ending September 30), the United States admitted 28,400 refugees, far below the 70,000 that were authorized. The admission figures for FYs 2002 (27,100) and 2003, were the lowest in the history of the U.S. resettlement program. The average admissions for the five-year period from 1997–2002 was 66,000. Although President Bush authorized 70,000 for FY 2004, preliminary admissions rates for the first quarter indicated that this would not be attained. The government had not yet established selection criteria or an efficient security screening process for handling the large groups that would enable the United States to resettle the full number authorized.

In 2003, the United States increased the use of detention for asylum seekers, ignoring its own guidelines favoring parole. It enacted nationality-based restrictions on immigrants, which not only discriminated against people of certain nationalities, but also contributed to greater use of detention.

In late 2002, the Department of Homeland Security instituted a measure subjecting asylum seekers arriving by sea to automatic detention. The measure was aimed at Haitians after a boat carrying more than 200 Haitians ran aground in Florida in October 2002. In April 2003, Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a sweeping decision reinforcing the government's power to detain many immigrants on national security grounds without specific evidence that the individual posed any security threat.

The United States implemented Operation Liberty Shield, which required the prolonged detention of asylum seekers from more than 30 countries. The policy, however, was discontinued about two months after it was unveiled. Another U.S. policy, the special "call-in" registration of men from 25 nations, began in the fall of 2002 and continued until April 2003. Under special registration, the United States registered approximately 83,000 people, detained 2,800, and initiated deportation proceedings against 13,000. Both Operation Liberty Shield and special registration applied primarily to people from Middle Eastern countries or countries with Muslim majorities.

To avoid detention and deportation, members of nationalities covered by these measures fled to the border creating a surge in asylum claims in Canada—four times as many Pakistanis made claims in the first three months of the year, at the height of these programs, as in the second quarter. (Many could not apply for asylum in the United States because it generally prohibits the filing of an asylum



Haitian asylum seeker, 56-year old Rothenel Charles, languishes in Krome detention center outside Miami, Fla., despite illness and an immigration judge *twice* granting his claim. The government refused to release him until February 2004, to undergo surgery, and continues to appeal the judge's decision.

Photo: South Florida Sun-Sentinel/A. Valentin

application more than one year after arrival.) But Canada directed large numbers back to the United States, foreshadowing the safe-third country agreement between the two countries, saying it could not process the flood of arrivals at the border. The United States detained and initiated deportation proceedings against many that Canada sent back. Those detained then missed their Canadian asylum appointments. In the past, Canadian officials coordinated with U.S. officials to ensure such people were not detained.

At the year's end, the two countries were preparing to implement the Safe Third Country Agreement, where Canada would turn back asylum seekers at its border who had transited through the United States and vice versa. Canada also failed to establish an asylum appeals system despite a promise in 2002 to do so within a year. The Canadian Council for Refugees noted, "refugee claimants have less rights of appeal than Canadians contesting a parking ticket."

When call-in registration ended in April 2003, the flow to Canada subsided, but several communities reported large numbers of Pakistanis and other Middle Eastern nationals still leaving the United States. The Pakistani embassy estimated that 13,000 of the estimated 25,000 nationals out of status in the United States left in the last two years.