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World Refugee Survey 2002: Number of World's Uprooted Grows;

U.S., Others Close Doors to Refugees

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Refugees worldwide suffered the repercussions of the tragic events of September 11, says the *World Refugee Survey 2002*, published today by the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR). The United States, preoccupied by security concerns in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington, temporarily shut down the refugee resettlement program on October 1. As a result, the United States admitted fewer refugees in 2001 than in any year since 1987.

Thousands of refugees in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and elsewhere who expected to go to the United States became stuck where they were, often in places where they were at risk. "At a time when freedom is under attack, the world is turning its back on people fleeing war, persecution, and terror in search of freedom," said USCR executive director Lavinia Limón. "This indifference towards refugees undermines our stated values."

That was not the only problem refugees faced in the wake of September 11, however. A number of other countries, concerned about security but also responding to growing anti-immigrant sentiment, tightened admissions procedures and criteria for asylum seekers and immigrants. The first refugees to be affected by the clampdown were Afghans. Afghanistan's neighboring countries all refused entry to Afghan civilians fleeing the intensified ground fighting and aerial bombardment that accompanied the U.S. military action in October, thus trapping them in positions of danger.

Canada and Mexico joined the United States in intensified efforts to establish a "North American Security Perimeter." In December, the United States and Canada formally agreed to review security-screening procedures for refugees and asylum seekers, share information on asylum seekers, and negotiate a safe-third country agreement. The United Kingdom and Germany passed anti-terrorism laws in late 2001 that curtailed the rights of immigrants and refugees inside their borders. Denmark, traditionally welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees, drafted some of Europe's toughest asylum regulations in January 2002.

Worldwide, conflict and human rights abuse brought the total number of refugees to 14.9 million, the largest number in six years. More than 22 million people were internally displaced. Afghanistan produced the largest number of uprooted people in 2001. Some 4.5 million Afghans were refugees in other countries, mostly Pakistan and Iran; another 1 million Afghans were displaced within Afghanistan. Midway through 2002, however, more than half a million Afghan refugees had returned. Hundreds of thousands more appeared willing to return, but international donors were not keeping pace with the repatriation and reintegration costs, calling into question the sustainability of the returns.

Among the newly uprooted were some 1.8 million Africans driven from their homes by war, armed insurgencies, or violent civil unrest. This massive new population displacement occurred in 19 of the 48 countries in Africa last year. Poor funding by donor nations resulted in harsh living conditions for millions of uprooted Africans. One million refugees in East Africa and the Horn of Africa suffered as a result of an \$8 million shortfall in UNHCR's 2001 budget. Assistance for nearly a million refugees in Central Africa suffered a \$7 million shortfall. More than a half-million refugees in West Africa lacked nearly \$5 million in much-needed aid.

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“Failure of the rich countries of the north to bear their fair share of the human and financial cost in assisting and protecting refugees is shortsighted and likely to multiply future costs,” said Bill Frelick, editor of the *World Refugee Survey 2002*. “Whether contributing financially to maintain refugees in safety and dignity in their places of initial asylum, providing rescue through resettlement for those still in danger in the regions of initial flight, or funding sustainable return and reintegration in places like Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan, donor countries can do more than simply provide charity—they can invest in a more stable and secure future for all.”

The 290-page *World Refugee Survey 2002*, an authoritative annual report published by USCR, reviews refugee conditions and government policies affecting refugees and displaced persons in 133 countries worldwide.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees is a nonprofit humanitarian organization that works for the protection and assistance of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons around the world.

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