

From Humanitarian Relief to Rehabilitation: A Comprehensive Response

Keynote Address by Mrs. Sadako Ogata
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
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I am very pleased to have been invited to inaugurate the Fourth Advanced Development Management Program on the theme of the interface between emergency relief and sustainable development.

Emergency relief is a wide-ranging term, and could cover varied situations from the earthquake in Kobe to the refugee influx in Kenya, from helping flood victims in Bangladesh to helping war victims in Bosnia. In order to better focus our discussion and bring it closer to the expertise of my Office, I will address the topic from the perspective of man-made disasters. Mandated by the UN General Assembly to protect and assist refugees and find solutions to their plight, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has to grapple daily with the consequences of man-made disasters.

Both natural and man-made disasters cause enormous human suffering. In both cases, the needs of the victims must be urgently addressed. However, in the case of a natural disaster the government is able to help the victims, with international assistance if necessary. Man-made disasters, on the other hand, are inherently political, often being the direct result of internal conflicts, so that the government is either unwilling to protect and assist the victims or lacks the credibility or has lost the capacity to do so. The international community has to intervene on behalf of the victims against the government or parties to the conflict. This is what makes UNHCR's protection responsibilities particularly complex.

Although entering into a highly politically sensitive area, we must remain strictly humanitarian, driven by the needs of the victims and measured by the yardsticks of impartiality and neutrality. In addressing the issue of the interface between emergency relief and sustainable development, these considerations must be borne in mind because they condition the nature of the international response.

Today's humanitarian crises are the product of internal conflicts rooted in ethnic and religious tensions. They are aggravated by unbalanced development and socio-economic disparities. We can neither prevent emergencies nor resolve them without a comprehensive and concerted effort to address the socio-economic and political causes, while undertaking humanitarian action to ameliorate the immediate needs of the refugees and other victims.

The issue of how to link relief with development should begin with establishing an effective emergency relief system. Confronted with a series of major emergencies in recent years, UNHCR has substantially strengthened its emergency preparedness and response capacity. Today a UNECR emergency team can be mobilized and functioning anywhere in the world within 72 hours. Our highly trained teams are backed by standby staff arrangements with governments and NGOs, stockpiles to meet the relief needs of half million people and an emergency fund to get the operation rolling without delay. These facilities

have been used in over twenty different operations, ranging from the Russian Federation to Tanzania, from Bangladesh to Benin.

The goal of our emergency preparedness and response system is to utilize local resources and strengthen local capacity to cope with crisis, and therefore NGOs are our major partners. Occasionally, however, the enormity of the demands have been such that we have turned to the military, as we did in eastern Zaire and have done for the Sarajevo airlift for the past three years. We are working with governments on arrangements to use their military and civil defense assets. We are also negotiating "service packages" with them so that we can count on them to provide certain functions such as water, airlifts, sanitation in case of emergencies. Needless to say that these arrangements are only for exceptional circumstances and in the context of a civilian-controlled multilateral humanitarian operation.

Effective emergency response to protect and assist refugees is one aspect of our mandate. The other aspect is to find solutions to refugee problems. In countries seeking peace after long years of war, such as Mozambique and Angola, we are helping refugees to return home and reintegrate themselves. This is an area where the linkage between relief and development is critical.

It is on this aspect that I would like to focus the rest of my talk today. I would like to share with you the challenges we confront, and the efforts we are making to overcome them by linking up with longer-term rehabilitation and development. Finally, I would like to propose some ideas as to how our efforts can be improved and enhanced in cooperation with others.

Repatriation movements in the Post-Cold war era can be divided into two basic categories according to the circumstances in the country of origin. Under the first category, a peace agreement has been reached under international auspices, incorporating measures foreseen for the return of refugees and displaced persons. A process of national reconciliation, even if fragile, is underway. Major repatriation programmes of this type have occurred in Central America, El Salvador, Namibia, Cambodia and Mozambique. The return and reintegration of refugees have been vital in bringing about national reconciliation and peace in their home countries. We are preparing in the coming months for a similar operation for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Angola.

Under the second category of repatriation movements, despite some fundamental changes, there is no functioning peace agreement nor a process of national reconciliation in the country of origin. Significant areas of the country may still be experiencing conflict. The power of the central Government may not be fully consolidated, or limited to certain parts of the territory only, as in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Liberia. Warlords and local commanders may be vying for power. Returnees may find their property destroyed or occupied by others. Nevertheless, people continue to return under these less than ideal conditions. UNHCR has assisted in the voluntary repatriation of some 2.6 million refugees to Afghanistan, some 400,000 refugees to Somalia and over half a million refugees to Rwanda.