



# With you

2009 issue 1



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**Without us, refugees can experience dangerous gaps in vital aid.  
With us, they can get the assistance and protection they so desperately need.**



## A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friend of Refugees,

I recently spent 10 days visiting UNHCR refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda.

My travels took me from Dadaab in northeast Kenya, where nearly 200,000 Somali refugees live, to southern Uganda's Nakivale district, now the temporary home to 30,000 Rwandans and Congolese.

In Dadaab, 5,000 refugees a month come across the Somali-Kenyan border to the camps. New turmoil in the Democratic Republic of Congo has added 2,000 new arrivals in Nakivale – and more are expected.

The facilities in the two countries are a study in contrasts, yet both fulfill UNHCR's commitment to protection and emergency shelter, and hopefully, one day, repatriation.

Amidst what could be despair in their exile, hope flourishes among these refugees. Those with entrepreneurial skills find ways to supplement what is otherwise a life of subsistence. While so much in the way of material goods is lacking, refugees told me that their deepest wish is for education for their children.

The fervor of that wish is apparent in the classrooms I visited. Even though they were hot, poorly ventilated and with only the most rudimentary books and tools, students sat in rapt attention.

The people with whom I met said they felt safe and protected. Unexpected benefits of their exile are infrequent, but the most striking in my opinion is the door that is slowly being opened to allow more girls and young women to access education and develop as individuals and leaders.

The dignity and intelligence of the Somalis, Congolese and Rwandans I met are testaments to their endurance and commitment to return to their former homes one day and to reach their potential for happy, productive lives.

Thank you so much for your interest in UNHCR and its work. As you'll read in the pages of this newsletter, your support helps save many lives.

Many faiths teach the lesson that to save one life is to save the world. In my 10 days in Africa, I saw how UNHCR is reaching 250,000 of the millions around the globe it touches.

Sincerely,  
*Marc Breslaw*  
Marc Breslaw  
Executive Director



# Malnutrition – A

**E**nsuring adequate nutrition for refugees is a crucial part of the work of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). It is our job to detect, correct and prevent malnutrition in refugee populations.

*First, we must establish the cause of the problem because not all malnutrition is the result of food shortages. Parasites and bacteria in the water supply can be to blame. Diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS reduce appetite and nutrient absorption. Young children being weaned off breast milk in a refugee setting may not have access to appropriate infant foods and experience a “nutrition gap” at a critical time in their development.*

UNHCR



**With you, the UN Refugee Agency can provide basic assistance**

# growing threat to refugee children

## Lifelong damage

While many will actually die of infections and disease, over half of all deaths in children under five are associated with malnutrition.

Acute malnutrition increases a child's susceptibility to infectious diseases such as measles. Severe acute malnutrition is life-threatening and requires urgent therapeutic feeding.

Chronic malnutrition results when children are poorly nourished over a long period of time. They can suffer lifelong damage that might include stunted growth, low immunity and impaired mental and behavioral development.

To prevent this permanent damage to children's health, most of the UN Refugee Agency's nutrition programs focus on early intervention – on the so-called “window of opportunity” in children that extends from just before conception until the age of two.

As part of our regular nutrition surveys in refugee camps, we carefully monitor malnutrition levels in young children. We provide supplementary nutrition for pregnant women and support extended breastfeeding to prevent dangerous “nutrition gaps” in early infancy.

In a nutritional crisis, UNHCR provides lifesaving therapeutic foods: high-energy milk formula for severely malnourished infants and ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs) like Plumpynut™. These packets of enriched peanut paste require no cooking or mixing with water and can be safely administered in the home.

UNHCR implements fresh food projects in refugee camps to ensure that refugee meals are varied and nutritious. If required, we provide vitamins and micronutrient supplements to prevent debilitating health conditions such as anemia, goiter (a chronic enlargement of the thyroid gland) and blindness.

## We need your help

UNHCR is currently battling malnutrition in refugee camps in Chad, Eritrea, Djibouti and Kenya. Government food rations for refugees in Djibouti have recently been halved. In children under five, both malnutrition and infant mortality are at emergency levels.



UNHCR/H. CAUX

## Give a refugee child the gift of a lifetime

With your support, you can save a malnourished child from disfigurement, disease and a lifetime of debilitating health conditions.

**\$40** can provide high-energy milk formula for five severely malnourished infants in an emergency feeding center.

**\$140** can buy 20 packets of a ready-to-use therapeutic food such as Plumpynut™, an enriched peanut paste that has revolutionized the treatment of acute malnutrition in refugee settings.

**\$250** can provide the necessary materials, seeds and training to enable up to 25 refugee families to cultivate their own “multi-story garden.” Even in the harshest desert conditions, these innovative “gardens in a bag” can produce more than 26 pounds of fresh vegetables a month.

**\$5,500** can provide a complete Nutrition Survey Kit for the field, including scales, height measuring boards, anemia testing equipment and arm circumference tape.

In the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, nearly a quarter of refugees are malnourished and 80% of the children are dangerously deficient in iron. To combat the nutrition crisis in this camp alone will require the generous support of people like you.



nce to refugees in need, pay for further education or training in

# The house that Habania built

**The UN Refugee Agency continues to help thousands of Darfur refugees living in Chad to make the move from emergency tents to more permanent shelters.**

Fifteen-year-old Habania lives alone in the Kounoungou refugee camp in Chad. She fled from Darfur with her older brother and sister in March last year. When her siblings decided to return, she was left to fend for herself in the camps as an unaccompanied minor.

Habania received a UNHCR tent as part of her initial relief package. However, she didn't feel safe living in a tent on her own. Within weeks she was building herself a more substantial shelter with UNHCR's help.

"Initially we provide the refugees with tents," explains Carolyn Wand, UNHCR's senior reintegration officer in Chad. "These are sturdy tents that can withstand the elements in this part of the world, but you don't want to live in a tent forever. So now we are working toward a strategy of building semi-permanent structures. UNHCR provides materials and supports the refugees – so they're building the shelters themselves with help from UNHCR."

The tents are often incorporated into the new shelters as roofing. The refugees then use plastic sheeting and locally available materials like mud brick to complete the structure. UNHCR encourages the use of mud over traditional, highly flammable materials like millet straw, and provides training in mud brick making and construction.

"I look at this photo of Habania," says Carolyn Wand, "and think about what it took her to build this simple

*"To build the house, I made the bricks myself. I built the walls. For the roof, I used tree branches as a support structure for the tent to provide protection from the elements."*

- Habania



*Habania Adam Mahamat, outside her house with Jorge Holly, head of UNHCR's field office in Guereda, Chad*

mud brick house in the harsh environment she's in. With just a little support from people like you and me, a young girl has been able to make herself a home and make her life in exile more livable."

## What you can do to help

As the largest international humanitarian organization, UNHCR provides refugees with emergency shelter, water, medical care and other essentials for their survival.

With your support to USA for UNHCR, we can ensure that refugees receive the lifesaving help they need. Whether it's combating malnutrition or providing emergency shelter and protection for refugees, **your donation can make a difference!**

**To donate online, please visit [www.UNrefugees.org](http://www.UNrefugees.org).**

**Support refugee camps and help millions of refugees return home.**

# Emergency Response Team Update

UNHCR's Emergency Response Team responded to three major crises in 2008. A cyclone in Myanmar, an earthquake in China and a conflict in South Ossetia left millions of people displaced and vulnerable. With the combined cost of these operations exceeding \$28 million, we have appreciated the support we have received from UNHCR donors worldwide.



More than 430 tons of UNHCR shelter relief was airlifted and trucked into Myanmar in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.

*Operation:* Shelter assistance and relief for victims of Cyclone Nargis

*Duration:* May-September 2008

*Emergency Response Team deployments:* 9

In May, Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar's southwest coast, leaving more than a million people homeless. UNHCR was appointed lead agency for shelter in the UN's joint emergency response to the disaster. From Yangon and two emergency field units in the flooded Irrawaddy Delta, Emergency Response Team members oversaw the delivery and distribution of 430 tons of shelter and basic relief items.



A view of Beichuan, which was severely damaged by the earthquake in central China.

*Operation:* Shelter assistance to victims of the Sichuan Earthquake

*Duration:* May-June 2008

UNHCR dispatched 15,000 all-weather tents to China's Sichuan Province following a major earthquake in May. Providing shelter for 75,000 homeless people, the tents were donated at the specific request of the Chinese government, which arranged for their transport to the quake zone.



UNHCR blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans are distributed to displaced families from South Ossetia at a collective center in Tbilisi, Georgia.

*Operation:* Shelter, protection and emergency relief for people displaced by armed conflict in Georgia

*Duration:* from August 2008

*Emergency Response Team deployments:* 5

Since August, more than 190,000 people have been displaced by fighting in northern Georgia. The Emergency Response Team has coordinated relief in the main internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Gori, and distributed shelter, water and bedding to more than 60,000 people staying in public buildings and private homes in Gori and Tbilisi. With the region covered in snow, UNHCR winter-proofed selected public buildings to shelter the estimated 54,000 people who will not be able to return to their homes before spring.

**The Emergency Response Team: your best chance to help.**

# Why I do it: Tapio Vahtola in Georgia



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*UNHCR distributes non-food items to the internally displaced people of Karaleti. Many people in this village have lost everything during the fighting, and now stay in their houses with nothing or stay with host families whose resources are scarce.*

Tapio Vahtola is usually based in Geneva, where he is UNHCR's Corporate Relations officer. Just months after completing his emergency training in June, he was sent to Georgia with the Emergency Response Team.

## ***Why did you choose to do the Emergency Training?***

Emergencies are a crucial part of the UN Refugee Agency's work. Everyone who works in UNHCR should see these situations to be able to help. When you work in the field, in direct contact with the beneficiaries, you appreciate what it means to work for an agency like UNHCR.

## ***Where are you based?***

For the moment, I am based in Gori, which is a town north of Tbilisi, where our relief efforts are concentrated. This is where we have the only tented camp in Georgia. It's on the outskirts of town in a sports field. We also have internally displaced people (IDPs) staying with host families and in "collective centers" – public buildings, mainly schools and kindergartens, that hold a large number of people.

## ***What is UNHCR's role?***

UNHCR is coordinating the entire relief effort in the camp in cooperation with local authorities. We are the lead agency for protection, shelter, non-food items and telecommunications for the whole operation in Georgia.

## ***Can you describe the IDP camp?***

Two thousand individuals reside in the camp. At this stage, we have managed to stabilize the situation. We had all the services up and running relatively quickly, including water and sanitation, hygiene promotion and food. We have medical services in the camp and we have distributed plastic sheeting, mattresses, beds and sleeping bags – now that it's getting colder. The camp is stabilized and the situation is quieting down.

## ***What is a typical day for you?***

I'm responsible for the security in the camp for the Emergency Response Team. I am also the media spokesperson, so I meet on a daily basis with international and local media. Apart from that, I am an extra pair of hands. For the past days until very late in the evening we have simply been setting up tents for the new arrivals.

## ***What have you found most rewarding?***

Most rewarding is the human contact. In UNHCR terms, this is a fairly small camp so you get to know people. And the local communities also help. In the beginning, they were even bringing in food. It has been a privilege to work with them.

**To donate online, please visit [www.UNrefugees.org](http://www.UNrefugees.org).**