



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

Vol. 12 • No. 8

March 1993

SPECIAL ISSUE: FOCUS ON AFRICA

Repatriation Under "Abnormal" Conditions

This issue on African Refugees focuses on the process of repatriation. Repatriation under "normal" circumstances, as specified by the UNHCR and OAU conventions (Article V), takes place on the basis of a tripartite agreement between the country of origin and the country of asylum under the auspices of the UNHCR. This means that the UNHCR has no mandate to cooperate or assist those refugees who return to areas not controlled by official governments. However, tens of thousands of refugees repatriate spontaneously without any assistance from the UNHCR and without the knowledge of either the host country or the country of origin. The 1985-87 Tigrayan repatriation of some 150,000 Tigrayans from eastern Sudan to Tigray in northern Ethiopia, is a typical example of such a phenomenon.

The growing number of refugees who spontaneously repatriate to areas that are not under official government control has therefore put more pressure on nongovernmental organizations, and governmental and humanitarian agencies to reconsider the process of repatriation under "abnormal" circumstances.

This issue aims to analyse and highlight some of the pertinent experiences of NGOs and practitioners in dealing with the process of repatriation during conflict, and the role of the international

community vis-à-vis the basic principles of the process of repatriation and development. ■

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