Durable Solutions for Developing Country Refugees

Barry N. Stein
Michigan State University

"Refugee problems demand durable solutions" is the opening statement of the Principles for Action in Developing Countries adopted by the 1984 Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In fact, in most refugee situations no such demand is made. Those same Principles weakened the demand for durable solutions by labelling third country resettlement as "the least desirable and most costly solution" and by indicating that when "voluntary repatriation is not immediately feasible" it is sufficient to provide only "temporary settlement" for the refugees. This article seeks to provide some background to recent changes in refugee problems that have impeded the attainment of durable solutions and to explore some of the difficulties and possibilities for durable solutions in developing countries in the eighties.

OVERVIEW

The heart of the problem of refugee assistance in developing countries, which has emerged since the mid-1970s, is "the massive arrivals of refugees in low-income countries where often no durable solutions are at hand" (Hartling, 1983). These three key elements — massive arrivals, low-income countries, no durable solutions — deserve elaboration. Massive arrivals refers to influxes of hundreds of thousands if not millions of refugees. Such numbers have been seen before, but rarely in so many different situations at the same time with the refugees lingering in limbo for so long. The current Afghan refugee problem is of historic proportions, over three million refugees in Pakistan, with another million plus in Iran, and after five years, no solutions are in sight.

1 The author gratefully acknowledges assistance provided by the Ford Foundation but the views expressed in this article are his own.

2 In stating a belief that the Principles weakened the demand for durable solutions I do not mean to imply or suggest any flagging of commitment or effort by the High Commissioner or his staff. There is, however, a difference between the staff and administration of UNHCR and its Executive Committee comprised of sovereign governments. The Executive Committee by ranking durable solutions in priority order, particularly be labelling one solution as "the least desirable", has provided ample excuses for those governments inclined to reject all durable solutions other than voluntary repatriation and to offer only temporary rather than durable solutions.

IMR Volume xx, No. 2
Low-income countries bear the main refugee burden. Of the 34 countries listed as low-income (less than $400 per capita GNP) in the 1983 World Development Report (World Bank, 1983b) 27 are or recently have been involved in refugee or refugee-like situations as sources, sanctuaries or both. Developing country refugees are primarily rural, approximately 90 percent fleeing from rural areas to like areas in the country of asylum. They usually concentrate in peripheral areas or provinces in their sanctuary, regions that typically have a higher percentage of their population living in absolute poverty. A massive refugee influx into a low-income country can have a severe impact on the host country and the local population in the affected region. Serious long-term environmental damage may result, and the host’s own development efforts may be adversely affected. The refugee induced burden on already poor countries has become one of the focal points of the discussions about refugee assistance in developing countries.

“Often no durable solutions are at hand” because the first asylum countries will only let the refugees stay temporarily in their territories. Besides political or cultural factors leading to a decision against permanent acceptance of a refugee group, low-income hosts may be hesitant about allowing refugees to remain due to a concern that sufficient jobs or arable land are not available even for their own people. A durable solution means the integration of refugees into a society: either reintegration into their homeland after voluntary repatriation or integration into the country of asylum if settlement is allowed or into a third country through resettlement. No durable solution can mean open-ended, expensive care and maintenance of refugees who must wait for an opportunity to put down roots and again become members of a society.

Approximately 90 percent of the world’s ten million or so refugees are from developing countries and over 90 percent of these refugees will stay in developing countries, either settling in their country of first asylum or being repatriated to their homelands. Few third world refugees are resettled either to other developing countries or, more commonly, to developed countries. Refugees from less developed countries are being aided by and in less developed countries.

Into the mid-seventies most third world refugee movements resulted from independence struggles against a colonial extracontinental domination. Host countries maintained a high degree of solidarity with refugees from independence struggles, and there was the expectation of ultimate victory, independence, and repatriation. Refugee problems then were not necessarily of long duration. “The vast majority of the refugees were able to return to their countries of origin, or allowed to settle locally, mainly in rural areas” (Hartling, 1983).

Since the mid-seventies the situation has changed. There has been a large increase in the number of refugees from independent states: Afghanistan,
Burma, Chad, El Salvador, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Morocco, Laos, Vietnam, Guatemala, Angola, Uganda, Sudan, and Zaire. Voluntary repatriation has become significantly more difficult to achieve, and, even if it will eventually occur, it may be more delayed and incomplete than in the past. Increasingly, voluntary repatriation will have to take place without a decisive event such as independence, without any political settlement between the contending parties, and without any change in the political regime that originally caused the flight. Further — with larger numbers of refugees — with some host countries having less sympathy and solidarity for refugees who flee independent neighbors rather than imperialism, and with the growing populations and growing economic problems of many low-income countries, there is hesitancy about accepting refugees for settlement and integration and an increased propensity to view refugees as only temporary settlers.

**COST OF RELIEF**

The international community is deeply disturbed because “there has now been, for a long while ... a comparative slowdown in the provision of durable solutions” (Hartling, 1983b). A considerable shift has become apparent in the proportions of assistance spent on refugee relief and those spent on durable solutions. In 1970, 83 percent of UNHCR’s $5.87 million General Program budget3 focused on durable solutions. Since then, emergency relief and care and maintenance programs have been provided for hundreds of thousands, even millions, of refugees. Because of this increased need for relief assistance, the percentage spent on durable solutions in 1980 declined to 33.5 percent of the budget and in 1981 to 26 percent. In 1983 the percentage spent on durable solutions began to rise again, to 29.6 percent, and it is projected at 35.2 percent for 1984, 38 percent for 1985, and 42 percent for 1986.

Adding to the donors’4 concerns is the fact that during the past decade the total UNHCR budget increased more than sixty fold, to approximately $500 million in 1980 and 1981. It declined to about $400 million for 1983 and 1984. In addition there are other expensive situations in which durable solutions have proved elusive. UNRWA’s (UN Relief and Works Agency) budget is estimated at $194.4 million for 1983 and $216.7 million for 1984, and 1,957,061 Palestinian refugees were registered in 1983. On the Thailand-Kampuchea border the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) cares for 230,000 Khmer at a 1983 cost of $28 million. And for the World Food Program (WFP) “by far the greatest proportion — $108 million or about 54 percent in 1983 — of WFP emergency assistance is now directed to refugees” (WFP, 1984a). WFP

3 The total UNHCR budget in 1970 was $7.9 million.

4 The donors refers to the states of Western Europe, North America, Oceania, and Japan which are the main sources of voluntary contributions to UNHCR's programs.
emergency aid to refugees was even higher before 1983: $132.4 million or 68.6 percent in 1982; $131.7 million or 73.9 percent in 1981; and $119.4 million or 62.4 percent in 1980.

To the donors, larger assistance budgets and fewer durable solutions raise the spectre of an endless drain of resources, of expanded burden sharing that goes on and on with no solutions in sight. UN Under-Secretary-General Farah stated in 1983:

Donors... have expressed concern over the slow progress being made towards finding permanent solutions to the refugee problems. There is a feeling that unless determined efforts are made in this direction, refugee programs will become an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end (Farah, 1983a).

DURABLE SOLUTIONS

The Palestinian refugees and UNRWA stand as a constant reminder of the consequences of failing to find a durable solution. Eritrean refugees began to arrive in the Sudan in the 1960s; “some refugees from Laos will mark in 1985 their tenth year in refugee camps” (UNHCR, 1984); and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is in its sixth year — although one needs to note that the sizeable refugee outflow began almost two years before the invasion. “Refugee problems demand durable solutions” not only because of the cost to the international community, the burden on the host, and the waste of the refugees lives but because in their second, third and fourth generation refugees can be a violent and destabilizing social ulcer.

Refugees are caused by government action and achieving durable solutions is dependent on the political will, diplomacy, and statesmanship of governments. Although bountiful economic conditions can ease the task of integration, political will controls the gateway. If the golden land rejects or detains the refugees, then no durable solution will be possible. If one of the poorest lands accepts the refugees then, with international assistance, a new life can begin. Durable solutions are political solutions.

Root cause discussions contribute little to the search for durable solutions. The root causes are well known, they are the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse plus associated outriders and jackasses. These causes and issues are outside of the tiny refugee arena, they are the daily bread of the rest of the UN system and foreign and development ministries around the globe. Refugees result from such conflicts, sometimes deliberately, other times as an incidental by-product, but the existence or fate of the refugees will likely be ignored as a reason for resolution. Rarely do refugees seem to be a prime factor in the end of a crisis: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan will not end to allow some people to go home. The root causes are largely beyond redress or elimination by the refugee assistance system, but the system can sometimes
deal with immediate causes, can moderate and discourage outflows, or can encourage and facilitate return (This is not a suggestion to ignore root causes or to absorb countries of origin but to place responsibility for these problems properly within the international system. Refugees are political problems; UNHCR is not a political agency while other UN organs have a political mandate).

There are only three durable solutions: voluntary repatriation, local settlement, and third country resettlement. Both political will and capacity are necessary to their achievement, and many obstacles stand in the way of all three solutions. Indeed, the obstacles today are such that for refugees from developing countries third country resettlement is not a primary option. Historically only a small percentage of refugees are resettled and the massive resettlement program for Indochinese refugees is not likely to be repeated soon. Many developed countries that resettled Indochinese refugees note the refugees' severe ethnic and cultural problems of adjustment as well as their own limited absorptive capacity, economic problems, xenophobia, and compassion fatigue as reasons why resettlement is a durable solution of last resort. Developing country refugees normally have only the first two durable solutions as realistic options.

The donor countries push for the durable solutions of local settlement or voluntary repatriation is of course based on a humanitarian concern for the welfare of refugees, however, it is also self-serving in two respects. First is the often mentioned desire to reduce care and maintenance costs. The other underlying reason is so the refugees will not be sent to the donors for resettlement. Interestingly the donors restrict resettlement for much the same reason the hosts are hesitant about settlement; concerns over cost in times of economic difficulty, doubts about assimilating those so culturally different, and belief that the numbers are too great to absorb. The donors, however, see no inconsistency in paying the hosts to keep the refugees and in urging them to find the political will to accept unpleasant solutions.

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

The slowdown in achieving durable solutions that has occurred in the last decade has largely been caused by a decline in voluntary repatriation. This decline in turn was caused by the virtual conclusion of the period of independence struggles which produced refugees but also resulted in their repatriation when the goal was achieved. Now these newly independent countries with their fragile insecure governments, are causing refugee flows as they undergo nation-building and revolutionary change or are engaged in conflicts with their neighbors. To return refugees to these lands, newly independent, poor, with the troublesome regime still in power requires some new thinking about voluntary repatriation and ways of promoting it.
Although there has been a slowdown in the pace of voluntary repatriation, progress in achieving repatriation has not ground to a halt. "The first half of the present decade has already seen similar movements back to Argentina, Chad, Ethiopia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Uganda, Zimbabwe and elsewhere, in all of which UNHCR has been intimately involved" (UNHCR, 1985b). However, these successors illustrate the contemporary difficulties with voluntary repatriation. In only three cases — Chad, Argentina and Zimbabwe — was the return relatively complete, and Chad's conflict continues to produce refugees. In the other situations only a small proportion of the refugees — for example, 2,759 Laotian returnees from an estimated total of 89,000 refugees as of mid-1985 — have been able to return home.

Everyone supports the idea of voluntary repatriation — the ideal, best, preferred, most desirable solution — but there is no agreement on the means of achieving it. Ironically voluntary repatriation is the most sought after solution, but it is the area in which UNHCR, the international community, and individual states have the greatest limitations of mandate, influence, time, and resources. UNHCR normally is limited to one year in assisting voluntary repatriation and cannot address economic and developmental difficulties in the country of origin that can preclude return (Some are uncomfortable with the thought of giving development aid to a persecuting government so that its victims may return, but others feel that because poverty contributes to flight all necessary steps should be taken to encourage return. Certainly aid to an offending government is more easily done multilaterally than bilaterally. It has also been suggested that repatriating refugees should be able to shift their care and maintenance to their homeland for several years as an inducement to return).

There is a strong political element inherent in voluntary repatriation. Refugees flee from their homeland because the basic bond between citizen and government has been broken, fear has replaced trust, the father- or motherland is persecuting and rejecting some of its own. Trifles do not cause massive exoduses, and refugees cannot easily pick up and go home until substantial changes occur. International politics are an integral part of voluntary repatriation. Look to the Soviets in Afghanistan, Vietnam in Kampuchea, the Somali-Ethiopia War, Libya and Chad, South Africa in Namibia, the United States and others arming "freedom fighters" drawn from refugee camps and on and on. Many voluntary repatriations occur after the overthrow of a tyrant, independence, a change of regimes, the end of a conflict. New constitutions and peace treaties may bring return. Internal politics are also involved. Revolutions, nation-building, ethnic conflict and civil turmoil can cause flight; amnesty, stability, and peace can bring return. However, the political causes of flight do not disappear easily, if ever. "We are not in a utopian world where all refugees can repatriate voluntarily" (Hartling, 1983b).
The most important reason why all or many refugees may not be able to repatriate is the continuation in power of the regime that originally caused the exodus. However, refugee groups rarely possess uniform characteristics so this factor does not apply equally to all refugees. Return will usually be impossible for many victims of revolutionary change — the middle-class targets of communist revolutions — and for ethnic groups that have been rejected or expelled — the Ugandan Asians or the ethnic Chinese of Indochina. Deliberately attacked by their governments such victims might only return if they surrendered the characteristics that initially marked them as victims, if that is possible and acceptable to the regime. For most other refugees some possibility of return may exist depending on developments at home, i.e. a government secure enough in its position to offer amnesty to some or all, and international actions taken to promote their repatriation.

UNHCR in 1983 undertook a repatriation effort with regard to some of the Ethiopian refugees in Djibouti. A tripartite commission comprising representatives of the two governments and UNHCR was set up to establish a return program. The program was aimed at those rural refugees in Djibouti who had fled from an area of fighting, turmoil, and drought. Urban refugees who were politically opposed to the Ethiopian regime were not included. The start of the return was preceded by home visits by refugee leaders to examine facilities and conditions and to report back to their people. Returning refugees were given “kits” of food, tools, and animals with which to begin reestablishing themselves. The program was designed to begin slowly and to depend on favorable reports from early returnees to keep momentum going. By the end of 1984, “a total of 32,000 refugees repatriated from Djibouti, some 13,000 of them being considered as having returned in an organized manner and the balance as having spontaneously returned” (UN, 1985).

UNHCR has not been idle with regard to the slowdown in voluntary repatriation. “The last few years have also seen more attention being given to voluntary repatriation within the Executive Committee than in the previous decades” (Coles, 1985). In 1985 UNHCR convened a Round Table on Voluntary Repatriation “to submit observations and conclusions on voluntary repatriation to the Executive Committee” (UNHCR, 1985a). Some of the Round Table’s observations and conclusions were:

— That emphasizing the importance of voluntary repatriation did not deny thereby the necessity in some situations of settling refugee in another country. It was only to maintain that return was normally the best solution.
— In dealing with an entity with the country of origin or of asylum, the High Commissioner should not be unduly inhibited by the formal status of any particular entity. ... be prepared, whenever necessary, to deal with non-recognized entities...
— Assistance for the reintegration of returnees provided by the international community in the country of origin is recognized as an important factor in promoting repatriation.
— Recognized as having a legitimate concern about the consequences of return, particularly where the return has been brought about as a result of an amnesty or other form of guarantee of safe return. The High Commissioner must be regarded as entitled to insist on his legitimate concern over the outcome of any return that he has assisted. He must also have direct and unhindered access to the returnees.

5 The Djibouti Tripartite Commission is symbolic of UNHCR’s active pursuit of voluntary repatriation. A similar approach was used after the 1983 flight of refugees from Uganda to Rwanda.
The Djibouti repatriation illustrates many of the possibilities and problems of designing new modes of voluntary repatriation. It was able to repatriate large numbers of refugees because it separated out the innocent, unwittingly involved refugees from the politically committed. Peace is a sufficient condition for the return of those who flee conflict while the more difficult condition of regime change is needed for political exiles. Indeed the Ethiopian exile community, in Djibouti and globally, protested and opposed the program as *refoulement*. Exiles have an interest in demonstrating the evil of their foe and repatriation programs undermine their political stance.

Another issue raised in the Djibouti repatriation was about push factors in the country of asylum. That is, how voluntary is voluntary? Does it mean free will or are some inducements allowed? This issue arose because of indications (Crisp, 1984) that some refugees were told that rations would be cut off if they did not repatriate. When there is no drastic change or political settlement at home but concerned governments and international authorities agree certain refugee groups can return safely, then where does push become refoulement?

The Djibouti repatriation involved UNHCR in an active position not only facilitating repatriation but also bringing governments together to create conditions that would encourage return. UNHCR must tread carefully to preserve its humanitarian nonpolitical character. Negotiating an end to disputes such as Afghanistan, Kampuchea, or the Ogaden would be political but helping refugees voluntarily return home is a humanitarian act. At the moment the Djibouti success should encourage UNHCR to try harder to find ways to repatriate the least controversial refugee groups such as old people, women and children, and unaccompanied minors. Timing is important: return of some of these groups may be possible early in a situation if their wishes and the situation are promptly assessed and action taken.

The passage of time has also proven an important factor in voluntary repatriation, particularly spontaneous return of refugees. Many people flee for a confused and disorderly combination of reasons that mix political persecution with economic and social disruptions. Some who have nothing to fear are caught up in a panicky exodus or join it because of vague expectations of adventure or opportunity. As situations stabilize, worst fears fade and expectations wither, and many refugees wonder why they ever left home. It is important to keep the door open for return and not to finalize the refugees status in a way that precludes repatriation. Many thousands of Khmer in the border camps in Thailand have gone home in this way as have Ugandans from Zaire and the Sudan, Zairians from Burundi and Uganda, and Chadians when civil strife eased or ended.

However, when spontaneous repatriation occurs without a political settlement there can be a variety of problems involved in confirming the numbers of returnees and in getting aid to them. For several years now
UNHCR has had a $20 million Special Program for Returnees in Ethiopia to assist returnees from the Sudan in the north and from Somalia in the east. The plan was to provide self-sufficiency kits to some of the returnees and to create some settlements for others. However, almost the entire northern program has had to be cancelled because political conditions and fighting made the provision of assistance impossible.

Nonetheless, despite the UNHCR Djibouti program and the spontaneous drift home of many refugees the fact remains that voluntary repatriation is the durable solution least effectively promoted by the international community. Many disputes are too political to allow any UNHCR humanitarian role. There is no alternative mechanism that can be relied on to promote or force negotiations. Ad hoc responses through the UN, the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, and bilateral efforts by neighbors or others only partially address the problem. Sometimes responses use the refugee situation to score points on a Cold War or territorial rival who can be lambasted as a persecutor and violator of human rights. Sometimes the refugees are used in connection with guerrillas as a way of preventing a rival from consolidating a victory and keeping the costs of his invasion high, as in Kampuchea and Afghanistan.

It may be inevitable that voluntary repatriation will be as limited in the future as it has been through the ages. “When perceived national self-interest of a strategic, military, political or even economic character does not appear fully to be compatible with” (Griffiths, 1983) the return of refugees there may be little that UNHCR or the international system can do to encourage return. But some explorations of possible strategies and of more consistent efforts and mechanisms to influence perceived national self-interest would be useful. Countries sometimes respond to penalties or inducements; shame or scorn may temper their behavior; their development assistance could be shifted to the countries of asylum or they could get additional assistance to reintegrate their people. More effort is needed to promote partial repatriations, to get at least some of the people home rather than holding the entire mass hostage to the political goals of hard-core dissidents.

Voluntary repatriation is not always the best answer or even possible. A Palestinian return would negate Israel’s national existence. Some peoples may be better off out of a land where they were forever the despised minority; although that is by no means clear and would only be so if toleration were impossible and if they found a friendly sanctuary. Lastly, perhaps some useful lessons might be learned from the ill-fated minorities treaties of the inter-war period to design international assurances and protection for returnees.

There is a certain sense of urgency about the need to find new ways to
promote voluntary repatriation. This is because in the late-twentieth century the earlier alternatives to voluntary repatriation are no longer available. In the past, as best we know it, open-lands, weak borders, and less fully developed nationalism meant that many refugee groups could carve out a place for themselves. Mormons could settle a salt desert; millions could move labelled as "immigrants"; tribes under pressure could go to the hills or trek to some empty land or even set up dominion over others. Today we have only three durable solutions and we must get maximum mileage from each one.

Settlement

The other primary durable solution for developing country refugees is local settlement. Many point to an expansion of local settlement as a way of taking up the slack caused by the decline in voluntary repatriation. The ICARA II (Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa) Declaration notes:

Where voluntary return is not immediately feasible or possible, conditions should be created within the country of asylum for a temporary settlement or the integration of refugees into the community and their full participation in its social and economic life.

Despite this declaration many host countries are hesitant about either temporary settlement or local integration.

Operationally temporary settlement is not very different from local integration. Both involve a host permitting refugees to "participate on an equal footing in its social and economic life" (UN, 1984c). There will be at most only small differences in the forms of assistance needed for one or the other type of settlement. In terms of policy the main difference is that temporary settlement is not meant to be a durable solution, the refugees are allowed to remain while waiting for voluntary repatriation to become feasible. Given the delays and difficulties of arranging repatriation many hosts consider a temporary settlement decision to be of equal weight with a local integration decision. Temporary settlement is not tantamount to integration but hosts are clearly hesitant due to fear it will eventually become permanent settlement and de facto integration. Nonetheless a host government faced with few alternatives may prefer temporary settlement because it delays a commitment and may be more acceptable to domestic political forces.

In reality the lot of many refugees is temporary asylum in camps with care and maintenance assistance and no durable solution in sight. Countries of asylum are hesitant to grant refugees permanent residency even when it is clear that repatriation is far off or unlikely. Host hesitancy toward temporary or permanent settlement is based on more than just a financial balance sheet and derives from many interconnecting factors:
a) Support for the refugees political cause — particularly independence, secession or autonomy — would be weakened if they were integrated and ceased to be a visible reminder of the cause. Palestinians have played this role the longest but this category also includes: Khmer in Thailand, Ogaden Somalis in Somalia, Afghans in Pakistan, and Saharawi in Algeria.

b) The size of the refugee population may be too large for the host to absorb. A refugee group may be too large either in absolute terms, three million Afghans in Pakistan, or in proportion to the size of the host, 40,000 refugees in tiny Djibouti or Somalia hosting refugees equivalent to about twenty percent of its population. Absorptive capacity is highly subjective, however, and many countries with relatively light burdens — Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia — nonetheless feel unable to integrate refugees.

c) Fear that local settlement would encourage more refugees to flee to the host country. It is extremely difficult to determine whether or not a magnet effect actually exists, but the fear expressed is plausible and genuine.

d) Fears of being accused of giving priority to refugees rather than to needy nationals or alternatively that the refugees’ economic skills bring them into competition with nationals. This is one of the most common themes in refugee situations everywhere.

e) Unwillingess or inability to make a financial contribution — from their own scarce resources, or by going into debt — for the sake of refugees.

f) Fear that the refugees may skew development plans and priorities because they are in the wrong place with the wrong needs.

g) Past experience with international refugee integration assistance which established services and infrastructure but did not cover long-term recurrent costs of maintenance. The donors preference for partial additionality6 particularly misses the point.

h) Concerns that the refugees’ ethnic, social, cultural, or political background might make them unacceptable to segments of the population and unable to integrate.

---

6 Additionality refers to the request by the low-income host countries that refugee assistance of all types should be over and above — additional to — the normal development assistance they would receive if there were not any refugee situation. Donors, however, indicate that if refugees are incorporated into development projects, such as settlement schemes, they would become potential contributors to the host’s development. Donors, therefore, feel it is reasonable that a share of development assistance should also apply to the refugee areas. In other words, partial rather than full additionality.
This last point, that the national population will not accept the refugees, is an extremely serious, widely evident concern and one that calls some durable solution strategies into question.

We live in the age of nationalism for all the good and ill it brings us. Han Kohn (1968) has defined nationalism as a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state. Generating a supreme loyalty — above religion, family, tribe, region — is a difficult and long process. Some states never achieve it. Once achieved, however, nationalism brings great benefits to a state. Those who share the nationality of the father/motherland will cooperate with one another for the common good, and internal peace and cohesion will be easier to maintain. Nationalism is a source of identity and pride. However, just as nationalism integrates all members of the nationality into the nation-state, it excludes all others. In many of its varieties nationalism is intolerant and aggressive towards those who are different.

Historically the development of nationalism and of nation-states has been a violent process with many instances of war, massacre, extermination, forced assimilation and expulsion or flight. European nationalism reached its present state of maturity and stability after a century that included two world wars and many other horrors. There are many pathways to becoming a nation-state, but one of the most common, which fits the circumstances of most developing countries, is first to have a territory with relatively stable boundaries and then the nationality develops within the shell. Most often there is a core or dominant nationality that determines the content of the emerging nationalism in competition, often violent, with other ethnic groups or nationalities within the territory. The losers may be assimilated, remain as a minority, be exterminated, flee, or be expelled.

This painful refugee-producing scenario fits all too many developing countries. Africa was well launched on this road by the 1964 Organization of African Unity Resolution “that all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence”. However unsatisfactory those colonial boundaries were, there was no sensible alternative to respecting them. International boundaries are highly impervious to change; people, however, are treated by governments as transferable and expendable. In all regions, wherever there are differences and compromises between political boundaries and the human landscape, the process of sorting out peoples and nationalities continues.

Francis X. Sutton (1983) has pointed out that this familiar nation-building pattern has a reverse side that hitherto has been ignored. Nation-building, “the fiercely nativist sentiments”, “narrow and particularistic sentiments” of the integrative revolution “raise important barriers to the acceptance of refugees, even where there are favoring ethnic, cultural, or political solidarities”. Sutton goes on: “if this analysis is sound, the prospects of long-term
settlement of refugees in places of first asylum in the Third World do not look very encouraging”. I believe the analysis is sound and the prospects need serious examination.

The most worrying example illustrating Sutton’s point is the Banyarwanda tragedy: the 1982 uprooting of Rwandese refugees who had been in Uganda for two decades and had long ago achieved self-sufficiency. About 70,000 refugees were affected; half were driven back into Rwanda and the others forced to take refuge at relatively unaffected refugee settlements in Uganda. The ruling political party directed the attack on the Banyarwanda reportedly (Winter, 1983) because they supported the opposition party and were convenient scapegoats for Uganda’s numerous failings. Most of the refugees who were attacked had been spontaneously settled. Uganda’s policy toward the refugees had always been one of temporary settlement:

Uganda was committed to voluntary repatriation as the final and best solution to the refugee problem. That was why it had refused to integrate or assimilate refugees and had never given the Ugandan nationality to any of them (Holborn, 1975).

For years many have pointed to “traditional hospitality” by peoples in developing countries as a major factor ameliorating the condition of refugees. This hospitality has been particularly effective when ethnic connections exist between refugee and host. However, there are situations in which local acceptance of kin can lead to national problems, imbalance and rejection. In Lebanon the Palestinian refugees involvement with national politics upset a delicate balance and contributed to tragedy. In Malaysia ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam were rejected against a backdrop of a delicate national ethnic balance. In Pakistan a wary eye is kept by national authorities on Afghan refugees in the province of Baluchistan where the refugees ethnic kin have long resisted national control.

In Africa the fears are of a different order. The World Bank considers the predicament of Africa to be a generalized crisis — of which refugees are only a small part — with no end in sight for the next decade. “The record is grim and it is no exaggeration to talk of crisis” (World Bank, 1981).

The Bank and other development institutions now face one of the greatest challenges of the post-war era as they face the prospect of trying to restart sub-Saharan African development (World Bank, 1984b).

In better times, solidarity with the refugees’ cause of liberation and the belief they would not stay forever made traditional hospitality easier. In the grim crisis of the next decade will there be repeats of Uganda and Djibouti\(^7\) to illustrate Sutton’s concern that long-term settlement has poor prospects?

\(^7\) Although the voluntary repatriation from Djibouti to Ethiopia appears to be proceeding well, there were reliable reports that if UNHCR did not assist with the program, Djibouti would denounce the Convention and Protocol and forcibly repatriate the refugees.
It may be necessary to question whether the relative weights assigned to the three durable solutions in recent years are wrong or too optimistic. The refugees and development approach has been pushing local settlement as the most available durable solution. This preference has come about through a process of elimination — voluntary repatriation has slowed down; resettlement is not realistic — and not from a record of successes (Stein and Clark, 1985). We need to be cautious about local settlement, if it were easy, a whole new approach to assistance would not be needed to promote it. A durable solution means integration and most host countries are offering only temporary settlement. That could evolve into de facto integration but temporary settlement could also become rejection and expulsion. Much more attention needs to be paid to incorporating a chance for citizenship into settlement schemes. Without that chance, it may well be that the only real durable solution is voluntary repatriation, followed by resettlement in pluralistic societies as second best.

**Resettlement**

Resettlement is one of the three classic durable solutions, however, it is the least used durable solution. Historically, it did not need to exist during the era of free migration, and resettlement was of only modest scale during the inter-war period. Since World War II perhaps five million refugees have been resettled. For the last few years worldwide resettlement has been at an annual level of approximately 150,000 refugees.

Since World War II resettlement has played a gradually more limited role as the character of refugee problems has changed. In the first period, up to World Refugee Year in 1959, the focus of refugee problems remained in Europe and the overseas offshoots of Europe — the United States, Canada, Australia — showed their solidarity by resettling a fair share of the refugees, displaced persons, and escapees. In the sixties and seventies the focus of refugee problems shifted to the developing world. Fortunately, most of the refugee flows from struggles for independence carried the seeds of their own solution. Victory led to rapid voluntary repatriation. Now we are confronted by “massive arrivals of refugees in low-income countries where often no durable solutions are at hand” (Hartling, 1983). Most refugees today are from struggles within and between independent developing countries. Some conflicts drag on for five years — Cambodia, Afghanistan, Ogaden; for ten years — Angola and Spanish Sahara; or for twenty or more years — Eritrea and Palestine; with no solution in sight. Millions of refugees await an unlikely voluntary repatriation and are increasingly offered only temporary asylum. Only in the Indochinese refugee crisis has resettlement been widely used as a solution for developing country refugees.

All of the wrong lessons have been learned from the Indochinese resettlement effort. Commentators have focussed on “the difficulty of integrating
refugees from entirely different ethnic and cultural backgrounds" (Aga Khan, 1981). The difficulties have been used to label resettlement as the “least desirable and most costly” (UNHCR, 1984) durable solution reserved “as an exceptional measure to be pursued only for compelling humanitarian reasons” (US, 1984). Instead of resettlement, voluntary repatriation and local settlement are to be pursued. The 1984 meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee approved this rank ordering of durable solutions (UNHCR, 1984).

It is surprising how easily the industrialized countries have been let off the hook and allowed to exclude themselves from the search for durable solutions. The donors’ protests that resettlement creates impossible demands and burdens and that they are being overwhelmed and suffering compassion fatigue are accepted at face value, as are their demands for more effort and will to achieve the nonresettlement durable solutions so relief won’t be so costly.

However, the donors’ protests about the burden of resettlement and the resulting compassion fatigue are not mere devices to excuse a lack of action. Resettlement, as with other durable solutions and actions benefitting refugees, is dependent on a favorable climate of public opinion. “However, there has been increasing evidence in recent years of confusion in the public mind between the very special situation of refugees and that of millions of other aliens who are endeavoring to gain entry to countries other than their own” (UNHCR, 1984b). This confusion has hampered a sympathetic approach to refugee problems. Further there is a growing public “impression that there is no end to the problem” (Moussalli, 1983). UNHCR’s Director of International Protection has warned that: “If the political mechanisms do not work, the humanitarian machinery may gradually become paralyzed. ... Everything possible must be done to help States and the political organs of the international community to find appropriate political solutions” (Moussalli, 1983). Without solutions there is the danger of a rising tide of restrictionism and xenophobia in the resettlement countries (UNHCR, 1984c).

Indochinese resettlement is labelled the exceptional case and its costs and difficulties cited as reasons why “few have found it possible to renew their generous offers of places at anything like the same level — if at all” (Aga Khan, 1981). This view fails to note how refugees feel about resettlement and whether or not a durable solution was achieved. In Southeast Asia local integration and repatriation were not possible and rescue by resettlement became necessary. It is still the most available durable solution for Indochinese refugees and it is shameful how many thousands of refugees are nearing their sixth year in camps because of meager resettlement quotas. In assigning weights to durable solutions, nonresettlement needs to be rejected and resettlement restored as one of the major durable solutions. This does not necessarily mean resettling three million Afghan refugees — although the
United States recently suggested at the 1984 Population Conference in Mexico City that it is a mistake to concentrate on numbers rather than on how expanding populations might be accommodated — but it does suggest examining all three options when looking at a refugee situation to see who can go home, who can stay in the land of asylum, and who needs to be resettled.

**COST OF DURABLE SOLUTIONS**

The belief that more rapid movement toward achieving durable solutions will lead to lower refugee assistance costs has not been adequately investigated. This belief was well expressed by UNHCR's Deputy High Commissioner at the 1982 Berlin Conference on "Refugees and Development":

> Our experience shows it is over the long run much cheaper, as well as better, to have the refugees be self-sufficient rather than dependent on relief (Smyser, 1982).

This belief, besides being based on UNHCR's experience also reflects a common view of technical assistance and development. An old proverb says:

> Give a man a fish,
> and he will eat for a day;
> teach him how to fish,
> and he will eat for the rest of his life.

However, what both statements miss is how costly it will be to make people self-sufficient; that is, how do you fish in the desert?

Relief and care and maintenance are expensive but the durable solution of local settlement — especially when it involves developmental and infrastructural assistance and also incorporates elements of the local population — is not inexpensive. Durable solutions are more expensive in the first several years than care and maintenance, but they have the potential of eventually becoming less expensive as the refugees become self-reliant.

Refugee situations, however, vary greatly. Some refugees are in fertile areas where seeds dropped into the earth produce bountiful harvests; others are in areas where extensive inputs are needed before seeds sprout. Care and maintenance situations, where logistics is the main variable, have less variety than self-reliance situations. It is likely, therefore, that care and maintenance costs will vary within a smaller range worldwide than will durable solution costs.

It is very difficult to get figures on care and maintenance costs and on durable solutions costs so that comparisons may be made. Some information is available that suggests that durable solutions are not automatically much cheaper. In 1980 the UNHCR Working Group on the Fund for Durable Solutions reported:

> that durable solutions would require in favorable circumstances at least $1,000 to $1,500 *per capita* from the fund itself in addition to
outside financing. In other cases per capita costs would be considerably higher (UNHCR, 1980).

In contrast, the World Food Program reported (FAO, 1981) that two years of food aid for five million African refugees would cost approximately $916,560,000. This works out to an annual per capita cost of $91.66. The World Food Program’s operation in Thailand, UNBRO, reports a similar figure (UNBRO, 1984). The 1984 UNBRO budget for care and maintenance of 310,000 people is $32,437,000 or $104.63 per capita.

The point is that refugees and development assistance from the outset is not a panacea for all refugee problems. Certainly in terms of one of its justifications, lower costs, it may lead in the opposite direction in certain situations. Particularly in less favorable circumstances there are indications that delay may have it uses. Delay allows for a longer exploration of prospects for voluntary repatriation. It also permits greater attention to design, planning, surveys, and other measures to enhance the prospects of success for local settlement schemes once they are implemented. Lastly, these cost figures indicate the importance of a development-oriented approach to refugee assistance. While it is difficult to justify high per capita costs for an isolated refugee settlement, these costs are more acceptable for a settlement that is linked to a process of integrated area development where agricultural production complements and stimulates nonfarm activities, goods and services.

CONCLUSION

The demand for durable solutions that has been expressed in the early 1980s has not yet developed sufficient momentum to improve substantially the prospects for refugees. Thus far the renewed push for durable solutions has produced increased attention to the problem — since 1983 “Durable Solutions” has been an item on the agenda of UNHCR’s Executive Committee; the 1984 Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) had the theme “Time for Solutions”, and the 1984 Principles for Action in Developing Countries “demand durable solutions” — but only modest results have been achieved in actually attaining more durable solutions. There is increased effort for durable solutions as shown by the increased percentage of the UNHCR budget spent on durable solution activities. However, increased expenditures do not automatically bring increased solutions. Perhaps too much of the renewed effort for durable solutions has concentrated on resources rather than on using more effectively what is already available.

It is also important to remember that refugee assistance has not been, is not now, and never should be dominated by a balance sheet mentality. Cost consciousness is secondary to other goals. Refugee assistance is humanitarian assistance to restore victims of injustice to full membership in a human community. Sometimes the only choice is an expensive choice.
REFERENCES

Aga Khan, S.

Coles, G.J.L.

Crisp, J.

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization)

Farah, A.A.

Griffiths, T.

Hartling, P.


Holborn, L.W.

Kohn, H.

Moussalli, M.

Smyser, W.R.

Stein, B.N. and L. Clark

Sutton, F.X.

UN

UNBRO (United Nations Border Relief Operation)

UNHCR


US Office of the Coordinator for Refugee Affairs

Winter, R.

World Bank


WFP