
GOVERNMENT



UNHCR and Refugee Women

The office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by General Assembly resolution in 1950 to protect refugees and promote durable solutions to their problems. UNHCR depends entirely upon voluntary contributions from governments and private sources for its programs, seeking to assist as many as possible of the more than twelve million refugees in the world. The High Commissioner acts under the authority of the General Assembly and follows policy directives given to him by the Assembly and ECOSOC. He also reports to the forty-three member Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program.

The nature of the refugee populations with which UNHCR has to work today has changed considerably since the 1960s when, particularly in Africa, the major movements of refugees of rural origin began. Since that time it is estimated that 75% of refugees being assisted throughout the world are women and children. It is only in recent years that some of the implications of that fact

have been recognized and acted upon by the international community, through international and non-governmental organizations.

UNHCR, as an international organization mandated to protect and assist refugees until a durable solution may be found for them, sets up, in response to requests received from the government of the host country, programs appropriate to the needs of the particular groups of refugees concerned — programs which are implemented by governmental or non-governmental agencies. Besides the protection element, an initial assistance program normally comprises elements addressing food, shelter, clothing, water and medical needs, and moves on to include educational requirements and projects which help refugees on their way to becoming self-supporting.

Programs until now addressed refugee groups as a whole (without distinguishing particularly between the sexes), although certain projects — such as supplementary feeding for children

BY ANGELA GIBBS PEART

and lactating mothers or counselling for female victims of violence— were drawn up to meet specially-perceived needs. UNHCR acknowledges that these measures have not been enough to address the unsatisfactory conditions and prospects of many refugee women. Their need in both the protection and assistance fields have to be addressed at the very early stages of a refugee influx. As the Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Arthur E. Dewey, recently said “We must admit that previous responses in emergencies did not always take women into account and must now be reoriented... We do not say that we are setting up programs that benefit women only, but we are designing programs with the recognition that women are the largest beneficiaries and have the greatest needs.”

Like most refugees, women refugees are faced with the inherent dangers characterizing their flight to safety, together with insecurity and often interminable waiting periods in camps while durable solutions are sought on their behalf. Yet it is clear that refugee women are doubly disadvantaged for, confronted with the trauma of uprooting, deprived of normal and family ties, property and belongings, they are forced to assume an abrupt change of roles and status. Faced with loss, due to death or frequent absences of husbands and young male family members, female-headed households are a common phenomenon in many refugee populations today. Unprotected as they are, ensuring physical protection and equal access to food and non-food items for women heads of households and women on their own, are permanent concerns of UNHCR. Often, economic pressures cause refugee women and girls to be exploited and abused— problems which are rarely reported by the refugees.

A close link exists between the provisions of international legal instruments, both universal and regional, regarding women's status and rights in general, and their relevance to women who are in search of protection and assistance from the international community as refugees. The basic provisions of international human rights, enshrined in the charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensure freedom from racial, religious and sexual discrimination. Moreover, Article 26 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires not

only equal, but also effective protection against discrimination on any grounds such as, *inter alia*, sex. Subsequently, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women elaborated specific provisions for the implementation of political, social, economic, cultural and civil rights of women.

Undoubtedly, the most important milestone in the recognition by the international community of the special needs and problems of refugee women occurred during the United Nations Decade for Women (UNDW): Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985). During the Decade, the World Conference of the UNDW, held in Copenhagen in 1980, adopted three resolutions specifically devoted to UNHCR's action in favour of refugee women. At the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UNDW, held in Nairobi in 1985, the Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted by the General Assembly in 1986, highlighted the situation of refugee and displaced women as an area of special concern. Most recently, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has identified the issue of refugee and displaced women and children as a priority one, to be introduced, under the Theme of Peace, at the Commission's 1990 Session.

With regard to refugee and displaced women in Africa, the 1984 Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa Beyond the UNDW called for concerted action to ensure that humanitarian and development programs enabled refugee women to become self-reliant and active participants in programs implemented on their behalf.

At its thirty-sixth session in 1985, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR for the first time adopted a separate resolution stressing the need for UNHCR and host governments to give particular attention to the international protection of refugee women. At its thirty-eighth session in 1987, the Executive Committee, in its General Conclusions on International Protection:

Took into account that refugee women have special protection needs as well as special resources which can be utilized for the benefit of all refugees, reiterated the need to give particular attention to their situation with a view to improving

existing protection and assistance programs and called for concerted action by all States and concerned agencies.

Recognized the need to collect reliable information and statistics about refugee women, to increase awareness of their situation and to incorporate information about their needs in the Office's training programs and called upon the High Commissioner to report in detail to the thirty-ninth session of the Executive Committee on the particular protection and assistance problems and needs of refugee women and on the concrete measures taken to meet them.

UNHCR has recognized the need to assess, strengthen and reorient existing policies and programs in favour of refugee women, whilst ensuring that such efforts are culturally appropriate and result in their full integration, rather than singling them out from the refugee community as a whole. Thus, in February 1988, a Steering Committee on Refugee Women was established under the Chairmanship of the Deputy High Commissioner to define, oversee and coordinate this process. The Office is aware that more detailed knowledge and understanding of the needs and roles of refugee women is called for and would benefit all in the refugee field— countries of asylum and countries of origin, UNHCR, other international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and, of course, the refugee communities themselves. A data base is being compiled with data being received from UNHCR's offices around the world. Some of the problems and special needs of refugee women in regard to assistance, protection and durable solutions, are examined in the following paragraphs.

Refugee Women and International Protection, Assistance and Durable Solutions

In regard to international protection, there are situations in which refugee women face particular hazards involving, notably, threats to their physical safety and sexual exploitation— due to the mere fact that they are women. They are also frequently subject to discrimination, unequal access to relief supplies, and problems of availing themselves of legal status

as refugees. It has become increasingly obvious that programs must be designed to ensure women's full participation, taking into account their vital socio-economic role and their central contribution to family and community life.

Specific Protection Issues Concerning Refugee Women

In 1987 UNHCR issued a set of guidelines explaining the objectives of international protection of refugee women and girls and proposing methods for achieving them. Regrettably, reports from Field Offices around the world confirm that incidences of rape, abduction, sexual harassment and the obligation to grant "sexual favours" in return for documentation and/or relief goods remain a distressing phenomenon in camps, settlements, urban centres, or along escape routes and border areas.

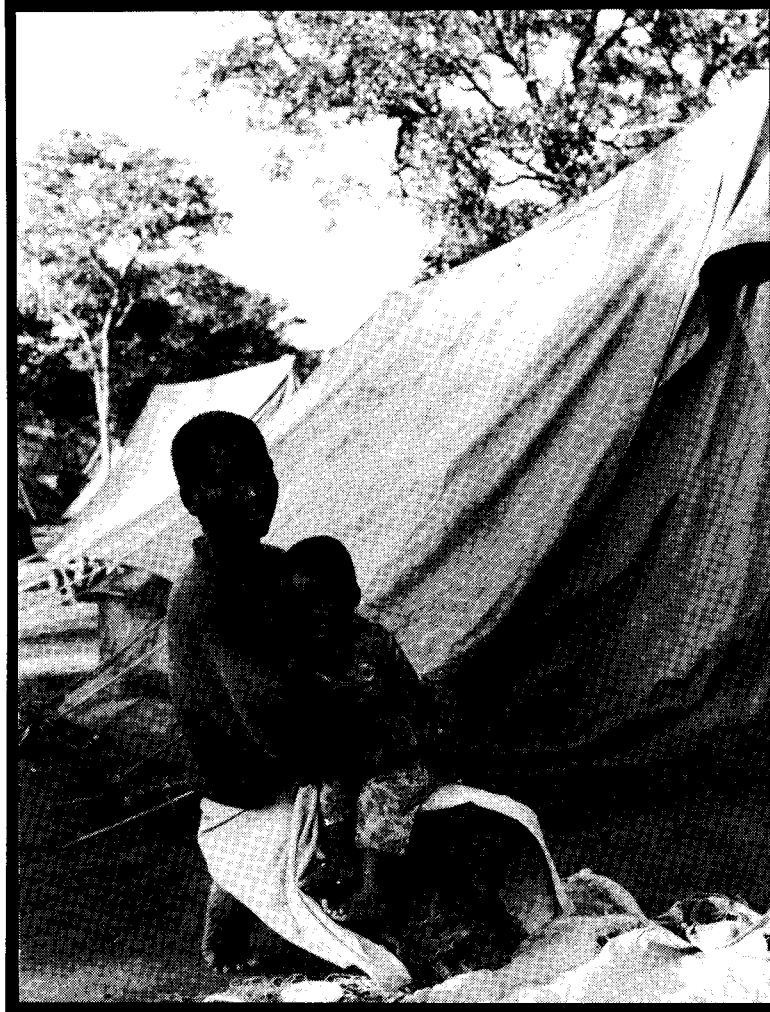
In South-East Asia, the Anti-Piracy Program remains an essential factor in the effort to confront the high risk of physical violence, most often involving rape and abduction of refugee women, due to pirate attacks. Between 1985 and 1987, 337 rape cases were reported, not including the cases of women who were abducted, many of whom were never traced.

Serious cases involving violation of the physical security of refugee women in camps, settlements and border areas continue to be reported. These include rape and abuse by border guards and soldiers at entry points along national borders. A recent survey conducted in an African country hosting large numbers of refugees revealed a high proportion of female victims of violence who had fallen into the hands of anti-government forces.

In countries where refugees are confined for long periods in overcrowded camps and reception centres, refugee women frequently suffer from family vio-

lence, due to pent-up frustrations and fragmentation of community life, as well as rape and abuse from other refugees and, in some cases, camp guards. This phenomenon further compounds the personal tragedy faced by those refugee women in camps in South-East Asia who, during hazardous sea voyages, have already been victims of grave violence.

Refugee women, whether they have found asylum in developed or developing countries, are also particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation for the purposes of prostitution. This is particularly true of female refugees who are unaccompanied,



Mozambican refugee mother and child in Zambian camp

Photo: UNHCR

single or are heads of family, and results from a variety of factors (including difficulties in obtaining work permits, their lower educational status in relation to men, difficulties encountered in "placing" children while they work, and in finding jobs and housing). Apart from being an unacceptable contravention of Article 6 of the 1979 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and

of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (UN General Assembly Resolution 317 (iv) of 2 December 1949), prostitution of refugee women inevitably results in large numbers of unwanted pregnancies and breakdown in social mores. In some host countries, moreover, the fact that refugee women reside in urban centres far from family and clan, results in their being automatically tainted by popular opinion as prostitutes.

Resettlement

The term resettlement is used by the UNHCR to describe the settlement of refugees in third countries, a durable solution which is only resorted to in cases where a refugee's return to his or her country of origin does not appear to be possible in the foreseeable future and where it is not possible for the refugee to integrate in the first asylum country. Within the context of its resettlement activities, UNHCR has been particularly concerned with certain categories of refugee women who are ineligible for resettlement and who, either due to their refugee status or to social mores within the country of first asylum, as women find themselves seriously at risk. Close cooperation between voluntary agencies and UNCHR resulted in the creation, in 1988, of a Special Resettlement Program for Women at Risk.

The Canadian government was the first to agree to participate, on the basis of joint sponsorship with NGOs, in sponsoring vulnerable women found to be in this category. Under the joint assistance, the government provides financial assistance and other assistance normally provided to government sponsored refugees. NGOs provide services related to other resettlement needs (such as psychological support, daycare, and referrals to special services). Thirty-six women from different parts of the world, both from rural and urban backgrounds and including wid-

ows, single mothers, divorced or abandoned women, and women heads of families had arrived in Canada by 31 December 1988, and are in the process of settling into their new lives. Over thirty are on their way. Several other countries have expressed interest in following suit.

Needs and Potential of Refugee Women in the Various Sectors of Assistance

Over 80% of refugees receiving assistance from the international community are to be found in developing countries, where women traditionally constitute an integral force in the social and economic fabric of society. As refugees, the burden of work of such women inevitably becomes more acute when, often as heads of household, they assume a primary role in all activities affecting survival and self-sufficiency of the family unit.

A basic principle of effective program-planning is the identification of needs according to the demographic composition of a refugee caseload. Apart from a few notable exceptions, women, and often female heads of household, comprise the majority of the adult population in most refugee situations around the world. Assistance programs — from contingency planning, emergency relief, care and maintenance through identification of durable solutions — should be geared to meet the special needs of refugee women, ensure their participation, and thereby benefit the whole community. The following summary provides an overview of specific difficulties faced by refugee women in key sectors of assistance.

Health, Nutrition, Water and Sanitation

Provision of basic health care at the family level is most often the domain of women in refugee communities. The dual role of women as bearers and caretakers of children and managers of family income exposes them to special physical

and psychological vulnerability. In many refugee situations, a major problem is the inability of women to free themselves from their daily tasks long enough to attend to their own health needs. In some cases, traditional nutrition and sanitary practices are inappropriate, or impossible to follow in a refugee camp or settlement with a concentrated population. Cultural barriers may also restrict women's access to health care. In UNHCR's largest country program, difficulties have been experienced in bringing medical and nutritional care to female Afghan refugees.



Afghan refugees in Pakistani camp

Photo: UNHCR

Where refugees are wholly dependent on outside aid, new foods may not provide the balance of nutrients contained in the traditional diet. For example, unsupervised use of milk powder in relief operations may disrupt traditional breast feeding practices which, combined with the risks of contaminated water and containers, can cause serious health hazards for infants.

Increased vitamin and mineral requirements during pregnancy and lactation make refugee women far more prone to deficiency diseases, sometimes resulting in functional impairment and death. Endemic scurvy and severe anaemia is a chronic problem affecting refugee women in many countries. In addition, the birth rate among refugees is often above the average of the local population; frequent, close-spaced births have a detrimental effect on the mother's health and nutritional status.

Like most of their counterparts in developing countries, refugee women and

female children spend an inordinate amount of time in water collection. This interferes with schooling and involvement in productive activities. Installation of accessible water supply systems is, therefore, of particular significance for refugee women, who should be consulted when new pumps and equipment are introduced, and trained in maintenance and repair tasks, as well as in water usage and the dangers from water-borne diseases.

UNHCR includes in its assistance programs to refugees supplementary feeding for vulnerable groups, mother and child health care, public health education, psychological counselling and most importantly, the training of refugee health workers. Mobile medical teams with women health visitors cater to the needs of women who cannot for cultural reasons attend clinics. A number of "women only" dispensaries have been created. Other areas being addressed are the unsupervised use of milk powder in relief operations, the improvement of food baskets, and family planning on a voluntary basis. Community mental health services are funded in areas where the need arises.

Education

The problems encountered in the provision of education for refugee girls are similar to those faced at the national level: girls' enrollment decreases progressively; absenteeism among girls who are obliged to assist with family chores is higher than among boys; there is a high drop-out rate given the lack of teachers properly trained and sensitive to girls' needs; traditional values of families which do not perceive education as a goal for self-sufficiency or of assistance in the improvement of their daily life. Guidelines on primary education for refugee children, including special provisions for girls, will be issued by UNHCR in 1989.

In the sphere of vocational training for refugee women, increased emphasis is being placed on the teaching of skills related to income-generation. The opportunity to engage in such activities has

proved to be a strong motivating factor for many refugee women, especially when child-care facilities are also available, as in the case in the Family Life Program, in which a total of 46,000 refugee women in one African country have participated. This particular program's activities will therefore be extended, from traditional occupations such as handicrafts, to include the teaching of skills aimed at local markets, such as shoe-making, poultry-raising and confectionery. Aware that education constitutes a vital factor in improving the social-economic status of refugee women, UNHCR will, as from 1989, give priority to non-formal education, notably literacy training and skills training by identifying new projects, improving the focus of ongoing projects including refugee women, and reorienting those projects with a low success rate. Special attention will be given to adequate technical input and planning of projects to increase their impact.

Social Services

An important catalytic role in ensuring that the needs and potential of refugee women are met and understood, is achieved in the social service area with a focus on social work, education, training and community development. Apart from well-known social counselling programs around the world which benefit women, such as the victims of violence programs in South-East Asia, the work of Social Services has multiple ramifications affecting wider assistance programs.

As part of a multi-disciplinary, integrated approach, experienced UNHCR Social Services Officers now routinely participate in technical evaluation missions. Assessment of the needs and participation of refugee women represents an essential aspect of their task. One such example was provided during a recent technical mission to a Middle Eastern country hosting two distinct refugee populations and a variety of urban refugees of diverse nationalities. Discussions with refugee women resulted in a variety of culturally-appropriate measures being

proposed by the women themselves (such as girls schools, training of traditional birth attendants, improved sanitation facilities located at a safe distance from dwellings, introduction of farming activities and of semi-mechanized looms to supplement family income through traditional weaving skills). In societies where strong cultural constraints govern the role of women and their access to facilities, identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable groups of refugee women can prove extremely difficult, as has been found to be the case in Afghan refugee



Mozambican refugee mother and child in Zimbabwe camp Photo: UNHCR

villages. In order to establish a coordinated mechanism for identifying the most needy groups, particularly refugee women, evaluating their situation and putting them in touch with services, a Social Welfare Cell has been established on a pilot basis by UNHCR in cooperation with the authorities and an experienced NGO. This program also includes provisions for training of outreach workers for the refugee villages.

Promoting the establishment of women's associations, based on traditional structures, and encouraging representation of women on camp committees, is also an important aspect of Social Services work. While this is difficult in some cultures, notable successes have been achieved in others. Salvadorian women in camps in one Central American country, for example, form over 50% of the camp committee membership, participating fully in all camp decisions, including identification of specific program requirements tailored to their needs.

Domestic Fuel Supply

Large number of refugees who depend on forest resources for fuel have settled in arid and semi-arid areas in developing countries. Women, who are generally responsible for fuel wood collection and cooking are thus faced with the problems of obtaining firewood from continually shrinking resources. As fuel wood sources close to refugee locations become depleted, distances to be travelled by women in search of firewood become longer, reaching up to 10 kilometres a day in some African countries, causing local resentment towards the refugees. UNHCR has taken steps to relieve the fuel problem in certain refugee locations. These include supply of fuel, reforestation projects and the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves. An evaluation of the fuel situation in refugee camps and settlements will be carried out by UNHCR in 1989.

Economic Activity

General problems confronting refugees include the difficult economic situation in host countries, lack of markets, legal restrictions limiting refugees' access to work, non-availability of arable land and lack of technical expertise for project implementation. Over and above these, women particularly face problems of illiteracy and lack of education or training, cultural norms which restrict movement of refugees outside their compounds, sexual biases within refugee communities and lack of time to devote to income-generating activities. To reduce these constraints a number of steps have been taken by UNHCR and its partners. Besides providing new skills through training, traditional skills of women are maximized to produce non-traditional skills items for which markets can be found. In addition, women are organized to produce items at home or in all-female co-operatives.

The growing phenomenon of female-headed households and larger numbers of isolated refugee women, together with awareness of the important economic role

of women, has resulted in a recognition by UNHCR that a more focused approach is needed with regard to, for example, subsistence food production and the earning of cash.

Ongoing efforts to redirect a number of local settlement projects in Southern Africa have also yielded positive results, with activities becoming more relevant and accessible to refugee women. Over 50% of new clients in a Refugee Business Project in one country are women, while in a small front-line state, hosting South African refugees, 90% of the participants in a series of orientation and training workshops on income-generation were women.

Efforts to establish projects for women are also being made in the context of refugee aid and development programs initiated by UNHCR in cooperation with the World Bank and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in refugee-affected areas in a number of major country programs. A recent sub-project identification mission to one country has already proposed various activities aimed at women in the areas of forestry, horticulture, domestic energy saving and handicrafts.

Significant achievements in the field of income-generation have been made with Afghan refugee women. In UNHCR's largest program, more than 30,000 Afghan refugee women have secured income through production of quilts, school uniforms, bags, carpets and other handicraft items, with some projects now breaking even. In a neighbouring country, also hosting a major population of Afghan refugee, over 6,000 urban refugee women, are engaged in carpet weaving, with the products being marketed through government outlets. This scheme ensures the competitiveness of their products and has proven economically viable.

Current and Planned Actions By UNHCR

In order to ensure that UNHCR adequately responds to the problems and needs of refugee women, the UNHCR Steering Committee on Refugee Women was established to coordinate and oversee the process. A number of efforts have been initiated by the Office. In the areas of international protection, Field Offices have been requested for more detailed in-

formation and follow-up on protection problems affecting refugee women. Feedback demonstrates that increased awareness among field staff and UNHCR partners has yielded some positive results and an ability to take preventive and corrective measures, though much more needs to be done.

UNHCR is acutely aware of the need for new and improved systems for the collection and maintenance of basic socio-economic and demographic data on populations of concern. Without such data, effective planning is impossible either for

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the population at large or for particular segments, such as women, requiring special attention. UNHCR has therefore taken steps to develop systems for registration, data collection and data management which can be implemented in various combinations according to prevailing local conditions, with the minimal objective of having a continuously updated age-sex structure of the population, classified by locations, available at all times. This would eventually serve as the common denominator for planning and implementing programs in all sectors, and also as the foundation and frame of reference for carrying out the more focused investigations and assessments needed to formulate appropriate responses to the special needs of particular population groups, most particularly women and children. A bibliography on refugee women is currently being updated by UNHCR's Refugee Documentation Centre.

With regard to the Office's global assistance programs, efforts are being concentrated on institutional changes aimed at ensuring that the needs of special groups are systematically considered, and regularly reported upon, from the assessment of needs, through the monitoring of progress achieved to the evaluation of results. In this context, women's aspects are being included in the various Sector Guidelines presently under preparation. Within the current development of UNHCR's Financial and Management Information System a number of features are being made available to assist managers with the planning and monitoring of assistance activities which take into account the impact of the role of women.

An essential aspect in UNHCR's strategy to raise public awareness of refugee women will naturally be achieved through public information activities. Accordingly, refugee women are frequently the subject of information materials such as *Refugees* magazine, posters, films/videos and leaflets. The Public Information Service has recently issued a series of colour slides, published a dossier in *Refugees* magazine, and arranged a photo exhibition dedicated to refugee women at the NGO International Consultation on Refugee Women in November 1988. In 1989 Radio Quebec of Montreal will produce a film for television portraying the problems of refugee women (UNHCR and CIDA are funding the project). As the author can testify, the interest and support within Canada for the plight of refugee women is extremely encouraging.

Training and sensitization of UNHCR and implementing partners' staff to the special concerns of refugee women is also being given particular attention. Training modules will address the issue, as appropriate, and training materials, based on case-study findings and incorporating relevant Women-in-Development aspects, will also be developed. Specific course components on refugee women and gender awareness will, for example, be included in future UNHCR orientation courses for recently-recruited professional staff, while protection training sessions now regularly include discussions of the particular protection problems of refugee women.

Conscious of UNHCR's need to have, at this crucial phase, full-time expertise in women's needs, a senior position of Spe-

cial Advisor on Refugee Women (Policy and Program) has been created within the Office, fully funded by the Government of Canada for a period of two years. A qualified candidate, experienced in the fields of women in development and assistance to refugees, has been selected to assume this important function, assisting UNHCR to bring about the changes necessary to enhance the impact of its programs on refugee women, and started work in early 1989.

Canada has long been in the forefront of efforts to improve understanding of the problems and needs of refugee women, and both the Government and the non-government community in Canada have strongly and consistently supported practical and systematic measures to deal with the problems identified. Apart from its regular contributions to UNHCR programs, the Government of Canada, an active member of UNHCR's Executive Committee, was the first to agree to implement the Special Refugee Women at

Risk Program. As mentioned previously, the Canadian Government will be funding the new position of Special Advisor on Refugee Women, besides funding a number of projects specifically geared to refugee women in Africa. When UNHCR entered into an agreement with the World Bank and the Government of Pakistan for a project which would provide employment to Afghan refugees while helping restore damages to the environment, Canada, which is contributing \$5,000 to the project, urged both UNHCR and the World Bank to redouble their efforts to include sub-projects for women among those selected. CIDA also contributed to the funding for the International NGO Consultation on Refugee Women, held in Geneva last November.

The non-governmental community of Canada has also played a pioneer role with regard to refugee women, both outside and inside Canada. Many projects addressing the needs of refugee women are funded and implemented by Canadian NGOs active in the developing world. In international forums, Canadian NGOs play

a prominent role in promoting the interests of refugee women. At the NGO International Consultation on Refugee Women held in Geneva in November 1988, the Canadian delegation consisted of seven women, three of whom are refugees now living in Canada. Refugee women at the Conference met with UNHCR's Deputy High Commissioner. The participants at the Consultation called on the international community, governments and voluntary agencies to change their "charity mentality" and recognize refugee women as individuals with specific needs who



Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rican centre

Photo: UNHCR

must fully participate in the decision-making process. "We appreciate the fact that you stressed that the UNHCR will need our help," they told him, and called for follow-up consultations with refugee women in which refugee women themselves would be the resource people.

A Working Group on Refugee Women was set up in 1987 by members of non-governmental and governmental agencies helping refugees throughout Canada. The Working Group acts as a clearing-house for information on all matters concerning refugee women both at the national and international levels, encourages sponsorships and also acts as an advocate for refugee women and their needs within Canada. The Refugee Documentation Project of York University, together with the Working Group and the YWCA, have funded a three-part project currently in its second phase, to identify and develop strategies and alternative solutions to gaps and inadequacies in services and to assist refugee women in their adaptation and full integration in Canada.

The numbers of refugee women con-

tinue to grow and their needs remain acute and urgent. They deserve our compassion, but most of all our active assistance in bringing them closer, wherever they are, to lives in which they can develop their full potential in safety and in freedom, both as women and as active participants in their community. Violations of the physical safety and integrity of refugee women are to be deplored by all parties and preventive and corrective action taken whenever necessary.

Significant steps have been taken by UNHCR, governments and non-governmental agencies to address the situation of refugee women, but further action at the national and international level is essential to achieve real progress. At its meeting last October, the Executive Committee of UNHCR called on host governments to take into account the special situation of refugee women in formulating national policies towards refugees who have found asylum within their borders. Additional technical and financial resources

will be required from donor governments, NGOs, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and inter-governmental organizations in order to make available viable opportunities to enhance the self-reliance of refugee women, thereby limiting the risk of their exploitation and enabling them to assume fully — and with dignity — their key role in socio-economic life.

This article comprises a number of extracts from the Note on Refugee Women (document A/AC.96/XXXIX/CRP.1) submitted by the High Commissioner to the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 1989. It includes additional information, some of which concerns work and activities undertaken subsequent to that date, particularly those relating to the contributions of the Government and non-governmental organizations of Canada.

Angela Gibbs Peart is a Public Information Officer with the UNHCR Branch Office in Canada.

SUDHA COOMARASAMY

To: The National Consultation on Refugee Concerns

From: A refugee sponsored by Christ Church Cathedral, Anglican Diocese of Montréal, Québec.

Like the squirrel and the robin
we built a cosy home in stages;
What took us 20 years to build
was burnt down in 24 hours.

We walked, we ran
and began to live out of suitcases;
Within assigned 6' X 10' rooms
we paced, yearning for 'home'

Like the monkey or the Kangaroo
I hopped from place to place;
with my infants clutching at me,
putting up and taking down our tents.

Addressless and adrift
our colour became our burden;
In borrowed life-boats we floated.
Then at last we saw land — our new
home.

Land of Indians, Inuits and Immigrants
Now I am one of you.
O Canada, the North Star, let's together
be
The Sanctuary of the stateless and
rootless.

(Tamil from Sri Lanka. October 1986,
Montréal, Québec.)

Statement on Canada's ODA

We crawled in pain
struggling to stand up.
You flew to our assistance
and dressed our wounded knees and
palms.
Now, we crawl with bandaged knees
if we could only stand —
there won't be anymore wounds.

We cried out in hunger
longing to feed at least our children.

You were quick to respond
by transporting your excess food
supply.
Now, with a full belly we hear
the cry of hunger not far away.
If we have lands or tools to till
hunger could be forgotten for ever.

To all you donors we beseech
do not dump your gifts and go.
Please, rethink, remodel, reorientate
your approach to the 'Poor' and the
'Oppressed.'

(October 1986, Montréal, Québec. From
an ODA recipient of Third World.)

Bienvenue Automne

Warmth of the Sun warmed
them burnt.
Tanned and grilled we closed our eyes
Unawares autumn crept behind us.
Now trees are shedding leaves —
Golden, like the dreams of youth
or,
like people shedding their suntanned
skins
we loose lustre and grow pale.
Grow pale at the thought of future —
flurries, snow storms, boots and shov-
els,
laws, legislations and rejections.
Yet within us echoes,
the promise of Spring and Summer sun,
Always this little voice of hope
springs, warms and blooms —
hurts, heals and grows
this year and the next
again and again without rest
we bloom, fade and fall
only to bloom again —
ready for another fall.

(Provoked by the new Immigration Bills:
C-55 and C-84. September 1987, Mon-
tréal, Québec.)

Human or Humane

Seated on comfortable chairs
that surround symbolic round tables
we discuss and determine
the fate of millions —
who miles away seek
to be free from oppression and
deprivation of self determination,
or even,
access to basic human rights.

Using our rights as donors
or enlightened democracies
we seize their rights
and schedule their lives.
Others we measure by our values
find they do not measure up and then,
make their decisions for them.
Always, 'their best interest at heart'
we reach out or send aid
to get rid of our self guilt.
The race between the 'haves' and
'have-nots'
continues.
They race to treat the 'have-nots'
always with preconceived ideas of —
the needs and goals of the marginal-
ized.

(Reaction to the Summer Course on
Human Rights. July 1988, Charlottetown,
P.E.I.)

The Battle That's Ever On

Many have to stay away from home
shuttling between jobs and eating from
paper bags,
in order to keep their homes.
Mothers spend time away from their
children
so that they can 'spend' on them.
Governments uphold "Motherhood,"
Future generation and improved
lifestyles.

Yet —
Homeless numbers increase
Adult-lifestyle condominiums expand,
need for better and cheaper daycare
increases
while the response decreases.
Budget spending on hi-tech advance-
ment
and elusive submarines expands,
spending on low-cost housing and
daycare shrinks.
Where is the logic one wonders.

Election promises abound
in housing, employment, environment
and women's issues
only to be abandoned
once the votes are cast and victory's
won.

The marginalized fight on
armed only with hope and vision
for better days and justice for all.

(November 1988, Scarborough, ON.)