

# Africa's Refugees & the O.A.U.

a clear policy for Africa's  
650,000 homeless must  
lead to long-range solutions

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The total number of refugees in Africa has not been computed accurately, and estimates vary considerably according to the source. It is probably safe to assume that the most accurate assessment is that of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. It is certainly the most complete, and the most recent.

According to figures released in October, 1966, the total number of refugees in Africa is in excess of 650,000, made up as follows:

Country of origin	Number	Country of Residence
Angola	253,000	(a) Congo - 250,000 (b) Zambia - 3,000
Burundi	3,000	Rwanda - 3,000
Congo (Kin.)	70,000	(a) Burundi 27,000 (b) Central Afr. Rep. 6,500 (c) Tanzania 2,000 (d) Uganda 30,000
Mozambique	15,000	(a) Tanzania 12,000 (b) Zambia 3,000
Portuguese Guinea	55,000	Senegal 55,000
Rwanda	160,000	(a) Burundi 52,000 (b) Congo 25,000 (c) Tanz'a 14,000 (d) Uganda 70,000
South Africa (inc. SWA)	1,000	Various 1,000
Sudan	115,000	(a) Central Afr. Rep. 25,000 (b) Congo 40,000 (c) Uganda 45,000 (d) Ethiopia 5,000 (1) (e) Kenya unknown (2)
TOTAL	672,000	660,500

(1) This is an unofficial figure. Ethiopia does not formally recognise refugees or provide for them through the UNHCR. Voluntary agencies are, however, permitted to deal with them.

From the "countries of origin" listed in the table above, it will be apparent that there are several distinct types of refugee situation. To a certain extent these overlap, with divisions based on the nature of the political problem from which individuals seek refuge, but this by no means is always the case. Thus the problems faced by South African refugees and those who have fled Mozambique differ substantially from those which arise from the position of the vast number of Angolans living abroad — although all come from expatriate-controlled states, as do those from Portuguese Guinea. Again, the refugees from Rwanda and the Sudan face different situations, although the cause of their flight is the same — a feeling of persecution of a minority by a majority.

The host countries face yet another set of problems, related not only to those of the refugees themselves, but to the total number of refugees from any one country, as well as the total within any country, and questions of relations between neighbouring states.

By far the largest category of refugees are those persons who seek refuge in another country as a result of some political policy or event which has made them believe that their continued residence in their countries of origin would be dangerous, difficult, or impossible. This group would include refugees from Angola, the Congo, Rwanda, and Sudan. For a number of reasons — including the large numbers involved, a feeling that the situation which gave rise to their flight is unlikely to alter soon, and economic need — this category is one whose immediate problems surround the need for settlement on a relatively permanent basis.

A second category, far smaller in number, includes those refugees who flee specifically in order to continue a political campaign against the governments of their countries of origin. These would include some Angolans, Mozambiquans (Portuguese) Guineans, South Africans, South West

(2) Kenya is similarly reticent about refugees, and has been reluctant to accept any or acknowledge the presence of those who have arrived. Its formal position is that Tanzania and Uganda are the principal refuges, and that it contributes to the costs of maintenance via the UNHCR and the OAU.

Africans and Rhodesians. These, generally known as "freedom fighters", require funds and training for their political activities, and the freedom to conduct them.

The third category, related to the second, consists of individuals whose flight is occasioned by the desire to avoid particular acts of discrimination or persecution directed at them, but not necessarily connected with political activity on their parts. Such persons, although politically articulate, are not in search of opportunities for political expression and activity so much as asylum, education, employment, etc. They are generally people who are either already trained for employment, or are desirous of being so trained, within an urban economy.

Among the manifold difficulties that arise in connection with the various categories of refugees in each African country is that of asylum.

The first question which arises in this regard is the procedure for accreditation of persons as refugees. This does not appear to have presented difficulties where there have been large numbers of refugees who have sought refuge in states bordering on their countries of origin. Although they are, strictly speaking, required to be accredited at their point of entry to the country, this seldom happens in practice. On the other hand, since they have, generally speaking, only migrated a relatively short distance and normally remain in large and homogeneous groups at the first convenient point, government departments (or, more usually, representatives of the UNHCR and non-governmental agencies with similar objectives, e.g. Red Cross, World Council of Churches) deal with this matter relatively speedily.

Difficulties are, however, occasioned in regard to other groups, particularly political exiles, or those fleeing for specific political reasons (fugitives from justice or injustice). The OAU — as well as some governments, e.g. Tanzania and Zambia — have made it a condition of asylum that such refugees be approved by one or other of the nationalist political parties from their countries of origin.

Problems in this connection arise from the multiplicity of parties (not all of which are always recognised for the purpose of accreditation); and, more seriously, from the use of this power by the political parties to secure adherents among persons hitherto unattached, or no longer desirous of being so attached. In other words, refusal to accept endorsement by one or other of the parties is tantamount to denying oneself the opportunity of asylum. It also frequently happens that the power of endorsement is used as a source of recruitment for "freedom fighters"; and, not infrequently, endorsements are withdrawn, with the result that individuals are declared 'persona non grata' and deported.

The OAU has not been able to establish a satisfactory basis for granting asylum. Some attempts were made in this direction in 1965, and a draft convention was considered by the Heads of State in Accra in 1965. The matter was again considered in Nairobi in 1966, but, again, it emerged

that the principal concern of member states was the need to avoid countries harbouring refugees who might conduct campaigns against other, neighbouring member states. Agreement to prevent this is, indeed, the sum of the OAU's achievement in this regard.

Sometimes, however, member states have gone further even than this in a negative direction. Lesotho's latest attempt at deportation of South African refugees (and even of some of its own citizens who had previously been South African nationals) is but one example. It must be seen against the background of fairly stringent legislation restricting political activity by exiles, which Lesotho shares with Botswana and Swaziland explicitly, and several other states tacitly, as well as against the foreground of recently concluded talks between Chief Leabua Jonathan and Mr Vorster on the question of deporting refugees. The countries of Southern Africa are not the only ones alleged to have been involved in collusive negotiations with refugees' countries of origin: a confidential source reported quite recently that Uganda had proposed similar arrangements with Sudan and Congo (Kinshasa) as part of a secret treaty.

Travel is another serious difficulty, since it raises the question of travel documents. There is no longer an international institution of the kind of the 'Nansen Passport', and the OAU has not apparently envisaged the creation of one to serve the same purpose — even on an inter-African basis. Few governments have been willing to provide refugees with travel documents at all, and those given are normally one-way documents of fairly short validity. The need for such documents is felt particularly by those wishing to travel abroad to take up scholarships, and, of course, by "freedom fighters" who travel for guerrilla and similar training (though the countries providing such training are not strict in this regard, airlines and/or countries visited in transit may be).

The third difficulty is that of resettlement. Most of the serious problems occur where governments have to face the needs of refugee groups for permanent — or very lengthy temporary — resettlement. At least three specific areas of difficulty can be distinguished, i.e. rural resettlement in agricultural projects, urban resettlement and employment opportunities, and education. The solutions to these problems depend to a very large degree on whether the refugee communities among whom they are applied are viewed as of long or short duration. Clearly, this must be a question faced separately in respect of each community and its intentions, but it is equally necessary for some long-term provision to be made on the assumption that similar problems are likely to arise frequently in the future. A few examples of some difficulties that arise in relation to each of the resettlement questions mentioned might indicate possible areas for the long-range policy planning which has very obviously not occurred so far:

Rural resettlement projects. Both governments and the UNHCR, as well as voluntary agencies, place great emphasis on this type of project, as best suited to the needs of the largest

groups of refugees. Projects vary greatly in size and scope; although the optimum size is regarded by the UNHCR as 1,000 families (4-5,000 persons), one settlement of Sudanese refugees in Uganda has 600, while a Rwandese settlement in Burundi accounts for no less than 25,000.

The first issue that has to be dealt with is that of persuading the refugees to accept the notion of settlement at all; in some cases this is not difficult, and small batches of refugees will often integrate themselves successfully into existing rural communities -- normally in areas which are ethnically and economically similar to the areas abandoned by the refugees. However, this process carries with it the disadvantage that the government of the host country is less easily able to maintain proper surveillance of the refugees, and, consequently, it has been discouraged. Whether the action of some governments, e.g. Burundi, in forbidding refugees to settle in areas other than those selected for them adds anything more than a further dimension to the refugee problem must be regarded as doubtful.

Generally speaking, however, the ease with which refugees can be persuaded to settle is in inverse proportion to the possibility of achieving a political solution to the problem they are fleeing. Thus, observers in Uganda report a significant decline in enthusiasm for settlement on the part of Sudanese refugees while round-table negotiations were taking place in the middle of 1965. Similarly, it is considerably easier to arrange for resettlement once refugees undertake a self-denying ordinance on political activity.

It is undoubtedly true that one of the greatest fears entertained by African governments giving asylum is that large numbers of refugees who continue to harbour political ambitions will cause disturbance and instability, and will thus constitute a security problem. This has often resulted in the establishment of resettlement schemes in remote areas, where agricultural projects aimed at developing an underdeveloped region have contributed little to the economy of the country.

Education: A substantial proportion of refugees of all sorts are in need of education, and the proportion of children of school age is frequently greater than a quarter of the total. Where the population has been resettled in an agricultural development project, this problem is not so great -- at least to the extent that the demand of refugee children for education is no greater than, and the need is not met to any greater degree than, that of the indigenous population. Difficulties tend to arise where refugees have already undergone some education and desire to go further. The demand becomes even more acute where one of the reasons for leaving the country of origin was inadequate access to proper education (as is the case with South and South West Africans, and refugees from the urban parts of the Portuguese colonies). Most countries of asylum are hard-pressed to provide adequate places to meet the demands of their own nationals for secondary, university and technical education. Pressure on places from refugees causes local resentment as well as political difficulty for

governments. As a result, only a small proportion of such refugees are accommodated by the governments concerned. The remainder are either assisted by UN agencies, foreign governments and voluntary organisations, or continue dissatisfied with conditions in their countries of asylum.

One lesson is that there is a need for a clear policy on African refugees on the part of the members of the OAU; that this should be followed by the establishment of a convention on refugees, and the establishment of adequate machinery for screening and accrediting refugees, as well as providing them with adequate travel facilities and documents where required.

The endemic character of refugee problems in contemporary Africa must be accepted, together with the fact that refugee situations are capable of long-range solutions, with adequate economic provision (based, if necessary, on foreign aid, either directly or through inter-governmental agencies).

Finally, inter-governmental agencies (such as either the UNHCR or the OAU) must be used to confront and overcome diplomatic and political problems arising from the existence of refugees, rather than ignoring them, avoiding them through inactivity, or eliminating them through collusive dealing with the governments of origin.

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But the others...

(contd from p 48

The others know much, much too late  
 The forbidden paradise begins at Bresson Square,  
 That one incursion into rue d'Isly is a raid into  
 enemy territory  
 Who are vowed to cover up their misery in the swarming  
 crowds of all the miserable ones of the  
 Casbah.  
 They have intervals of lucidity  
 Or of despair  
 Or some mad elations,  
 A mad wish to kill  
 To die  
 And with all their heart, all their blood, they wish  
 The other would cease to look  
 Or merely cease to exist...  
 The evening promenade of the young wolves dies at  
 the side of the Cafe Sourbiron,  
 At Tantonville, it stops and retraces itself:  
 It has struck against a wall.  
 The wanderings of the famished young jackals  
 Faulters on the invisible bulwark  
 Under the pressure of others  
 And the shoving of others  
 The curtain begins to crack...  
 It has cracked!  
 And on the asphalt of the same streets  
 The young jackals and the young wolves  
 No longer come to blows at night,  
 Nor is the day for bravado.  
 Also  
 That folding screen,  
 The frail folding screen of that door yields,  
 And...

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