General Assembly Session

Panel discussion: “Reintegration of refugees and Displaced Populations”, Monday 19th November 2001, 1.15-2.30 pm, Conference Room 1, United Nations

1. Please find herewith details of the panel discussion. The event was initiated by the ILO and co-sponsored by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. The panelists were:
   Ms. Misako Kaji, Head, a.i., Secretariat and Inter-Organizational Service, UNHCR
   H.E. Mr. Ibrahim M’Baba Kamara, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations
   Professor Aristide R. Zolberg, Professor of Political Science, New School University
   Mr. Robbie Thomson, Senior Officer, Population Movement and Disaster Preparedness Department, IFRC
   The discussion was moderated by Mr. Jayasankar Krishnamurty, Senior Economist, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction.
   Please also refer to biographical notes of panelists, attached.

3. **Mr. Krishnamurty** opened the panel by giving a brief overview and stressing several key points. One must ask where the locus of action lies in addition to the related action of the time frame. It must be noted that refugees were not just those affected by conflict but also by natural disasters. The ILO feels very strongly that that the aim of all programmes should be decent work, indeed, this is what refugees themselves wanted. Decent work is the cement that binds peace. This should not be a “quick fix” solution, for durable solutions are needed that adhere and are consistent with human dignity and human aspirations.

4. **Ms. Kaji** thanked the ILO and the IFRC for organizing the panel and said she was happy to see that humanitarian issues had been placed on the agenda of the United Nations in New York and on the global agenda. Ms. Kaji went on to address a range of different points. Key concepts were those of protection and solution. UNHCR’s mandate focused on the protection of refugees and working towards the durable solution of the problem. Protection can take many different forms such as legal, material and social, whilst solutions can include
voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. Today’s theme was reintegration, understood as the reabsorption of returnees into local communities of their country. With regard to Afghanistan, the socio-economic background of refugees should be taken into consideration in addition to the skills they may possess. The case of Mozambique in 1994 proved successful, producing 1.7 million returnees. ‘Empowerment’ is a key word, for when refugees are empowered they can be contributors to peace and development. This does not automatically imply long-term integration of refugees into local communities. Refugees should not therefore simply be seen as beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. With regard to the host community, it should be recognized that displacement can have an impact on the host community, producing a negative impact with the departure of the refugees. With regard to a solution agenda for refugees in exile, refugees and locals can take part in the production of food, vocational training, whilst entrepreneurial expertise can create employment, providing skills and experience, which in turn may give was to creativity and a diversified market. Ms. Kaji also referred to possibilities of creating and small and medium enterprises, microfinance and rehabilitating infrastructure. Ms. Kaji ended by reiterating three central concepts: solution, empowerment and partnership.

5. H.E. Ambassador Kamara defined refugees as normally a product of conflicts and natural disasters, intra and inter-state wars. Sierra Leone had suffered from both types of war. Natural disasters mainly produced Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs) though also refugees. The international community was usually much more sympathetic to IDPs and refugees created by natural disasters. Assistance to Mozambique after its natural disaster was double that to Liberia and Sierra Leone combined. With regard to Sierra Leone, refugees and IDPs have resulted from man-made disaster. Reintegration of such peoples normally begins with after victory by one side or after a peace settlement. This often involves the resettlement of the civilian population alongside the ex-combatants, producing the Herculean problem of reintegrating the two peoples together, for it is difficult to forgive and forget. With regard to Sierra Leonean refugees and employment, qualified professionals have picked up jobs in the diaspora. He referred to the many cases of African refugees with jobs in the US and UK. The skilled population provides easier provisions of capital but it remains difficult to encourage such skilled labour to return to their country. Ambassador Kamara mentioned the problem of young unskilled labour in Sierra Leone. It is still difficult for those who are unskilled and who often have to work in refugee camps under bad conditions. The reintegration of the unskilled should involve the provision of farming instruments together with seed capital. This has been done in Sierra Leone. Ex-combatants have received a resettlement amount whilst quick impact projects have also been put in place. Ambassador Kamara referred to Quick Impact Programmes (QIPS) such as vocational training, and the building of infrastructure such as roads and schools. It was also asserted that the presence of a local authority is essential to the reintegration process. He drew attention to two national strategies adopted by Sierra Leone on Disarmament and on Resettlement and Reconstruction.

6. Professor Zolberg began by stating that he aimed to provide a perspective on the reintegration of refugees. The possibility of the return of refugees was generally considered low in the past, giving way to reintegration. In the 1980s however, there were dramatic changes in this situation, concerning both externally and internally displaced refugees. Professor Zolberg stressed that the return process needs broader policies. The institutional
ethos of development agencies is often at odds with more traditional refugee agencies, it is therefore important to coordinate fieldwork of OCHA and UNHCR. With regard to civil conflict, Professor Zolberg asserted that the reintegration of ex-combatants is most difficult but should be a priority, since ex-combatants are often a destabilizing factor for programmes. There is a need to dissuade such groups from violence and encourage them to move towards productive economic activity. Professor Zolberg also stressed the need for better statistical tracking and successful reintegration policies.

7. **Mr. Robert Thomson** thanked the ILO for organizing the panel, noting that the panel was timely as the issues grow and resources become even tighter. Concern has been expressed by the 178 societies of the International Federation who are invariably as the front line not only at the inception of a disaster but also at the closing phases. Whereas the international community is guaranteed to leave the field, the international societies of the Red Cross never leave, they become part of the community. Integration or reintegration was debated in the past week at the Council of Delegates which comprises of the whole Movement: National Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Concern focussed on the long term and particularly the tendency of the International Community to concentrate on easily accessible disasters in the emergency phase, driven in great part by the media. By the time a return is possible, often interest has waned and funds have dried up. This is exacerbated by a failure to take into account the need to empower the displaced community who are thus often driven into dependency, apathy and despair. There is also the tendency by agencies to concentrate on the legal status of the individuals and not their vulnerability. The IFRC movement is mandated to look at vulnerability and only vulnerability and, as a result, in addition to its concern for refugees, it is equally concerned about other groups made vulnerable by displacement, including host and resident populations, IDPs displaced by other than armed conflict – natural and human induced disaster (probably the same total again in addition to the often quoted 25 million). The IFRC is also concerned about migrants, particularly those in an irregular situation and who thus are often marginalized even in terms of their most basic rights. To solve these longer-term problems there is a need for enhanced communication, cooperation and coordination. Not only in operational terms but in planning and particularly in fund raising. The ICRC recognized this and strives to do better within the movement. The panel is so timely as the ILO, UNHCR, The Federation and all humanitarian actors need to get to know and to understand each other better. Mr. Thomson ended by reporting that the Federation has entered into a dialogue with UNHCR to do precisely this but that it needs to go further.

8. **Mr. Krishnamurty** briefly highlighted the issues that the speakers had brought out in their presentations. These included the need to address the issue in terms of empowerment, the issue of the unskilled refugees or IDPs and viewing the whole process as tied to the broader process of reconstruction. Mr. Krishnamurty asserted that the ILO’s concern is to ensure that reconstruction is employment friendly. We also have to ask ourselves what can be done to relieve some of the dependency, apathy and despair that has been mentioned. In this regard, there is a clear need to ensure coordinated work between parties and to avoid duplicating work. Mr. Krishnamurty then opened the floor up to comments or questions.
9. A representative from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts asked speakers which groups should be considered most vulnerable and to define the difference between refugees and IDPs in terms of access to relief. The representative also wanted to draw attention to gender questions and the problem of refugee women being forced into prostitution to survive.

In response to the representative’s question, Ms. Kaji asserted that one cannot distinguish between the relief given to IDPs and refugees. Mr. Thomson stated that the international community would have to do better by prioritizing and desegregating data to establish what a displaced group looks like. Also, ‘off the shelf’ solutions should not be provided, for different peoples have different needs. All agencies have to better understand just what protection is about so that they can provide it. Ambassador Kamara stressed that the question of definitions have to be looked at very seriously, for IDPs often go through more difficulties than refugees.

10. An NGO representative asked about the amount of time that refugees are allowed to stay in the host country. The representative stated that once refugees have adapted to the host country’s cultures after several years they are asked to leave. Panelists were asked for their views on ramifications or difficulties of this phenomenon. Professor Zolberg responds by stating that many people move without deciding on a final destination. Original migrants from Europe came in as workers but the situation with refugees is different, although they experience the same ambivalence. The difficulty for refugees is that they do not know if they are going back or not. Programmes therefore have to be flexible enough to not judge in advance if people will go back or not. Mr. Thomson made several points in response to the question. Firstly, many host countries work towards preventing integration of refugees. The irony of this is that it makes it more difficult for people to eventually return to their homes. Secondly, the question of unaccompanied minors in Europe is relevant here for many people have abandoned their children in the hope that they will integrate and be given the chance to stay. Ambassador Kamara responded to this question by referring to a refugee camp on the border of Zambia and Angola, that after twenty years of existence remains cordoned off. Zambia will not allow the integration of these refugees. More generally, skilled refugees have been able to move and integrate; they are more easily accepted as they can sell their skills to the host country.

11. Additional points were made by the panelists. Mr. Thomson asserted that for there to be any chance of addressing this issue, the international community has to work better together. Professor Zolberg agreed in this point. Ambassador Kamara stated that he hoped that UNHCR has changes its policies and will go into areas where it was not allowed before, especially Sierra Leone. Ms. Kaji remarked that the question of Skill has emerged as an important these during the panel. Both Ambassador Kamara and Professor Zolberg made mention of the importance of skill. Ms. Kaji related this to UNHCR’s notion of empowerment; by passing on information about the socio-economic profiles of refugees, windows of development can be found for producing successful returnees. With regard to Sierra Leone, Ms. Kaji asserted that the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Ruud Lubbers had noted positive developments in Sierra Leone in his introductory statement to the Third Committee on this subject that morning.
Mr. Krishnamurty summarized the panel by highlighting the themes that had emerged from the panelists’ presentations and responses.

- Firstly, there is need for much better cooperation. The modalities of cooperation should assessed and it should be seen if the agenda can be moved further forward.
- Secondly, the discussion had clearly identified the tragedy of long-term refugees. Keeping people in camps idle breaks their links with society and adversely affects the possibility of social integration. It also produces negative consequences for the host communities themselves. Development agencies have to address this broad issue.
- Thirdly, there are several initiatives that could be started from the camps. These include the provision of counseling and guidance, collecting data immediately on employment and skills background of the refugees, providing women refugees with microcredit in the camps, and training refugees to provide them with new skills.
- Lastly, there is a need to see all parties involved to carry out dialogue as a method of conflict-resolution, building solidarity and finding solutions.

Biographical notes on panelists:

- Ms. Misako Kaji is Head of Unit of the Secretariat and Inter-Organizational Service with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. She is in charge of relations with member states, relations with other sister agencies and other organizations. Ms. Kaji flew in from Geneva to support the High Commissioner.

- Mr. Ibrahim M’baba Kamara is currently the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. Also accredited to the Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba and the Republic of Korea. Prior to his appointment, Mr. Kamara was Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Sierra Leone to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the Organization of African Unity(OAU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Also accredited to Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Lesotho, Tanzania, Israel, Madagascar and Zambia.

- Professor Aristide R. Zolberg is University-in –Exile Professor of Political Science at New School University, New York City. He is the author of a number of books, notably “Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World”. He is an internationally reputed researcher on international migration.

- Robert Thomson spent most of his career in the financial sector as a successful broker as Lloyd’s of London, the shifted to the humanitarian sector working for a number of NGOs before joining the International Federation in 1994. He has worked in Africa, the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Currently, he is senior Officer for Population Movements at the Federation’s secretariat in Geneva.

- Mr. Jayasankar Krishnamurty is Senior Economist with the International Labour Organization’s Infocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction