THE CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION:
REPATRIATION DURING CONFLICT, REINTEGRATION AMIDST DEVASTATION

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Introduction

This volume reports on the 1992 Symposium on Refugee Repatriation During Conflict: A New Conventional Wisdom and on other activities of the International Study of Spontaneous Voluntary Repatriation through 1993.

In October 1992, the Center for the Study of Societies in Crisis (CSSC), Dallas, Texas, convened a Symposium entitled "Refugee Repatriation During Conflict: A New Conventional Wisdom" in Addis Ababa. The meeting was organized by Professor Barry Stein of Michigan State University and Frederick Cuny of the Center. Its purpose was to present the need for a "new conventional wisdom" regarding repatriation, to offer some recommendations regarding the parameters of a new approach to repatriation, and to stimulate discussion and suggestions towards the development of a new conventional wisdom.

The Symposium was the culmination of a research project, the International Study of Spontaneous Voluntary Repatriation, begun in 1986 by Stein and Cuny. The study has involved case studies on return to Afghanistan, Burundi, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, and Sudan, plus numerous publications and several interim or preparatory conferences. The study has been supported by the Ford Foundation and has benefited from support and collaboration by the Hemispheric Migration Project of Georgetown University, the Disaster Research Unit of the University of Manitoba, the Refugee Studies Programme of Oxford University, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, and the Refugee Bureau of the United States Department of State.

Since the Symposium the research project has been concerned with protection issues during repatriation and with assistance to returnees and their communities. The primary focus of our current activities is post-return assistance during conflict: community rehabilitation and reconciliation.

What's Going On?

The repatriation of refugees during conflicts was, until recently, a little-recognized phenomenon. Prior to 1985, large-scale, organized repatriations, such as those that occurred following World War II, had gotten the most notice in the disaster literature. Although voluntary repatriation was considered the "most desirable" durable solution, pessimism reigned regarding its prospects. Simpson (1939) noted: "Deliberate repatriation on a large scale is scarcely relevant in a discussion of practical instruments of solution." Some researchers and several observers had written that the number of "spontaneous" returnees--those who returned on their own--probably outnumbered those who were being officially assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Yet the numbers were vague.

In 1985, 54,000 Tigrayan refugees left refugee camps in Sudan and returned to their province in northern Ethiopia. The move occurred in the midst of an intense bombing campaign by the Ethiopian Air Force and an ongoing famine that many considered the worst in Ethiopia's history. The United Nations and the international community were hard-pressed to understand why people would want to return under those conditions; many predicted a major disaster for the returnees. Yet few died, and many were able to resume normal lives
within their communities in a short time despite a lack of international assistance.\textsuperscript{1}

The Tigrayan situation stimulated interest in the subject of refugee repatriation during conflict. In 1986, the Ford Foundation funded a multicountry study of the situation and conditions surrounding these returns. And in 1988, Georgetown University’s Center for Immigration Policy and Research for the Americas (CIPRA) provided additional support to expand the research to Latin America.

The study originally planned to focus only on spontaneous repatriation. The researchers believed that the Tigrayan situation was not unique and wanted to learn about the conditions that surrounded the peoples’ apparently sudden decision to leave refugee camps and return home. Research showed, however, that the issue was broader than had been anticipated: spontaneous repatriation was intricately linked with other forms of return.

Unassisted self-repatriation begins with the first flow of refugees from their country of origin and continues in different forms for the course of their exile.

By the second year of the study, a framework of repatriation during conflict was developed and applied retroactively to the studies that had already been conducted. The framework which is described below, is not absolute; some of the events that take place may change sequence or may appear sooner or later, depending on the situation. Nonetheless, the model has held true for the repatriations investigated and has provided insight into the processes at play.

Conventional Wisdom

The International Study has had an impact, strongly buttressed by the force of events and experience, on the principles and assumptions regarding voluntary repatriation. In 1983, UNHCR reported:

In the last analysis, voluntary repatriation remains—despite many successes—the most difficult of durable solutions to achieve. . . . Even in the best of circumstances, only a proportion of the refugee population may repatriate, and instances such as the return of virtually an entire refugee population . . . are more often the exception than the rule.

By contrast, in 1992, UNHCR noted: "This year, which the High Commissioner has dubbed the beginning of the decade of voluntary repatriation could, it is hoped, see up to three million refugees return home worldwide" (UNHCR, 1992). In fact, in 1992 and 1993 there were some major returns, totalling approximately four million refugees: to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran, to Cambodia from Thailand, to Iraq from Iran and Turkey, to Angola from Zaire and Zambia, to Somalia from Kenya, to Ethiopia from Sudan, and to Mozambique and South Africa. Thus far in the "decade of repatriation" almost seven million refugees have returned home.

When the Study began in 1986 the "conventional wisdom" on voluntary repatriation was reflected in Conclusions 18 (1980) and 40 (1985) of UNHCR’s Executive Committee which, reflecting established practices regarding a wave of organized repatriations to newly independent African states in the 1960s and 1970s, set four "preconditions" for UNHCR’s participation in voluntary repatriation. As interpreted by a draft for a new edition of

\textsuperscript{1} Hendrie (1992) and Techliwoini, in his paper in this volume, indicate that the exodus and return were a "participatory form of relief management" organized by the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) as a means of bringing their people to relief assistance. In order to receive assistance the Tigrayans had to become refugees because international assistance was only offered across the international border or in government held areas—where they would have been at risk of government reprisals, forced resettlement or conscription.
UNHCR's Emergency Handbook (1991), voluntary repatriation is the "most desirable solution" and there were "four preconditions for the UNHCR's participation in voluntary repatriation:"

1. **Fundamental Change of Circumstances:** "In order for UNHCR to become involved, a change of circumstances must be substantial and permanent, and not be merely transitory, as for example a ceasefire might be." There should be the end of a civil war or replacement of a repressive regime. "Examples include Zimbabwe in 1980, and Namibia in 1989."

2. **Voluntary Nature of the Decision to Return:** "So that the refugee's decision to return or to remain can be made of his or her own free will." "Freely made individual choice." "Carefully explained to refugees. "Intention to return . . . expressed in writing." Care to avoid coercion by governments or partisan refugee factions.

3. **Tripartite Agreements Between Origin, Host, and UNHCR:** "Terms and conditions . . . roles and responsibilities . . . legal and operational commitments." UNHCR to "ensure interests of refugees . . . physical safety."

4. **Return in Safety and Dignity:** Refugees to be protected "into the post-arrival period" and "not placed at unnecessary risk as a result of the repatriation operation." "Substantial and permanent change of circumstances has indeed taken place." "Legal guarantees" by country of origin, "full protection . . . UNHCR will monitor."

Amnesties are not a preconditions for UNHCR participation but UNHCR will negotiate blanket or general amnesties, communicate the details to the refugees, and monitor the agreement.

These preconditions represented, and still represent, properly high standards or statements of principle regarding the nature of any repatriation. Unfortunately, it was the rare refugee situation that satisfied all or most of the preconditions. In the real world, UNHCR can establish standards it hopes to achieve but UNHCR cannot set preconditions for its participation. Agreements and guarantees are desirable, but returnee assistance delayed may be assistance denied. Rather, assistance must reflect the refugees' own criteria and pace of decision-making.

Today UNHCR's principles and assumptions regarding voluntary repatriation, reflecting recent events and experiences, put much less emphasis on prior conditions for repatriation and take a more dynamic view of the process. The change in attitude became evident in 1992 when the Protection Sub-Committee of UNHCR's Executive Committee noted that:

It is, however UNHCR's experience, based on close involvement with repatriation operations over a number of years, that while the principles are accepted, the reality does not always fit comfortably with them. This may be the case where voluntariness for all is difficult to ascertain or verify, or when conditions in the country of origin are such that safety is not absolute and guarantees of safety and dignity cannot effectively be extended.

Ideally, the circumstances which led to departure should have been removed through social and political changes of a profound and enduring nature. The reality, however, is different, given that decisions to repatriate taken voluntarily . . . most often come together at a point after some changes have occurred, but before the conditions for [an ideal return] have been met. In such cases, the refugee is confident...
enough to return and the states to assist.

Further evidence of a new view of repatriation can be seen in UNHCR's "Voluntary Repatriation Training Module" (1993)—which includes the findings of the International Study in its Annexes, and in the draft "Protection Guidelines on Voluntary Repatriation" (1993) which makes a distinction between promoting, encouraging, and facilitating voluntary repatriation.

**REPATRIATION DURING CONFLICT**

In recent years, relief agency personnel working with refugees often were surprised when large numbers of people suddenly began to return to their homeland in the midst of the conflict that forced them to become refugees in the first place. Sometimes these repatriations, as in Tigray, occurred during periods of intense fighting or severe famine caused by the conflict.

Relief workers have long believed that refugees do not return home until the situation that forced them to flee has been resolved. Humanitarian agencies pointed to long-term refugee situations, such as the Palestinians, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Rwandese, and Cambodians. Thus, when repatriation does begin in the midst of conflict, many relief workers believe the situation is unusual. Alarmed by what they interpret as irrational behavior, they often work to discourage the repatriation or limit the number of people who are returning or restrict returnees to certain members of the population, such as single men or families without children.

Pressure to discourage repatriation during conflict can also come from other quarters. Other refugees will probably oppose repatriation in the beginning. Ofttimes insurgent groups will try to prevent the departure of their exile support base. Supporters of the insurgency, especially foreign governments, may actively oppose the return and pressure the United Nations (UN) and the host government to try to control it. Even human rights groups are likely to be in opposition.

Representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) are usually caught in the middle. While their organization officially favors repatriation as one of the durable solutions to refugee crises, their protection doctrine specifies that repatriation should take place under a framework of international guarantees of a voluntary return in safety and dignity after a fundamental change of circumstances—guarantees that are virtually impossible to obtain unless the conflict that started the crisis has ended. Sometimes UNHCR

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2 "Promotion" is an advocacy role to create the conditions conducive to return. "Encouraging" repatriation is only when there are "optimal conditions for return in safety and dignity." Self-repatriation is "facilitated" if "refugees freely take it upon themselves, as they often do, . . . to return home even in situations . . . the international community considers highly insecure."

3 Danger may come from the opposite direction, from exile groups pressuring refugees to return for political or military reasons. A December 1993 UNHCR Press Release expressed such concerns, which were realized two months later when a Sudanese Government military offensive caused renewed massive refugee flows.

Nearly 700 young refugee boys, some no more than 10 years old, have slipped out of Kakuma camp in Kenya and begun a dangerous trek into southern Sudan. . . . The UNHCR repeatedly has advised the youngsters that a return to the Sudan could exposes them to extreme risk of conscription as combatants, to lack of food and shelter, and to injury or death. . . . The UNHCR is reluctant to see the boys return to the Sudan unless their repatriation can be accomplished in safety and unless they can be reunited with their families. The situation prevailing in southern Sudan makes it impossible to reunite families and safely repatriate minors. The UNHCR appeals to the fighting factions to refrain from coercing minors to leave the camp and, in particular, to cease using them as combatants. (emphasis added)
has had to give in to the pressures of donors and adopt policies or procedures that were designed to discourage people from repatriating.

Despite these pressures, refugees do go home. Some of them go as individuals or families. Others may return in small groups. At some point, the return may grow into a massive, highly public, organized movement.

Today, most voluntary repatriations occur during conflict, without a decisive political event such as national independence, without major change in the regime or the conditions that originally caused flight. Countless individual refugees and sizeable groups of well-organized refugees return home in the face of continued risk; frequently without any amnesty, without a repatriation agreement or program, without the permission of the authorities in either the country of asylum or of origin, without international knowledge or assistance, and without an end to the conflict that caused the exodus. The fact that large numbers of refugees choose to return without the "protection" of the UN is an indicator of the efficacy of the protection process, and the fact that many refugees are willing to forgo assistance indicates how aid is regarded during this point in a refugee's exile. The return of refugees to their homelands under these circumstances requires new thinking about voluntary repatriation and the ways of promoting it.

The refugees are the main actors in the contemporary practice of voluntary repatriation. They are the main decision-makers and determine the modalities of movement and the conditions of reception. Refugee-induced repatriation is a self-regulating process on the refugees' own terms. The refugees apply their own criteria to their situation in exile and to conditions in their homeland and will return home if it is safe and better by their standards. Many of the returnees are in desperate circumstances—in part because their return receives woefully inadequate international support, but they do not flee again.

Generally, if international agencies and governments do not initiate, manage, and organize a voluntary repatriation the international agencies refer to it as an unorganized or spontaneous repatriation. However, the failure or inability to provide international repatriation assistance does not mean there is a lack of organization.

Under these circumstances, assistance and protection organizations need to understand what is going on, what their role should be, and what are their responsibilities as humanitarian agencies.

Our main concern is with spontaneous (refugee-induced) voluntary repatriation during conflict. Many refugees repatriate voluntarily and with positive prospects even during conflict. Unfortunately, many other refugees have to return due to great pressures or unsatisfactory conditions that border on coercion. In those cases we urge caution about assisting the return and urge immediate efforts to address the unsatisfactory conditions.

However, in a world of tragic and unsatisfactory choices sometimes it is necessary to take action in a moral quandary and a humanitarian morass.

We do not endorse coerced return of refugees. We are outraged when inadequate humanitarian assistance, closed doors, and lost hope forces refugees to choose between hunger, disease, limbo, and inadequate safeguards of life, limb and dignity on the one hand and a return to danger and instability on the other.

The first imperative for all who care about refugees is to protect them. But if protection has failed either physically or materially. If the combined efforts of the High Commissioner, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and governments fall short and refugees start home under unsatisfactory circumstances, then it is imperative to immediately redress the failures that have led to their decision to return or to assist the returnees to make
the best out of a bad situation.

Assisting repatriation is different from promoting it. We can almost never promote repatriation without peace and other fundamental changes in the situation. But the reality is that some refugees want to go home, and the dilemma is knowing when to facilitate or assist them to carry out their decisions.

Our study tries to take the refugees' point of view. We assume that the refugees have far better information than expatriates or the host country; we also assume that well-informed refugees make rational choices. Once refugees make their decision, all international agencies and NGOs should respect that choice and, to the greatest extent possible, assist the refugees' return.

We also recognize that the safety and security of returnees must be a continuing concern. However, these are relative, not absolute, conditions. The international system's inability to guarantee absolute security to those wishing to repatriate should not stand in the way of assisting repatriation.

Contemporary Repatriation

The voluntary repatriations of the "decade of repatriation" will be unlike almost any that have occurred before. In most cases the peace is fragile, security is tenuous, and the economy and infrastructure of the homeland is devastated. Almost all of the returns are "spontaneous," that is outside of or only marginally aided by the system of international repatriation assistance. The established "conventional wisdom" on voluntary repatriation, based on the experiences of the past, is mistaken and activities based upon it are likely to be irrelevant at best and harmful and wasteful at worst. There is a need for a new view of voluntary repatriation so that policies and activities to assist refugees, returnees, displaced persons, and stayees will respond to realistic conditions and expectations and have a possibility of being relevant and useful.

A new view of voluntary repatriation needs to recognize that most repatriation is refugee-induced and occurs under conditions of conflict. In some situations "repatriation" is the wrong term, because there has been no restoration of the bond between citizen and fatherland. "Return" is a better term because it relates the fact of going home without judging its content. Similarly, "voluntary" is suspect, because far too many refugees go home under pressure or threat or to flee poor security in their country of asylum.

Lack Of Durable Solutions

The number of refugees is increasing due to a lack of durable solutions. The three durable solutions require the integration, citizenship or permanent status, of a refugee into a society. However, voluntary repatriation is the most desirable durable solution by default rather than on its merits. Local integration, which historically played a more minor role than was apparent, has become even less of an option. Resettlement in third countries is offered to only one per cent of the world's refugees. So, by default, if the number of refugees is to be reduced, it will be by means of voluntary repatriation.

This decade has seen a large and great variety of refugee repatriations and returns. Although virtually all of the figures and totals are suspect, they do reveal a pattern: of the seven million who have returned home thus far in the 1990s, over ninety per cent returned in an irregular "spontaneous" fashion, i.e., without significant international assistance. The principles reflected in the Executive Committee's Conclusions 18 and 40 are valid and fundamental, but practice is not based on these principles. However, the dilemma is that reliance on the principles can make international plans and activities irrelevant in the field.
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Notes:
- The bracketed () indicates that a multi-year return ended.
- [iv] indicates the return was mostly involuntary due unsettled conditions in the host country.

Total rough 1975-1993: 10,995,686
Varieties Of Repatriation

It is useful to think of types of repatriation as lying along several continuums or spectrums. Amongst the possible continuums would be (1) whether a repatriation is unassisted or organized and by which actors; (2) the degree to which a repatriation is purely voluntary, encouraged, induced, or forced; (3) whether it is an individual, small group, or more sizeable collective return; and, (4) a political conflict spectrum reflecting the degree to which there has been a significant change in the original cause of flight. Today, most repatriation occurs under far from ideal conditions. The repatriations occur during conflict and raise serious questions of coercion and protection.

Some of the points along a return under political conflict spectrum would be:
(1) return after fundamental political change such as independence (Namibia) or victory (Eritrea, Ethiopia);
(2) return after a political settlement or major political change (Nicaragua);
(3) return after a political settlement that does not end the political conflict and which leaves the contending parties with substantial political and military power (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Angola);
(4) armed self-repatriation by covert refugee military forces seeking to produce a repatriation program (Rwanda);
(5) return to areas not controlled by the government of the country of origin (may be controlled by a rival political force; local, foreign, or international forces) (Tigray, Iraq, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Cambodia);
(6) return to a country controlled by the government that originally caused the flight (Guatemala);
(7) return caused by deteriorating political security conditions in the host country (the post-1985 return from southern Sudan to Uganda, 1989-1991 return from Somalia to Ethiopia);
(8) forced return of impressed refugees to a conflict zone (Khmer Rouge); and,
(9) interdiction and forced return of refugees to a country controlled by the government that originally caused the flight (Haitians).

The Repatriation Framework

When dealing with conditions of return during conflict it is necessary for assistance agencies to work with and react to the refugees' decisions. The international community has missed many opportunities to promote refugee-induced repatriation. If refugees had not engaged in independent decision-making and organizing, recent returns to Tigray (1985-87), Afghanistan, Mozambique, El Salvador, Bulgaria, and elsewhere would not have occurred. Because the international system has failed to provide durable solutions, some refugees are taking matters into their own hands and becoming major actors in the repatriation process.

Although UNHCR's tripartite approach to repatriation is useful and important—often stimulating and facilitating more return outside of official channels than within, its pace is often slow and does not reflect the refugees' own pace and criteria for deciding to go home. Thus, refugees often return on their own rather than wait for formal action by UNHCR.

There are four main phases of repatriation: (1) the "ricochet" effect; (2) relocation-stimulated repatriation; (3) community and alienation; and, (4) major repatriations. The key factors driving the events are the assistance decisions and attitudes of the host country, changing conditions within the homeland, the location of the refugees in their refuge, and the evolution of refugee communities at sites where refugees are concentrated. Also influencing this process is the fact that most borders are relatively porous allowing refugees to visit and
communicate with their homeland.

**Decision-Making**

There are two points to note about refugee decision-making. First, not all refugees are alike; there will be differential responses to forced location often rooted in differences in mobility, urbanization, gender, education, and economic status amongst the refugees. Second, we are examining refugee responses over a long period of time. The refugee community will behave differently at the beginning, generally a conservative risk-averse response, than years later when greater initiative and risk taking will be apparent.

Our view of refugee decision-making sees the refugees as making "rational" choices amongst unsatisfactory options, striving for an outcome that achieves relative security and some small degree of control over their lives. We assume that refugee actions are purposeful; their behavior may be interpreted as directed toward attaining a goal. Refugees make choices for some purpose and we must understand those purposes. Indicating that a choice is "purposeful" or "rational" does not necessarily mean that it is careful or conscious, or that it lists all alternatives and consequences. Many people simplify complex decisions by relying on habit, instinct, simple cues, and trial and error (Ordeshook, 1986).

Although refugees are commonly thought of as powerless, and they are certainly relatively powerless, it is well to recall that the decision to flee, or to stay, or to return home, is an action and a choice. (The choice is often influenced by geography; those near the border cross it and become refugees; others, far from the border, flee to cities and become internally displaced persons. Their status is different, but the cause of flight is often identical.) For almost everyone, the process of becoming a refugee is a transition from relative security and prosperity to uncertainty and poverty.

The decision to flee obviously reflects the refugee's belief that his or her power over others and level of self-control are now inadequate to provide protection from insult, injury, imprisonment or death. Flight represents an attempt to use whatever power, control and mobility the person still possesses to escape from danger to safety. Refugees make their moves to flee, to repatriate, to accept settlement or resettlement because of decisions that compare alternatives.

In comparing alternative decisions refugees attempt to conserve and strengthen their control over their own lives and to reduce the possibility that further stress will occur. Their basic response is conservative, to limit change and disruption. Not surprisingly, refugees seek security. To cope with the stress of flight, they cling to old behavioral patterns, old institutions, and old goals. In clinging to the familiar, refugees attempt to move the shortest distance not only in space to remain in contact with a familiar habitat, but also in terms of the psychological and sociocultural context of their lives. They attempt to transfer old skills and farming practices, to relocate with kin, neighbors, or their own ethnic groups in order to recreate the security of an encapsulating community with familiar institutions and symbols.

In the "relocation" phase of repatriation, refugees consider the move to refugee camps or further inland to settlements as a threat to their identity. It would move them from a known to an unknown world, further away from kin and familiar territory. Returning to a dangerous homeland, to a previously established social identity with rights and obligations, can be seen as allowing the refugee to retain more power and stability and control over his own life.

The passage of time is likely to alter the refugees' approach to decision-making but not the goal of the decisions--security and control. Rarely will the transition stage, marked by a conservative response, be shorter than two years. Where refugees play an active role in reconstructing their lives and communities and so reestablish a positive image of themselves,
the transition stage may be relatively short.

The later stage of decision-making is marked by increased initiative and risk taking [which may only be to pre-flight degrees of risk taking.] The turning point is when the refugees have regained much of their former standard of living and degree of self-sufficiency. Local leaders emerge capable of pushing local interests vis-a-vis the hosts and government officials. The refugee communityabandons its initial dependency, and an outward-looking and dynamic leadership emerges. Refugees organize themselves into more effective political units for obtaining benefits from the external environment. This organization requires the passage of time, but also gives the refugees a sense of control over their own community. Such organizing can be encouraged by NGOs, by growing confidence in the international presence and delivery of supplies, and enhanced by organizational skills of resistance-connected refugees. The refugees' willingness to take risks may focus on repatriation if the community's condition in the host country is hopeless, isolated, or precarious.

**Pattern and Process of Repatriation**

Actively interacting with the refugees' desire for security and some degree of control over their lives, are the events in exile: "ricochet" repatriations; relocation-stimulated repatriation; return by refugees alienated from the emerging refugee community; and, major repatriations.

**Ricochet:** If the exodus was sudden, such as a result of military action or a "stampede" away from danger, a substantial number of people who might not have felt personally threatened or whose sympathies were not in line with the majority of the refugees will immediately seek ways to return.

**Relocation-stimulated repatriation:** The next phase is the host government's round-up of refugees scattered along the border and their movement to refugee camps to facilitate assistance to and control of the refugees. At this point, refugees must decide whether to accept host government control and reside in the camps or try to elude the authorities and find a place to live away from other refugees. For those refugees who settle outside the camps, repatriation is more likely to be a viable alternative, especially if they are unable to find work in the country of asylum.

**Community and alienation:** One of the more interesting patterns found in refugee camps is the formation of politically organized, cohesive communities by uprooted peoples. Refugees show an impressive ability to organize and cohere as a new community with its own mores and values. Frequently, refugee organizations are formed that ally with insurgent groups. Refugees come to believe that their situation is a key part of the political equation in the struggle of their group for social, cultural or economic change.

Some refugees will be indifferent or alienated from the emerging refugee community, its values and common cause. These aloof refugees, seeking control over their own lives, are candidates to move away from the camp or settlement or to repatriate.

As time passes, the available space for repatriation is likely to increase. At home, the locus of the conflict may change; the levels of violence may decrease; political or economic changes may occur. The border may become more porous as a result of internal changes in the homeland. Cross-border trade may normalize, providing an opportunity for families in the camps and spontaneously-settled refugees to send "scouts" back to check on conditions and to find out if it is viable for small numbers of people to go back. Returns by internally displaced persons to particular regions will be carefully noted by refugees and may trigger some repatriation.
Gradually more and more people will begin to leave. They are generally people who are on the periphery of the mainstream refugee community, or those who feel they no longer "belong". The refugee organizations may oppose the return of these less committed refugees, feeling that repatriation somehow undercuts the political and/or moral position of the refugee community. Repatriations during this period may expand the political space at home, although not significantly.

**Secondary relocation-stimulated repatriation:** At some point, in almost every refugee situation, the host government will decide, or propose, to relocate or transfer refugees from refugee camps near the border to camps or formal settlements further inland. This relocation may be dictated by political concerns, as in the case of Guatemalans in Mexico, or operational concerns, as in the case of Sudan. Whatever the reason, the relocation decision forces the refugees to decide whether to accept the transfer and the disruption it is likely to cause to both the refugees' lives and to the established sense of community, or to leave the camps and either attempt to integrate into the surrounding communities or repatriate.

A key consideration is the perceived breakup of the sense of community that has evolved in the camps. If more refugees show an interest in repatriation than the existing political conditions and organization of assistance allows, then organizational attitudes start to change, and agencies working with the refugees begin to actively seek ways to expand the space for repatriation.

**Major repatriations:** UNHCR participation often marks the final stage in the repatriation process. In response to the growing return movement and to governmental pressures (usually from the host government and then from the country of origin), UNHCR will begin to provide assistance. Whether or not this is carried out as part of a formal tripartite agreement may depend on the way the repatriation is perceived by the international community. In recent years UNHCR practice has been to become significantly involved in repatriation earlier in the process.

Return or repatriation is not an all or nothing one-shot event. Returns occur over a long period of time, and the successes or failures of the early returnees influences not only the prospects for later returns, but also internal politics in the homeland and the attitudes of the country of asylum and the international community.

**MAJOR ISSUES AND PROBLEMS**

The Symposium discussed a number of major repatriation issues and problems which present major challenges to the refugee assistance and policy communities and could mar the hopes for a successful decade of repatriation. The discussions were free-ranging and no attempt was made to reach closure or conclusions on the issues. These issues are: are: fragile peace and tenuous security; protection of the voluntary nature of return; the UN system's plans, designs, coordination, management, and funding of repatriation operations; non-recognized entities (NREs); and, post-return assistance, reconciliation and rehabilitation.

**FRAGILE PEACE**

In many of the refugee situations where hope has been reborn, there is an awareness that reconciliation and peace have shaky foundations. Many of the conflicts have ended without a victory for either opponent. Rather, exhausted by years of inconclusive conflict and prodded by patrons whose patience and support eroded with the end of the Cold War, a deal has been made by opponents who still possess formidable firepower. However, many refugee-generating conflicts long predated the Cold War and have the potential to resume or continue outside of the East-West context. Superpower interference certainly caused greater damage, which may become an object of revenge and an obstacle to reconciliation, and left
the parties with sufficient stockpiles to continue the conflict. Refugees who repatriate under such conditions are in danger of renewed conflict, but they also represent an important opportunity to strengthen the fragile peace.

Refugees languishing in border camps can be an impediment to peace. They often support insurgents back home and some refugee camps and settlements have been bases of rest, recruitment, and training for guerrillas. Sometimes, as in India, Uganda, Mozambique, Honduras, Mexico, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Thailand, they draw, or threaten to draw, the country of refuge into the conflict.

Given the long-term, unresolved nature of most refugee situations, it is time to consider voluntary repatriation in a new light. Rather than a passive international approach, return should be actively promoted even before the formal end of hostilities. And repatriation should be seen as a tool for reducing confrontations along tense borders, for expanding or securing zones of peace and stability for returnees, and possibly as an encouragement to talks between the adversaries.

The mere act of going home may reduce conflict and promote peace. When thousands of Salvadoran refugees and displaced persons returned to homes in conflict zones, the reoccupation of homesteads was so extensive that the Salvadoran military reduced bombing sorties in order to avoid killing civilians. The returnees even warned both sides in the civil war to keep hands-off the reoccupied zone.

If international assistance were focussed on returnee areas, conflict-free zones could conceivably be created, and further return might be encouraged and protected by the presence of international workers. Some evidence suggests that even death squads are reluctant to murder in the presence of international witnesses.

Fragile peace creates a terrible dilemma for international agencies. Certainly they cannot endorse the agreement, pressure the refugees to return, and transport them home without violating their prime mandate to protect refugees. At the same time, this reticence should not lead international agencies to discourage or hinder those refugees who want to exercise their right-of repatriation. In several repatriation programs, the international community’s stance has been to make extensive preparations for return, and to discourage refugees from going home before all was ready. However, refugees often act on the basis of different information and criteria than that of outsiders. The greater danger is that lost repatriation opportunities may also be lost peace opportunities. Peace can emerge from a process that includes the return of refugees and the reconciliation of communities. The dilemma is knowing which comes first, return or peace.

PROTECTION OF THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF RETURN

Too often, refugee protection is inadequate because it is focussed in the wrong direction. Protection concerns are almost exclusively directed at the country of origin whose persecution caused the exodus. For too many refugees, however, the greater and more immediate danger comes during their exile. The danger comes from threats, pressure, and attacks by the host or elements within the host society; and it comes from inadequate international assistance which forces refugees to choose between malnutrition and danger. As Minear and Weiss (1991) noted:

With the international community opposed to the repatriation of people against their will, the choice of some Iraqi Kurds to return home on their own stands as a judgement against the lifeline available to them. Their decision to coexist with an enemy who gassed their relatives rather than trust the world to provide for their needs would be understood by Cambodians . . . and Palestinians.
The ability of refugees to take matters into their own hands and organize repatriations is a hopeful sign. But often they are forced into this position by hopelessness, danger, and lack of assistance. Iran has charged that: "For the refugees, reduced assistance constituted an attempt to force them to return to their country" (UNHCR, 1990). What is the connection between malnourished refugee children in Malawi and "spontaneous repatriation" to Mozambique?

Experience shows that refugees are often inadequately fed. The food which they receive may be inadequate in quantity, so that people, and particularly children starve; and inadequate in quality, causing... repeated outbreaks of scurvy, pellagra, and other deficiency diseases. (Seaman, 1991)

Host countries have a definite interest in encouraging the return of refugees. The 1978-1979 return of 200,000 refugees from Bangladesh to Burma had some elements of compulsion, yet it is usually referred to as one of UNHCR's successful operations. At the outset of the repatriation there was evidence of marked opposition among the refugees to returning. On the day that the repatriation officially began, only 58 refugees crossed the border. Two and half months later only 5,300 had returned. The number should have been 50,000. The reluctance to return stemmed from fear of what might await the refugees.

By the end of 1979, however, some 187,000 had suddenly returned to Burma. The return movement seems to have been precipitated towards the end by conditions in the camps and by a curtailment of food rations designed to encourage an early decision in favour of return. (Coles, 1985; Aall, 1979)

The masivas to conflict zones in El Salvador grew out of the hostile, hopeless situation in the closed refugee camps in Honduras. Attacks on refugee settlements in Southern Sudan have driven hundreds of thousands of refugees back to Uganda, and threats to refugees have driven hundreds of thousands from Somalia to Ethiopia and from Ethiopia to the Southern Sudan. Many host governments insist that repatriation is the only option and confine refugees to 'humane deterrence' conditions. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1991) recently reported:

several countries as a matter of policy keep refugees in closed detention camps... surrounded by barbed wire and surveyed by police and armed personnel... for more than a decade. Indeed, there are children born there who know no other reality.

The responsibility for this protection and nutrition crisis lies not only with the host governments and UNHCR, but also with the donor governments, whose penny-pinching starves children and with the UN system, whose confusion and lack of coordination causes promises to be unfulfilled. A 1991 International Symposium on "The Nutrition Crisis Among Refugees" found:

a surprising confusion in the international system about the strategies of the different government, UN and non-government agencies concerned with refugee welfare. They revealed that there were no norms for refugee rations... They also revealed the ambiguity about responsibilities in the system. Host governments were responsible for refugees in law, but did not have the resources to discharge the responsibility; donors had the resources but no legal obligation to the refugees; the UN had poorly defined
responsibilities for the material welfare of refugees and no resources other than those they were given by donors. The non-governmental organizations had no responsibilities at all. (Seaman, 1991)

There is clearly a gap between principle and practice that needs to be explored with regard to 'voluntary' repatriation. The principle as expressed by the 1985 UNHCR Executive Committee is that repatriation "should only take place at their [the refugees'] freely expressed wish; the voluntary and individual character . . . and conditions of absolute safety, . . . should always be respected." Practice, however, is not to sit back and wait for the refugees to express a desire to go home. A somewhat less individual and less voluntary standard often has been accepted and lauded. Evidence of pressure is commonplace particularly when no other durable solution, settlement or resettlement, is possible. In its 1991 Note on International Protection, UNHCR reported:

problems in verifying the voluntary nature of the decision to return have persisted. . . . where resistance forces have exercised significant control or influence . . . or where the conditions of asylum are so severe as to border on coercion to repatriate.

Duress, with its implication of no free choice by the refugees, is clearly unacceptable, but it is not easy to determine the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable pressure, encouragement, suggestion, persuasion, and inducement. Crisp writing about the 1983 return of Ethiopians to Djibouti notes:

Even if they still had doubts about returning, the refugees were aware that their future in Djibouti was at best a limited one. After four years of intermittent intimidation, the refugees morale was low, and the advantages of attempting to remain in Djibouti were difficult to perceive. . . . It seemed preferable to live in poverty and danger in their own country than to remain as unwelcome guests in foreign country. (Crisp, 1985)

Why would adequately protected and nourished refugees return home during conflict conditions to a country ruled by the government that originally caused the flight? There may be times when we should be grateful that a 'durable solution' has not been achieved. Indeed, many such returns represent a failure by the international community to provide for and protect refugees. Non-return may be a positive reflection on the attitudes and efforts of host countries, on the support of donors, on the protection by international agencies, and on the voluntary nature of return.

At the Symposium a lively debate was sparked by the rhetorical question: "How do we reconcile protection principles with reality when security conditions begin to deteriorate in the country of asylum?" Some questioned whether the protection principles were realistic and generally applicable. They could not apply to every situation and ought to be viewed as useful goals rather than as absolutes. In conflicts you might have to reduce your expectations and principles to a few basic goals or principles. The group agreed that the most basic principle of return was that it be voluntary.

Discussion shifted to means of practical protection for refugees. The three stages of repatriation were described; preparation, travel and reintegration. Practical examples were offered for protection in each stage. In the preparation stage, the refugees' right to make an unpressured decision can be protected by providing safe houses or locations to allow uncoerced deliberations. Once a repatriation decision is made the refugees could be moved to an area where they could be protected prior to departure. In some cases, they might even be
able to move to another site such as a border departure station to avoid any reprisals from other refugees. Transportation could be provided from the camps to the border, or to alternate safer crossing sites along the frontier.

The great difficulty of providing protection en route was noted. Many at the Symposium related incidents where relief agencies have encouraged armed factions to supply escorts for returnees. In Mexico, refugees were registered at the departure point, relief agencies in the areas of return were alerted about the returnees, and the returnees were asked to check-in with those agencies once they reached the area.

Once refugees were back in their home areas it was felt that increasing the presence of international agencies was the most practical means of protection and reducing human rights abuses.

The importance of establishing a NGO network to provide protection in areas of return was pointed out as well as NGO sharing of information to protect refugees in transit. Keeping track of people en route could reduce disappearances and assist if searches are needed. However, NGOs had to be circumspect about information gathering in conflict areas. Increased information assisted refugees in making informed decisions and thus increased their protection. However, it was noted that in many cases refugees have better information than the relief agencies.

The UN was urged to develop systems and techniques, perhaps borrowing from Amnesty International and other human rights monitors, for monitoring repatriation outside of the official framework of return. NGO participation should be encouraged as a conduit for information about returnees while protecting the confidentiality of this sensitive information.

Refugee Women

The issue of what can be done to protect and assist women when they are repatriated was the subject of two papers and a major theme of the Symposium's discussions. A number of methods were outlined for developing practical protection systems that are women-focused that can help avoid some of the ways that women are placed in subservient and powerless roles in refugee societies. However, once refugees begin to repatriate, it was recognized that it can be difficult to extend protection beyond the bounds of the refugee camp. Thus, practical protection and assistance that is mobile or is built into the assistance system is necessary.

Refugee women must be brought into the central concerns of the assistance system from the beginning of a refugee or returnee situation. Too often women's needs and concerns are treated as an additional and separate category, as an afterthought, rather than as an integral part of overall planning for returnees. Women are central to returnee programs because refugee women and those in their care are a majority of the refugees, returnees, and of the population in most of the communities to which they are returning. Failure to include women's needs in overall planning and failure to intricately involve women in all aspects of the planning, design and implementation of repatriation programs would undermine the total refugee program and would irresponsibly endanger most refugees.

Refugee women and girls have special assistance and protection needs that reflect their gender and age: they need protection against sexual and physical abuse and exploitation and protection against sexual discrimination (Martin, 1992). High priority needs to be given to training, documentation and assistance for split families where the women are sole supporters of their household. Special protection, transport and monitoring efforts need to be made to protect women en route to their homes. Efforts need to be made to ensure women have a voice and access to land resources, credit, health care, and agricultural inputs.
organizations, development organizations and human rights organizations need to make cooperative efforts in helping women repatriate, to help them through the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction, and to ensure respect for human rights during the fragile period of return and reconciliation.

The Symposium felt there was a need for positive discrimination for refugee women and children; for more female assistance and protection officers; for training of refugee women as community health workers; for attention to the physical location of refugee women within refugee camps; and for ensuring that information and registration for assistance and entitlements is done publicly so that the resources actually go to the recipients.

THE UN SYSTEM

Beyond the problems of protection and nourishment, the UN system is not prepared to plan, design, coordinate, manage, and fund refugee return movements. In part, the difficulties are traceable to the old 'conventional wisdom' reflected in UNHCR's four preconditions for participation in repatriation. But UNHCR is only part of the problem. As events at the end of the Gulf War and in Somalia illustrated, contemporary refugee movements can be too large in scale, too rapid in pace, and too costly for the resources of UNHCR, or even the whole UN system. The UN system has attempted a fundamental restructuring of its humanitarian assistance, but after little more than one year the first coordinator resigned in frustration.

**Design**

Repatriation programs tend to be designed without significant refugee participation or input. They assume that the refugees are dependent and compliant. Working with refugees in emergency and camp situations can lead to a mental image of refugees as clients rather than as actors and participants. Also it is difficult to design and sell to the donors a plan that has many imponderables that are based on possible refugee reactions. It is easier to promote a familiar plan that follows traditional doctrine and assumptions; and then make changes in the field.

There is a cookie-cutter sameness to UNHCR's repatriation plans. Although responding to dramatically different situations, varying in scale and levels of conflict, the repatriation plans follow the same formula, table of contents, and boilerplate. Whether the plan is for Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, or Namibia, it follows the same outline for a voluntary repatriation operations plan. Understandably, such a plan will have sections on transport and logistics; food; water; domestic needs; health; education; shelter; social services; agriculture; reintegration; and the registration form. Further, repatriation will be seen in three phases: pre-departure; movement; and, post-arrival. The plans are strong on protection, legal arrangements, and logistics. They proceed in stages, finish one task before going on to the next, they assume control over the refugees' movements—usually to reception centers within the homeland, then on to rural areas, and, they assume UN agencies will

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4 The impact of erroneous assumptions about refugee behavior or a failure to gauge the refugees' own plans and goals can be seen in the successful 1992-1993 repatriation of 360,000 refugees to Cambodia. As UNHCR's *Refugees* Magazine made clear, "as soon as repatriation began" the repatriation plan proved to be "unworkable."

Originally, UNHCR's repatriation plan rested on two basic assumptions: first, that every refugee family should be free to return to the destination of their choice; and second, that they should be given two hectares of agricultural land.

Last year, both assumptions made sense. . . . But . . . the day that the first convoy crossed the border—the situation had changed.

So it was back to the drawing board almost as soon as repatriation began. This produced a major shift in policy.
coordinate their activities. The models for these plans are Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The successful repatriation to Namibia involved only 43,000 refugees in the context of winning their independence, yet it was extremely costly, ran out of money, left some refugees stranded, provided little reintegration assistance, and produced a "Lessons Learned Survey" with 177 recommendations (Namibia Repatriation Unit, 1990). The Namibia repatriation is wholly atypical in that the numbers were small, there was a long time to prepare, there was peace and independence, and the return movement was controllable by the refugees themselves, through the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO), and UNHCR. In its "Lessons Learned Survey," the Namibia Repatriation Unit noted problems with the plan being "drawn up mainly by persons who were not directly involved in the implementation of the programme," that "all positions must be filled by qualified and experienced staff members at a very early stage . . . [and] retained until the very end," that there was a "constant need to add more and more staff," that there were problems with a "lack of financial control," that equipment and vehicles were procured late, that "it is important to establish a co-ordinating unit preferably outside of existing country/regional desk structure," and, that "earlier collaboration with other agencies (e.g. UNDP and WHO) might have proved useful particularly in planning for the post-arrival integration phase." There is little evidence that the list of 177 lessons learned is applied to other operations.

Most of the potential repatriations of the decade of repatriation are likely to involve hundreds of thousands, even millions, of refugees returning swiftly and irregularly to homelands with devastated infrastructures. Mixed in with these movements are likely to be equal or greater numbers of internally displaced persons in great need. Many of the refugees will not be able to go home. Many will join the ranks of the internally displaced. A great many, after years in refugee camps with schools, clinics, markets, and other services, will not want to return to farms; they will move to urban areas. Realistic repatriation plans must assume giant, rapid, irregular return movements to devastation and poverty. And, preconditions for participation are unacceptable; if refugees are returning home, under whatever circumstances, the UN cannot stand on the sidelines.

**Funding**

There is a urgent need to arrange advance funding for repatriation activities. UNHCR relies on voluntary contributions to fund its activities. This means that the availability of resources is unpredictable and often inadequate. UNHCR is handcuffed and delayed, and repatriation opportunities are lost. Funding difficulties have short-circuited a two-way repatriation between Angola and Zaire, and repatriation programs in Mozambique, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. At the 1990 Executive Committee Sweden noted: "because of lack of contributions, ongoing repatriation programmes were being hampered or even halted."

Unfortunately, this problem is far bigger than UNHCR or voluntary contributions. UN members are $500 million in arrears on their assessed payments for peacekeeping operations. Members of the Security Council are expected to call on the United Nations to play a growing role in preserving peace in trouble spots around the globe. But the organization finds itself facing a deepening financial crisis because many of these same member nations are not paying for their share for the operations. (Lewis, 1992)

...anything is possible, and that includes a massive spontaneous movement home. (Guest, 1992)
Funding shortfalls directly affect peace and repatriation possibilities because a number of peacekeeping operations—Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Angola, Somalia—have a repatriation component.

The members of the Council note that United Nations peacekeeping tasks have increased and broadened considerably in recent years. Election monitoring, human-rights verification and the repatriation of refugees have in the settlement of some regional conflicts . . . been integral parts of the Security Council’s effort to maintain peace and security. (New York Times, 1992b)

There is strong evidence that the international community is failing to provide both ad hoc assistance to returnees and developmental aid to returnee areas. This failure is both financial and organizational. Not only is the funding inadequate, the implementation measures and identification of responsible agencies is lacking. It appears that as refugees return home the international community loses interest in their cause and their needs and the community’s attention shifts elsewhere. There are many complaints by countries of origin—Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique—that the extensive political and military aid that went to the destabilizing activities of refugee warriors and exile groups has not followed them home. There appears to be something askew with a system that can provide guns to exiles but fails to provide the same individuals with seed and tools after they have returned home. The problem, however, is that often refugees do not return home in peace.

When refugee assistance moves from humanitarian aid toward development aid there is a shift in leverage in favor of the donors. Humanitarian aid has a compelling dramatic immediacy about it that makes it difficult for donors to stand on the sidelines. Lives are at stake and aid rushes in. Development-oriented returnee assistance, on the other hand, is after the emergency, conditions have stabilized, the danger is past, and whatever the compelling arguments in favor of development aid, the drama and urgency are missing. Donors asked to fund unsatisfactory projects can sit on their purses. Countries of origin must take serious account of donor views if their projects are to go forward.

Returnee Aid

Separate from the issues of design, coordination and funding of reintegration assistance, is the problem of mere returnee aid. This is the cash, seeds, tools, blankets, etc. sent home with the returnees or, preferably, provided them at their destination. Huge numbers of refugees, a large majority in most self-repatriation situations, return home with little or no assistance and they are not adequately aided after arrival. When large-scale movements occur, they are often very rapid, and may include elements of coercion. Since 1986, over one million refugees have returned to Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, and elsewhere because of threats or attacks in their country of asylum. Their departure and arrival is unaided, relief reaches them with difficulty. Many other returnees, move on their own without international knowledge or assistance. As Allen (1991) reported on the 1986-1987 flight home of approximately 250,000 Ugandans from Southern Sudan:

The relief effort proved to be a dismal failure. According to UNHCR’s own figures, in 1986 the total amount of food distributed was only 10% of expected cereals, 14% of beans, 12.5% of cooking oil, . . . it is clear that the returnees were left pretty much to their own devices, and, . . . things did not improve in the following year.

Because they receive woefully inadequate international assistance, many returnees are in desperate circumstances. Re-establishment and reintegration are jeopardized. The fact that
they do not flee again, does not justify ignoring their plight.

Urban Returnees

The Symposium discussed the destination of returnees within their homeland and supported the right of people to return to their place of origin or to any other place of their choosing, including urban areas. Governments and the international community cannot plan the returnees' lives. It is likely that a good number of urbanized—by their experiences in exile—returnees, refugees and displaced persons will choose to return or drift to urban areas. Further, as many returnees, refugees, and displaced persons may want to remain anonymous—due to unresolved issues in a civil conflict, they may choose to go to urban centers where one can more easily remain anonymous.

As no one is sure as to where refugees and displaced persons will return, the 'repatriation package' needs to be kept as mobile as possible. Governments and aid agencies need to be prepared for movement to urban areas. However, there tends to be a lack of urban development skills amongst refugee assistance staff and within the repatriating community.

Assistance to urban returnees needs to be focussed on the problem of urban poverty rather than just on the needs of refugees. There is likely to be a population of established urban dwellers who are as needy as the newcomers. As in rural areas, in urban areas assistance needs to be targeted to the community, not to 'privileged' individuals.

NON-RECOGNIZED ENTITIES (NREs) and NON-GOVERNMENT HELD AREAS

There is a need for the United Nations to deal more effectively with Non-Recognized Entities (NREs), also referred to as non-recognized parties to the conflict, because they are likely to be major actors in most repatriations in the 1990s. In many refugee and repatriation situations a major proportion of the people in need are in non-government held areas, i.e., territory controlled by NREs. It is difficult to generalize with regard to NREs because there are too many levels of NREs ranging from a government in full control of its territory but denied international recognition and its seat in the UN, as in the recent case of Eritrea, to factions of guerrilla movements that may have tenuous control of a small area and may be closer in substance to a bandit force than a liberation movement. Some small guerrilla forces, of course, may eventually grow into a formidable force, and even become a government. In other cases, as in Tigray, Eritrea, Western Sahara, Namibia, etc., the NRE is a refugee-based organization. Beside its political expression as a party, front, or movement, the refugee-based organization may have aid societies, education programs, and other welfare agencies that can play an important role assisting the returnees as the TPLF (Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front) and REST (Relief Society of Tigray) did for the returnees to Tigray in 1985.

The force of circumstances has led UNHCR and other UN agencies into increasing contact with NREs such as Eritrea, RENAMO, and Somaliland. Most of these contacts are merely practical and fleeting. However, when refugees are repatriating to an area controlled by a NRE, there is a need for a more formal relationship that can provide assistance and assurances to the refugees and offer UNHCR an opportunity to monitor the condition of the returnees. There are serious problems involved in offering protection to returnees in an area held by a liberation movement or even a de facto government which might abuse refugees or recruit them for its military.

The United Nations needs to reduce its structural limitations on communicating with NREs. The system is not neutral, it is skewed to relate to the official structures—often using

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5 For example, The New York Times (Lorch, 1993) reports with regard to Somaliland: "Desperately poor,
a member government involved in a civil war as an implementing partner, and ignoring the unofficial agencies. The Symposium considered whether humanitarian assistance, in either the country of asylum or origin, could be "impartially provided" when the UN has to rely on the consent of a member government. "Consent" is inherently political. Instead of being based on the needs of civilians, consensual international humanitarian assistance ignores the realities on the ground—that the local authorities, such as Renamo, Khmer Rouge, TPLF, are not controlled by the government; and thus aid given only in government held areas is likely to have a political and military impact on the balance of power.

It is difficult for donors, NGOs, involved governments, and UN agencies to relate to NREs. Donors—the UN system, bilateral actors, most NGOs—tend to view the relief and assistance activities of NREs as somehow more politically suspect than the motives of the parallel government-run official aid programs. Aid is denied to the people in non-government held areas because its delivery and distribution cannot be independently monitored and controlled. Yet often government assistance operations are not held equally accountable for reporting and monitoring. The resulting double standard for international assistance is hardly impartial and it denies assistance to large number of needy people in conflict areas.

As the Lead Agency for repatriations, it is important for UNHCR to open a communication channel with NREs so as to ease access for other relief, assistance, and protection actors. Although NGOs often are willing to attempt to provide aid to all who are needy, NGOs generally lack the funding and technical capacity to substitute for the UN or bilateral donors. Indeed, those NGOs that work with NREs often find themselves excluded from the international policy and planning process and their information and role is distrusted, as not being neutral, by a UN system that structurally favors its member states.

Coordination of assistance to and identification of the needs of all civilians is not possible if the coordination is one-sided. NREs and NGOs working in non-government held areas and their information on needs often are denied access to the assistance system. NREs have limited resources, access, and visibility, but they may have valuable information on situations and conditions. NREs have local capacity to provide direct assistance to returnees. A broader reading of the co-ordination of assistance functions of UNHCR or DHA should lead to an increased awareness of the role of NREs in the assistance process.

Initial contact with NREs is often difficult and dangerous. Many relief workers have been injured and killed. However, over time many rebel movements have learned to cooperate with relief operations. The contact with NREs is needed in order to learn about their abilities and qualities.

Many at the Symposium felt that the UN should develop criteria for working with indigenous NREs, particularly the non-military relief arms of liberation movements, and should publicize these criteria as a way of influencing the behavior of NREs. There are, of course, many political dangers, at all levels from the local to the international, involved in

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6 Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (1992) in his An Agenda for Peace states: "In conditions of crisis within a country, . . . Humanitarian assistance, impartially provided, could be of critical importance; . . . could save lives and develop conditions of safety in which negotiations can be held. . . . In these situations of internal crisis the United Nations will need to respect the sovereignty of the State; . . . Humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country." (emphasis added)
such an exercise, however, an insistence on international standards and criteria, that are based on recognized humanitarian law and standards, might push those NREs that are claimants to international status in the right direction.

At the Symposium participants suggested several minimum criteria for working with and even "recognizing" NREs. These included: the degree to which the NRE is indigenous, community based, and has popular support; the transparency of its operations to other agencies and donors; its commitment to human rights; the extent to which it is working to change the system; its level of organization and centralization; and, the efficiency of its operations in using resources, preventing diversion to military uses, and in reaching the affected population. It was suggested that these criteria did not have to be determinative, conditions were likely to require some degree of 'ad hocism'. Working with NREs, besides promoting humanitarian standards, can also strengthen the NREs capacity to deliver assistance and promote community development and institution building in devastated areas.

The political problems and objections to working with NREs were also noted and the Symposium participants favored political discretion in such approaches, noting that there are many players within and outside of the UN system that might provide deniable channels of communication with NREs. The greatest importance was placed on the practical matters of communication, co-ordination, and assistance, and less on the formal mechanism chosen to achieve results. It was noted that the UN itself is of two minds on principles related to this issue, both insisting on respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal matters and passing resolutions calling for humanitarian access, protection for displaced persons, and noting the threat to international peace and security of certain internal actions.

**RECONSTRUCTION and RECONCILIATION**

Refugees and displaced persons who return to their homes under conditions of fragile peace are in danger of renewed conflict and renewed flight. A major issue for refugee assistance and development assistance organizations in the 1990s is to develop and improve means of pre- and post-return assistance to returnees and to their communities and societies that will not only promote the reintegration of the returnees, but also the reconstruction and reconciliation of local and national communities thereby solidifying a fragile peace and averting resumed forced migrations.

In traditional repatriation operations, returnees are provided with a basic package of rehabilitation assistance including foodstuffs for several months, shelter materials, seeds, and other agricultural inputs and cash grants. In a few cases, UNHCR has also provided community-based assistance to returnees, usually in the form of infrastructural support, but seldom within an integrated development-oriented framework. Contemporary conditions in countries of origin—many groups who are equally needy, poor security, conflict or fragile peace, devastated infrastructures—necessitate the immediate conversion of any refugee reintegration assistance into community-based assistance that has the goals of reconstruction and reconciliation. However, UNHCR is severely limited in its ability to provide reintegration and reconstruction assistance. It is not a development agency. Its mandate only covers refugees, and once refugees repatriate they shortly cease to be of official concern to UNHCR. Whatever assistance process is begun by UNHCR needs to be taken over and completed by another agency.

Assistance from development agencies, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), rarely reaches reintegrating refugees. Their operational mandates do not include refugees and their project selection criteria and standard methods of implementation often fail to take account of refugee needs.
Nonetheless, current and recent practice involving refugee repatriation to Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Central America, Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, and other situations of repatriation during conflict or to fragile peace indicates a willingness on the part of refugee and development assistance agencies to attempt some rehabilitation projects under adverse conditions in the hope of promoting reconciliation and a more durable peace. In several returnee situations refugee and development agencies along with NGOs have tried small, quickly implemented post-return assistance projects which require one-time investments aimed at satisfying urgent needs at the community level. These projects attempt to avoid the creation of dependency or the provision of inequitably imbalanced assistance to a particular group. These post-return assistance programs are variously called spot reconstruction, cross-mandate assistance, quick action projects, or quick impact projects (QIPs). The agencies have been spurred to undertake these innovative and unconventional approaches in hopes of promoting refugee reintegration and to prevent further migration.

Typically, these repatriation assistance projects are community-based assisting the entire population of an area including returned displaced persons and stayees along with the returnees. In a region of former conflict, all groups are in great need and the goals of reconciliation and building peace would not be served by showing favoritism to one segment of the population.

Reconciliation

Both before and after a peace settlement reconstruction activities have the potential to contribute to peacemaking and reconciliation. Even before a settlement, "Foreign donors could use the promise of specific reconstruction assistance as an inducement to compromise at a crucial point in negotiations" (Lake, 1990). In Afghanistan before the 1992 rebel victory and in Mozambique before the 1992 peace settlement, reconstruction activities began in relatively peaceful areas under government control. In Afghanistan, it was hoped that the "zones of tranquility" might promote socio-economic stability, increased political accommodation, and the return of refugees (Harrison, 1990). The location of the zones was not revealed in order to forestall attacks by groups opposed to the concept, but the criteria for selection:

- would be how long the locality has been at peace; whether local leaders are united in welcoming a United Nations presence; whether capable local leadership exists for carrying out aid projects; accessibility of the area to the delivery of supplies; and the absorptive capacity of the local economy (Harrison, 1990).

Refugees in camps awaiting repatriation represent an important development and reconstruction opportunity. While they wait for a peace settlement or a return during conflict many international agencies and NGOs conduct training programs in the refugee camps. Generally the programs impart self-sufficiency and income generation skills—metalworking, carpentry, sewing, medical training, etc.—that will be useful once the refugees return home. It would be useful to add training for administrative and technical cadres to these programs in order to enhance the absorptive capacity of returnee communities to receive assistance. Further, it is necessary to ensure that when trainees return home they are either given the tools and resources necessary to utilize their skills or provided with access to those resources or to credit.

Political factors need to be taken into account in any program of reintegration and reconstruction assistance. In Nicaragua the QIPs embraced neutrality by choosing "to work with historically opposing forces in the same QIP" (Ortega, et. al., 1993), thus helping to
depolarize recipient municipalities. Even though a program may be designed to be neutral and impartial, available to all parties and focussed on non-controversial projects, its very existence and resources amidst a highly charged political environment will inevitably make it an object of competition and courtship by various actors. Instability, local rivalries, settling of scores, and plenty of weapons are "likely to be a pervasive condition in the immediate postwar period" (Lake, 1990). Avoiding charges of favoritism or political endorsement may be impossible. Indeed, in some circumstances it may be necessary to make politically-motivated aid decisions, "... involving personnel from various factions...in the same training program might open up channels of communication and contribute in some measure to the peace" (Lake, 1990).

Decisions concerning the allocation of reconstruction aid should not be made solely on the basis of whether a given area promises to be productive. Focusing myopically on economic criteria could aggravate ethnic, regional and tribal tensions (Harrison, 1990).

**Spot Reconstruction**

Experience in Sri Lanka has shown that reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance can be used to support peace initiatives before a formal final resolution to a conflict is achieved. There are serious risks; risks which must be clearly understood and faced from the outset. However, the potential benefits far outweigh the possible negative consequences and, with proper planning, many of the risks can be minimized.

Between late 1987, following the signing of a Peace Accord between the Governments of Sri Lanka and India, and mid-1990, UNHCR implemented a Special Programme of Immediate Relief Assistance to Returnees and Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, in mid-1990 the security situation in north-east Sri Lanka deteriorated rapidly and the program was suspended. However, in late 1991 it was possible to resume a revised program of spot reconstruction.

Spot reconstruction is "those activities that are undertaken to provide comprehensive, integrated reconstruction and development assistance to communities where conflict is relatively low." Assistance includes repair and reconstruction of basic housing, drinking water supply, small-scale irrigation, access roads, fisheries, skills-training, rehabilitation of agriculture, and revitalization of small, productive enterprises. It is financed using a combination of loans and grants administered by local financial institutions such as credit cooperatives or through the small loan windows of commercial banks.  

The overall objective of the program is to support the peace process by economically rejuvenating those areas where the conflict is less intense and where people remain or have returned. By providing assistance to help them rebuild their lives and to engage in productive activities, it is hoped that large numbers of people can be dissuaded from active participation in the conflict. In other words, by having something productive to do, they will be less likely to become active participants.

This is a long-term objective—it must be recognized that such a program will not be successful overnight and unless a general cease-fire is implemented full reconstruction cannot take place. But by creating an atmosphere where the numbers of people who are displaced

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7 Credit is the cornerstone of spot reconstruction and loans are the anchor of the assistance program. Loans are the self-evident measure of the workability of the overall program—if people are willing to borrow, the situation, at least from their perspective, is fairly stable. If they are only willing to participate in a scheme of grants or grants-in-aid (in-kind contributions), the situation is probably too unstable for anything but relief. More importantly, if people borrow money to rebuild, they are unlikely to risk getting involved, or re-involved, in conflict.
and unemployed is reduced, the severity of the conflict can gradually be reduced. Indeed, during the period of renewed fighting some of the project sites proved to be useful as relatively safe locations for the distribution of relief supplies and protection of displaced persons.

In formulating a program, it is extremely important that it be designed so that neither side of the conflict can take advantage of its benefits. It should continuously be pointed out that the program is unlikely to change political attitudes. Its strength is that it helps people in need and greatly reduces the likelihood that they would become actively involved with one side or the other. Further, if properly planned and executed and kept free of political interference, reconstruction assistance benefits all parties.

Any institution contemplating a reconciliation and reconstruction assistance program must be aware of some of the operational realities and risks. At first, the program may seem to be only barely viable and ponderously slow. There may be long periods when it is impossible to disburse funds because the locus of conflict has shifted back into the community or people are simply unwilling to take financial risks by borrowing or investing their own scarce financial resources. There will also be setbacks from time to time. These may mean temporary suspension of the program, and in some cases, it may even be necessary to withdraw from certain locales for long periods of time.

Reconciliation and reconstruction assistance, if properly planned and executed, can play a significant role in reducing conflict and supporting long-term peace objectives. In itself, reconstruction will not bring about peace, but it can make a significant contribution toward reducing the scope of the conflict and provide much-needed assistance to people who otherwise would be forced to leave their homes in search of relief and public welfare. If a program strictly adheres to suitable selection and implementation criteria and is strongly supported by a donor's group that is fully committed to the program and gives it flexibility to adapt to changing situations, community-based reconstruction and rehabilitation assistance can meet long-term objectives of reconciliation and reintegration.

The limitations of post-return assistance should be kept in perspective. Ideally, post-return assistance reconstruction, should become a standard feature of repatriation operations. However, post-return assistance has an essentially local and limited effect. It cannot bring peace to societies which are engaged in conflict, nor can they rebuild economies which have been devastated by years of war. Rather than being perceived as a bridge to a development process that may take years to come, post-return assistance programs are perhaps best seen as an important first step towards reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Despite this mixed assessment, it is vital to push forward the efforts to provide post-return assistance with the objective of promoting reconstruction, rehabilitation, and, most of all, reconciliation. A failure to provide assistance to shore up a fragile peace can lead to far more costly threats to international peace and security. In the post-Cold War Era, with tight budgets and numerous conflicts, it will be vital for the international community to reorganize itself to better support fragile peace.

POST-RETURN ASSISTANCE: REHABILITATION OR DEVELOPMENT

In recent years there has been an effort within the UN System to conceptualize the coordination of humanitarian assistance as part of a "continuum" from emergency relief to
rehabilitation and development. The concern to "bridge the gap between basic reintegration assistance and longer-term development" has generated an effort by UN refugee, development and humanitarian agencies to link, cooperate and coordinate with one another. This raises the issue whether development, or as will be argued—rehabilitation, should be the goal of post-return assistance for returnees. The choice of development or rehabilitation as a target will influence operational criteria, qualitative objectives and coordinating partners. For example, in Cambodia a deliberate choice was made by UNHCR to work with UNDP—in order to involve a development agency in reintegration assistance—rather than with to work with NGOs. Especially for UN agencies, the choice of development as a goal can lead to a more macro-level approach that is distant from the participatory community development needs of returnees. A review of UNDP for Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1993) noted: "development in the UN context denotes improvement/change in basic human conditions as measured on a country/state basis."

There are a number of problems that make the success, funding and implementation of a development-oriented assistance strategy for returnees very doubtful including: poor prospects for development due to political instability, fragile peace and extreme poverty; competition for development resources between returnee areas and other regions which are equally needy; and, operational and mandate problems of international agencies that would require unprecedented coordination in implementing development assistance for returnees. The same forces, conflicts and political disputes that produced refugees have chased away investors, destroyed infrastructure, led to the imposition of foreign sanctions, and have otherwise retarded the country's development. Fourteen of the fifteen homelands likely to have major repatriations in 1994 have continuing conflicts, occupied territories, armed truces, elections pending, and other political-military problems that are not conducive to development efforts. Many countries of return have no national development plans for relief or rehabilitation projects to connect to or be consistent with. Peace agreements often require delays in the development process—elections and formation of a new government may be several years distant. Under the contemporary conditions of repatriation to many homelands, major rehabilitation is required simply to reach a starting point for development.

Furthermore, development is not necessary for the achievement of a durable solution. Most refugees are self-repatriating during conflict and are aware of socio-economic conditions; their direct and immediate need is quick rehabilitation assistance—development is a distant dream. The return of refugees to poverty and frustration does not necessarily overturn a durable solution. A lack of development rarely leads to renewed flight; when

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8 DEVELOPMENT is such a controversial term that most development agencies do not define it. Nonetheless, the following descriptions are from the World Bank and UNDP, respectively.

The challenge of development, in the broadest sense, is to improve the quality of life. . . . a better quality of life generally calls for higher incomes - but it involves much more. It encompasses, as ends in themselves, better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and a richer cultural life.

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible.

The United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance defines REHABILITATION as "assistance to restore victims to self-sufficiency. To achieve a state of viability and to reduce the vulnerability of the affected population. Rehabilitation activities should be consistent with development objectives but may be implemented only to the extent that they satisfy specific needs imposed by the crisis."
returnees flee again, it is more likely to be due to political rather than development failures.

Post-return assistance needs to focus on participatory, community-oriented rehabilitation; on rapid, smaller, more immediate measures aimed at rehabilitation, restoration of legal status, and food self-sufficiency and at avoiding the creation of dependence. A strategy with rehabilitation as its qualitative objective would be better able to set proximate and realistic operational goals that are consistent with assistance agencies' resources, strengths and experience.

Local Level

In the end returnees reintegrate at the local level and local authorities play a major role in the success of a repatriation program. The community-based reintegration assistance approach of recent years not only equitably directs aid toward all who are needy, it also brings resources and rewards to local authorities to enable and encourage their interest and participation in reintegration. Greater use of local structures to formulate and deliver assistance can also help lessen the returnees dependence on international aid.

However, even in the best of times local authorities have few resources and relatively little power. Complex reintegration projects are likely to be beyond the ability, will and resources of local authorities to support and implement. Reintegration assistance projects need to be kept simple.

The Symposium noted that successful repatriation is when returnees move to an area where there is a viable development program in process to facilitate reintegration. However, the reality is return to totally devastated areas as well as to areas that have been totally neglected by national development plans. The absorption capacity of local stayee communities is likely to be low.

Local institution building is therefore very important, but the issue was raised of how one creates institutions in the absence of government, such as in Somalia, Liberia, and other return situations. It was felt that international NGOs with experience in group mobilization could assist local NGOs in institution building with seed money and technical advice. Building local institutions and local NGOs is a risky activity but it could have a high payoff in encouraging the local population to regroup and reestablish its institutions. Donors were encouraged to increase their willingness and flexibility for supporting rehabilitation activities in conflict areas.

NGOs

Many NGOs already possess the skills in small or medium-scale development and income-generating activities that are needed to promote rehabilitation. Even in politically-sensitive situations, NGOs "have made a positive contribution by keeping the torch alight for alternative values and systems. Under . . . military regime, any kind of organization among the poor was suspect" (Carroll, 1992).

Operational concerns have clearly favored working with intermediary organizations [NGOs]. They are able to formulate projects, mobilize resources to implement them, reach larger numbers of poor families, and work with unorganized populations. In repressive situations, intermediary organizations have represented the only way the [donors] could hope to make an impact; working directly with base groups was either impractical or dangerous. (Carroll, 1992)

However, in conflict situations the UN umbrella can give legitimacy and transparency to NGOs and greater protection from government hostility. Symposium participants felt that the level of conflict and the amount of control that a government had over a certain region
would determine the form of cooperative agreement between the UN and NGOs and whether or not it would be safe to work in that area. Funding for NGO projects in conflict areas was identified as a special problem. It was felt that international appeals could broaden NGO access to funds. The need to develop local links to international NGOs was stressed.

Many NGOs are doing development work in the country of origin a long time before major repatriation begins. Their presence and local knowledge can speed the delivery of rehabilitation assistance. Supporting and expanding projects run by NGOs can be an effective way to convey assistance.

NGOs, rather than international development agencies, may be a better way to bridge the gap between relief and development. Many NGOs ignore this gap. Their mandates are flexible and they have long operated along the entire continuum from relief to development. Many of the NGOs that have historically worked with UNHCR are not solely relief NGOs, they have development as well as relief arms. Development-oriented NGOs are more likely to continue to work with returnees and to seek funding on their behalf. Consciously increasing the involvement of development NGOs in reintegration and rehabilitation assistance to returnees is more likely to bridge the gap than attempting to draw in reluctant international development agencies who are uncomfortable in the role.

Refugee-Centered Assistance

Reintegration and rehabilitation assistance needs to be refugee-centered, reacting to and supporting refugee movements, initiatives, responsibility and decisions. Discussions about designing, encouraging and facilitating repatriation programs can give the impression that one can direct refugee repatriation. The reality calls for modesty—repatriation happens, at the refugees' own pace and criteria; assistance agencies accompany the refugees. A repatriation support operation needs to reflect the priorities and desires of the returnees. It is not possible to design a repatriation program for the refugees. They are independent rational actors who will make their own decisions reflecting their own needs and standards. "Once they decide to return, they are willing to invest any effort to secure their own future, and UNHCR's role becomes more one of support and guidance to spontaneous returnee actions, and less one of organization and planning on their behalf." (UNHCR, 1992d)

Most repatriation is refugee-induced and occurs during conditions of conflict and instability. Refugees generally have far better information about conditions in their homeland that either expatriates or the host country. Well-informed refugees make rational choices based on their desire to have security and control over their own lives, and to further their political cause. Once refugees decide to return, international agencies would be well-advised to respect their choices and to the extent possible assist their return.

In the Cambodian repatriation UNHCR had to decide whether to respect the refugees' decisions or substitute its own judgement for returnees who wanted to return to "no go" areas—regions under Khmer Rouge control or otherwise deemed unsafe by UNHCR. In a flexible spirit, UNHCR encouraged the refugees to engage in "institutionalized lying"—telling UNHCR they were going to a safe area, when they were really going to a "no go" area. Later, when UNHCR visited returnees in these areas, although the people were afraid that they would be forced to leave, their decisions were respected. Returning to a dangerous homeland, to a

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9 In El Salvador and Guatemala refugees have used voluntary repatriation as a political tool and UNHCR was uncomfortably caught in the middle of the negotiations.

10 Respect for the refugees' choice is not an absolute, however their decisions ought to be given weight and the benefit of the doubt.
previously established social identity with rights and obligations, can be seen as allowing
refugees to retain more power stability and control over their own lives.

Refugee-centered assistance should also seek to increase the refugees’ responsibility
for their actions. By supporting their decisions and priorities assistance agencies are
encouraging refugees to recognize that control and responsibility for their lives is passing
back to their hands rather than an open-ended dependence on the aid of others.

It is necessary to build trust between the refugee organizations and the assistance
community. The international community is reluctant to provide resources in conflict areas
where they do not have direct access to monitor the situation and the assistance. There is a
need to build capabilities within the refugee community for providing protection and
assistance. Refugees have been successfully trained as human rights monitors and assistance
implementors whose reports are seen as credible.

Virtually by definition, refugees who self-repatriate are not tied to the dependency
syndrome. They may later fail in their economic activities and become dependent on external
aid but they are not drawn home by the promise of aid. Indeed, virtually all refugees who
self-repatriated are impatient instruments for development, unwilling to wait for the end of
conflict before trying to improve their economic, social and security situation. Refugee-
centered assistance increases the refugees power, scope of action and responsibility by
maximizing the resources in their hands.

CONCLUSION

There is a dilemma and dichotomy in examining voluntary repatriation. The dichotomy
is both a promotion of repatriation and a rejection of it. The dilemma is that the promotion,
like so much else dealing with refugees, is not truly voluntary, it is coerced. The
international community offers no viable alternative to "voluntary repatriation." A fixation
on repatriation cuts off consideration of other durable solutions and can lead to policies that
harm the refugees. Given only the option of return, refugees wait while confined to camps,
closed camps, detention centers, restricted settlements, and other holding facilities which
prevent them and their subsequent generations from leading a complete life. By refusing to
settle for anything less than the best solution for the refugees, the international community
denies them a restoration to normalcy and confines them in institutions that violate their
human rights and fail to protect from involuntary repatriation.

In principle, voluntary repatriation is the most desirable durable solution. The
international community is on record in supporting not only the return home of refugees but
also supporting development-oriented assistance to promote reintegration and to reconstruct
homelands and regions of return.

In practice, however, much remains to be done. Actual assistance to voluntary
repatriation and reintegration is meager. Part of the difficulty is a lacuna in the mandates of
international agencies. UNHCR cannot provide long-term assistance to returnees and no other
agency stands ready to provide and implement rehabilitation- or development-oriented
reintegration programmes. UNDP may evolve to fill this role, but its progress in this
direction has been slow and reluctant. UNDP's ability to attract funding for reintegration
projects will depend on much greater accountability by countries of origin with regard to the
use of international monies.

The heart of the problems with repatriation and reintegration assistance is the nature of
contemporary returns. The lion’s share of return is repatriation during conflict without a
resolution of the political issues that originally caused an exodus. A lack of peace, failure to
reconcile, and continuing conflict are not conducive to long-term development programmes.
Donor governments are singularly unimpressed by the argument that development assistance can precede and produce peace. Their "show me" attitude demands progress towards political reconciliation by the governments of origin before investments will be made.

Confronted with the harsh reality that no durable solution is offered to most refugees, many refugees explore the possibility of going home. Refugee-induced repatriation is a self-regulating process. Refugees will voluntarily repatriate if and when they believe they will receive sufficient protection. Protection, security, more control over one's fate are the key variables in repatriation during conflict. Protection is a perceived political "space" or opening that provides refugees not only relative physical security, but also material and moral support. The space may be so narrow that only single refugees can return, or it may be understood so broadly as to permit a collective return.

Nonetheless, despite significant protection worries, there is a need to actively assist voluntary repatriation, even during conflict. In an imperfect world that only offers long-term temporary asylum to most refugees, there is a need to assist refugees to go home. In the real world it is inadequate to protest that contemporary repatriation is problematic; confronted with unsatisfactory options one must seek to find the best that is available. Rather than a passive international approach, repatriation should be carefully and actively assisted even before the formal end of hostilities. And repatriation should be seen as a tool for reducing confrontations along tense borders, for expanding or securing zones of peace and stability for returnees, and possibly as an encouragement to talks between the adversaries.

Many of the several million refugees who returned home under imperfect conditions in the last few years have stayed at home. Many are in desperate circumstances, but they do not flee again. This is not to suggest that the end justifies the means; that forcing refugees to go home against their will is somehow justified if they are not persecuted or attacked. However, the fact that large numbers of refugees choose to return without international "protection" tells us something about the efficacy of the protection process and the fact that many are willing to forgo assistance indicates how aid is regarded during this point in a refugee's exile. It is evident from the number of repatriations to date that the end of conflict is not a precondition for repatriation and that suggests there are political possibilities that need to be explored.

A new 'conventional wisdom' is needed regarding repatriation. Without correct basic assumptions about the process and problems to be confronted it is difficult to properly design a repatriation operations plan. Repatriation plans must assume large-scale rapid return during conflict to areas not controlled by the government involved. Preconditions are acceptable as statements of standards, values and goals, but not as a precursor to action. 'Worst-case scenarios' are likely to be closer to reality, and plans must be prepared to deal with disasters.

When planning a repatriation support operation it is essential that UNHCR's planning assumptions reflect the priorities and desires of the returnees. It is not possible to design a repatriation program for the refugees. They are independent rational actors who will make their own decisions reflecting their own needs and standards.

Return does not have to mean the end of international protection of refugees, particularly in situations involving conflict. In Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka the international community has taken actions to assist and protect the internally displaced. Concern for human rights as well as preventative measures to reduce the roots of conflict and to stem further flight can serve as the basis for international action. The Security Council has several times determined that refugee movements, or potential movements, are threats to international peace and security; and has used that threat to justify international intervention into the internal affairs of a member state. The return of refugees to unstable
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