

STATEMENT BY
THE INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON SECURITY IN REFUGEE
AND IDP CAMPS IN RWANDA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES
(28 OCTOBER 1994)

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is - after reviewing a report from a UNHCR lead ad hoc working group set up by the Committee - gravely concerned about the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the camps accommodating Rwandan refugees, especially in eastern Zaire. Refugees are living in an intense atmosphere of fear and intimidation with many being coerced into staying in the refugee camps.

At the same time, the lives of relief workers are also at serious risk. Threats of violence against them are increasing; and, the overall objectives and operations of the humanitarian relief community are increasingly in peril.

Camp structures have become tools of the few to control the lives of the majority. Refugee registration has been resisted by former leaders now in the camps to further their own interests. Food for general distribution are often hijacked to serve the needs of the few and deprived the legitimate many of their sole means of survival.

Under the present circumstances, effective assistance can not be provided to all those in need. Therefore the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Working Group) fully supports the efforts of UNHCR and agencies managing the camps to ensure an efficient and respected policing operation in the camps, which is essential for the well-being of the refugee population. The following objectives should be met:

- Separating out the military from the civilian population in the camps;

- Building and sustaining an environment that ensures the entitlement of refugees to humanitarian assistance and in particular adequate food supply;

- Building and sustaining an environment that ensures that refugees are able to exercise their right, on an individual basis, to either return to Rwanda or stay in the camps;
- Building and sustaining an environment that ensures that refugees benefit from the norms of protection from violence and crime as guaranteed in international humanitarian law and international refugee law.

In this extraordinary situation the sheer size of the caseload and degree of violence manifested makes it both unreasonable and unrealistic to assume that the local host country police force should be expected to deal with the situation without international assistance.

Urgent measures need to be taken now to reinforce the policing capabilities. These need to be implemented in close consultation with the UNHCR and agencies managing the camps, the governments of the countries of asylum and other operational agencies. These measures need to be undertaken before the present tragedy spills over into a much wider regional drama.

After much consideration, it is strongly urged that in cooperation with the Governments concerned, international support be provided to the relevant national police entities so as to ensure an effective policing presence in the camps. The alternative is intense suffering and the deaths of a substantial number of innocent victims who at this stage are pawns in a cruel political gambit.