

Refugee population swells to 20 million, famine threat grows

by Joyce Fredman

With the spread of regional wars around the world, the refugee population has grown to staggering numbers. There are estimated to be over 18 million, and probably closer to 20 million refugees and other "unaccounted for" peoples internationally. The recent events in Bosnia and Croatia alone account for over 2 million people, with the numbers increasing every day.

Such vast displacement of population means two areas of grave concern: no food and hideous health conditions. Ironically enough, on the brink of the 21st century, with all our scientific and technological knowledge, starvation and disease threaten a majority of the human species. Two of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, famine and plague, are galloping across the continents at full speed, and none of the powers that be seems ready or willing to rein them in.

On the contrary, as our *Feature* reports (pages 14-27), the proliferation of regional wars is a deliberate component of the Anglo-Americans' "new world order." The austerity conditions which the International Monetary Fund has imposed on the Third World have weakened those nations' economies to the point of collapse. The economic crisis in turn has fueled political and social destabilization, as the case of former Yugoslavia demonstrates most graphically. In the survey of the refugee situation which follows, we are forced to rely on statistics provided by the U.N. bureaucracies that deal with relief efforts. Yet, as our cover story shows, the U.N. itself, particularly at its controlling levels, bears large responsibility for the problem.

Former Yugoslavia

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made no secret of the fact that it is overwhelmed by the numbers of people directly affected by the current crisis in the Balkans. Since the summer, there have been upwards of 2 million people displaced by warfare—approximately 1.4 million from Bosnia and more than 700,000 from last year's Serbia-Croatia conflict.

Anglo-American policies are directly responsible for this tragedy. U.S. Secretary of State James Baker gave the green light for Serbia's war of genocide against its neighbors when,

in July 1991, he announced in Belgrade that the United States would not support Croatia's declaration of independence.

Anthony Land, the U.N. refugee agency's chief of operations in Croatia, has discussed the possibility of close to half a million more Muslims in the northwest corner of Bosnia being vulnerable to Serbia's "ethnic cleansing," a euphemistic term for driving them out of their homeland. "If that number of people were to move suddenly, it would suggest enormous logistical problems," Land told the *Washington Post*.

That's the understatement of the year. U.N. officials have already acknowledged that this conflict has caused the greatest dislocation since World War II. Officials noted that as many as a million *more* Bosnians could be driven out, and that a half-million refugees are expected to die this winter, if no adequate shelter is provided. Land said that large-scale deliveries of food and medical supplies to the northwest Bosnian cities may be the last chance to prevent a new surge of refugees. "What we want to do is break the sieges, open a humanitarian space in a conflict that has become inhumane," Land stated.

Africa

The latest news of the AIDS explosion in Africa may have shocked the developed sector, but it is no surprise to people for whom death is an every-minute occurrence. Typical of their plight, is life at the camps in Dolo, Ethiopia. Tsegaye Tadesse, a journalist for Reuters, described the living hell last April:

"On the ground, haggard and emaciated men and women—some clutching bony children—waited expectantly for long-promised food handouts. . . . 'There is no food, no water, no medical care. There is nothing here except death,' said one camp resident. Community leaders told journalists that more than 20 people die every day around Dolo, a remote spot near the Somali border. . . . The camps at Dolo are composed of thousands of flimsy shelters, held together by bits of rag and sticks. They offer no protection from scorching midday heat or chilly nights. . . . Inside the shelters, children suffering from famine and related diseases lie on dirt floors awaiting near-certain death. Other children stand around out-

TABLE 1

Food aid requirements for refugees, as of the end of May 1991¹

(thousands tons)

Region/Country	Cereals	Non-Cereals
Sub-Saharan Africa	669.3	210.6
Ethiopia ²	219.0	73.6
Liberia region ³	111.3	36.2
Malawi	176.2	57.5
Sudan	54.9	17.4
North Africa, Near East, ⁴		
Middle East	777.7	80.9
Iran ⁵	48.2	6.2
Pakistan	481.8	24.1
New Gulf emergency ⁶	232.2	41.1
Asia, Oceania	90.1	20.4
Thailand	16.6	6.0
Ibero-America/Caribbean	8.1	3.9
Mexico	3.6	1.9
Total	1,545.2	315.8

Source: UNHCR/WFP.

¹Including, where applicable, buffer stocks.²Somali and Sudanese refugees plus returnees.³Liberian refugees in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.⁴Excluding Afghanistan.⁵Afghan and Iraqi Kurdish refugees, excluding new influx.⁶New Influx of Iraqi refugees in Iran and Turkey, plus internally displaced in Iraq.

side, with eye sores and the classic bloated bellies of the severely malnourished.

"More than 200,000 former Ethiopian refugees who originally fled into neighboring Somalia during the 1977-78 Ogaden war have moved into the camps. These people, known in aid organization jargon as 'returnees,' have now lost everything twice in 15 years—some of the most tragic victims of the turmoil in the Horn of Africa where more than 23 million now face starvation. About 145,000 Somali refugees . . . have also flocked to the camps. The numbers have been further swollen by thousands of local people who left their villages because of drought in the region."

Demoz Kebebu, a representative of UNHCR, said that about 300 tons of grain and 18,000 liters of edible oil were distributed among the people in this area months before. Those amounts come to less than a kilo per person. "That was what we had and that was what we gave . . . now our stores are empty," he said.

Empty indeed. According to information from UNHCR, out of the total food aid needs worldwide (Table 1), donor pledges cover little over one-half at present. Even though

the most critically affected areas include the Horn of Africa (particularly Ethiopia), the refugee feeding program in Somalia has had to be suspended since January 1991, due to the deteriorating conditions. Southern Africa fares no better. The exodus of refugees from Mozambique into surrounding countries continues. The refugee population in Malawi, where most went, is over 954,000 people. Then there are the refugees from Liberia, who continue to go into Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone; they number more than 750,000.

Against these vast numbers, contrast the paltry amounts of food the World Food Program is able to dispatch. From their data as of June 1991, "For Ethiopia, against the cereal food aid requirement for the people affected by drought and civil strife, estimated by FAO [the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization] at 1 million tons for 1991, about 600,000 tons have been pledged so far but only some 245,000 tons have been delivered. Of the cereal needs for 1991 of some 1 million Somali and Sudanese refugees and 200,000 Ethiopian returnees of 237,000 tons, about 70% have been pledged but less than 70,000 tons delivered. In the case of Sudan, against an overall national cereal deficit of 1.1 million tons, pledges to date cover only about half of the total amount needed and only about one-fifth of the requirements have so far actually been delivered to Sudan. In the south, the food situation is precarious. Out of the 63,000 tons committed for southern Sudan, only 14,000 tons have been delivered."

Afghanistan

Another area of increasing concern for the UNHCR is the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan, which, according to the government's estimate, is nearly 3.5 million. Another 2.8 million Afghans are said to be settled in the Islamic Republic of Iran, but only 260,000 of those are receiving food aid through the World Food Program.

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising to find that by the beginning of July, up to 90,000 people a week were leaving refugee camps in Pakistan to trek back to their villages, most of which have been destroyed by 14 years of war. Peirce Gerety, a senior official of the UNHCR, said that Afghanistan could face a critical situation later in the year, if food shipments, mine clearing, repair of irrigation channels, and provision of seed do not keep up with repatriation. "We have barely enough cash to keep up with the encashment grant, and the U.N. is generally very short of money needed for the other activities in Afghanistan that are sorely needed to make repatriation a success," he said.

"Even without the war, this influx would have created an emergency situation, and money is very short," said Benon Sevan, the man in charge of the U.N. relief operation. A \$180 million emergency appeal was launched in June by U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, but very little has come in, and not much is expected, given the competing demands from other parts of the world. Some \$52 million

of the fund was earmarked for repatriating 1 million of the refugees from Pakistan and Iran, but over 370,000 have already returned. At the present rate, according to Sevan, the money will run out by the end of August.

Once back, the refugees face a new nightmare. They must rebuild their mud brick homes and clear the fields of the 10 million mines that were scattered over the country during the war. Most of the farmers have missed this year's planting season and will need a great deal of help to survive winter, which in mountain areas is quite severe. Health facilities are virtually non-existent, and what little infrastructure did survive, has since collapsed. Disease is rampant.

Cambodia

Further east, the threat of disease is also a factor for the nearly 400,000 Cambodian refugees returning from Thailand. The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia assessed the start-up costs to be \$200 million in March, a conservative amount to be sure, for its designated task of disarming and demobilizing more than 250,000 soldiers from four warring factions, plus repatriating hundreds of thousands of refugees in Thailand.

Already faced with the grim prospect of land mines, monsoon rains, and a lack of suitable land, they now battle a highly drug-resistant form of malaria that has emerged. World Health Organization experts have said that they consider the refugees (as well as U.N. soldiers stationed there) to be at risk for an extremely serious form of the tropical disease. It has shown complete resistance to all forms of medication normally used to treat it. "If Cambodia cannot get enough drugs and support for the improvement of health care and training, there may be a tragedy," said World Health Organization Director General Hiroshi Nakajima.

A biological holocaust

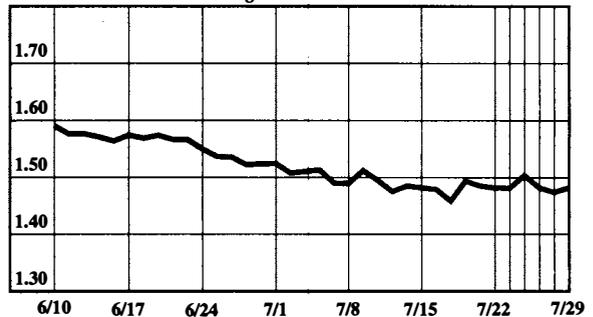
With conditions deteriorating on such a large scale, diseases once thought under control, or on their way to extinction, such as tuberculosis and cholera, have returned. Even worse, new strains of not only malaria and tuberculosis, but AIDS, are developing and spreading at an accelerating rate, particularly in Africa and Asia.

The last pandemic plague, which occurred in 1894 in Hong Kong and China's southern province Guangzhou, killed some 10 million people within 20 years. The world is now faced with death on an even greater magnitude. However, this time, we will have brought it upon ourselves. There is absolutely no excuse for starvation, when the ability exists to produce food, as we can. The United States has been called the leader of biomedical technology, yet the present administration cannot find the wherewithal to combat diseases such as measles, which were already defeated. Unless the morality and common sense of our governments keep pace with the need, the whole human race will pay for such turpitude with extinction.

Currency Rates

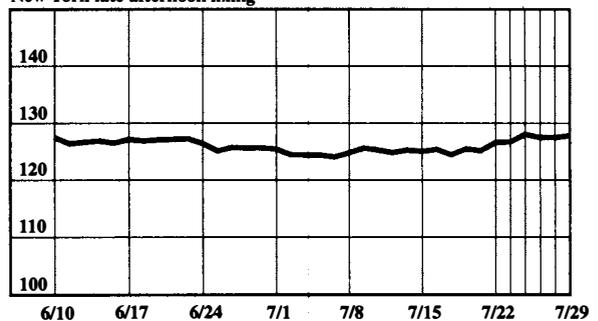
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



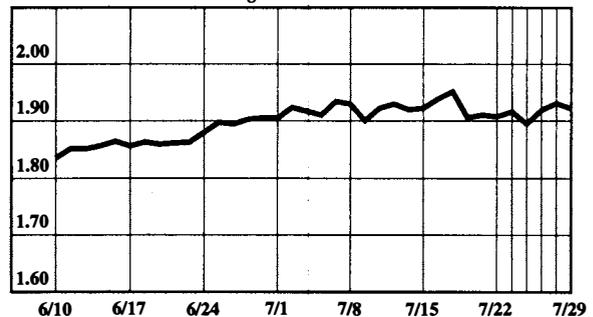
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

