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for Refugees (1991-2000)

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The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crisis of the 1990s

From Iraq to Afghanistan, and from the Balkans to the Great Lakes Region of Africa, the 1990s were years of forced migration. Displaced by conflict, millions of people became refugees. All would need international protection and assistance.

That story is told in a recently published book called "The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crises of the 1990s". Its author -- the guest on this edition of World Chronicle -- is Sadako Ogata, who headed the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 1991 to 2000.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle.** And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle.**

WILLIAMS: Hello, I am Mary Alice Williams. From Iraq to Afghanistan, and from the Balkans to the Great Lakes Region of Africa, the 1990s were years of forced migration. Displaced by

conflict, millions of people became refugees. All would need international protection and assistance. That story is told in this book called "The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crises of the 1990s". Its author – Sadako Ogata – was the UN High Commissioner for Refugees throughout that difficult period – and I'm very pleased to have her as our guest on today's programme. Mrs. Ogata, welcome. The minute you took over you were faced with three huge crises in nineteen ninety one: Iraq, Ethiopia and Albania. So, we're assuming you are an expert on this. You've been famously quoted as saying there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems. What did you mean by that?

OGATA: Well, this often quoted; no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems came a little bit after I experienced a lot of problems. Because the humanitarian action can take place, we can help to give protection to people, security, food, a little stability and so on. But the causes were all political. Just like a fire engine running all the time without extinguishing the source of the fire itself.

WILLIAMS: Joining us here in the studio today are Thalif Deen, UN Bureau Chief for Inter Press Service and Evelyn Leopold, UN Bureau Chief, of Reuters. Evelyn….

LEOPOLD: Hello. Mrs. Ogata I remember your final speech in the Security Council right before you left….

OGATA: …Oh yes…

LEOPOLD: …And you emphasized that security was a major problem in refugee camps, that there weren't enough peacekeepers taking care of them. That there was rape and in the case of the Congo, a virtual army formed in a refugee camp from Rwanda. Do you think its gotten any better as a result of your speech and your constant lobbying?

OGATA: What I appealed to the Security Council was that we will do everything humanitarian, but they had to work much more to get the security established and also leading to political solutions. And I felt this was the last chance I had to speak on behalf of the refugees to the Security Council. Well, things changed. There are no refugee camps consisting of millions of people in the eastern part of Congo. At the same time, the instability has continued throughout the country, but at least, I think it is more towards nation building, settlements, a little bit better than the time I lived through.

DEEN : Mrs. Ogata, the refugee policies of most western nations were established during the time of the cold war…

OGATA: Yes….

DEEN: As you yourself had spelled out in your book. But somewhere down the line, it transformed itself from political refugees to economic refugees. Was there an abuse on the concept of the political refugees?

OGATA: No, no. Refugees are really still basically political violations of human rights and it is much more political. People fleeing or moving for purely economic reasons are migrants. But the real problem was they were all crossed. People from countries where there was no possibility in their minds, for stabilities or opportunities to make a living and so on. It often came from autocratic governments or states in which there was no governance. And so in this sense, the migratory undertones of refugee crises complicated the situation.

DEEN: Is there a distinction between political refugees and asylum seekers?

OGATA: Well asylum seekers are the ones who come to another country and seek to receive refugee status. A political refugee is a generic term for all those who are fleeing conflicts and political persecution.

WILLIAMS: But when does a refugee in fact become an immigrant? The resettlement of many refugees of Rwandan origin both Hutu's and Tutsi's in the Congo raised that very thorny issue of citizenship and it is still being discussed today.

OGATA: This is very true, because the refugees from Rwanda were mostly Tutsi's who fled from the government who were then dominated by the Hutu's. There was a lot of migration from the small Rwanda to the big, big Congo, oh…about thirty eight years or more. They had taken up some Congo nationalities and there were some with Zairian nationalities; and Zaire was about to begin elections so they wanted to clarify who were Zairian and who were not Zairian. This complicated the whole issue of citizenship, and that was on the one part. One of the sources of instability in the Zaire side to which there were refugees who fled the Hutu's, many of them had been genociders. And they went in – they were more than a million – we had to establish refugee camps. So this combination of enormous insecurity, partly related to nationality issues and a lot of refugees fleeing into this terrain, really worsened the crisis there.

LEOPOLD: Can I pick up on that? The Hutu refugees are still raising havoc in the Congo to this day. They have aligned themselves with the Congo government army. And do you think that when they first came in after operation Turquoise, that you could have…..that if you had the proper security or the big powers that paid attention, you wouldn't have some, not all but some of this mess that's going on in the Congo today? Because much of it, not much of

it but a certain part of it, is started by the Hutu refugees, and Rwanda uses them as an excuse to attack the Congo.

OGATA: About a million or more than a million Hutu's did flee to north Kibu, and later the Turquoise they fled into Bukavu, which is a little more south. There were differences….

LEOPOLD: True.

OGATA: But the real difficulty was that these refugees consisted of people who are genuine refugees, I mean women and children, a lot of them. But also those who had lost been lost in the civil war and were fleeing. Many of them had committed serious crimes of genocide against the Tutsi's. There were some confiscation of arms at the border but many people went through the borders and there was a camp situation where there was cholera and also a lot of armed elements were there. The real problem that I faced was the cholera - we all tried to bring it down and this was the water issue – but the real problem was, what do you do with armed elements of former militias or military elements? Separate them from refugees who needed assistance and security. And it was very difficult for civilian organization with civilian staff, to separate this kind of group of people. And this was the strong appeal I made to the Secretary-General; in turn, to the international community for some kind of assistance. And I would say people who can separate armed elements from the non armed elements; which required something of an observer or a police type mission, or even a peacekeeping mission.

LEOPOLD: Is it happening?

OGATA: That did not exist in those worlds.

LEOPOLD: Is it happening now?

OGATA: I don't think so, no. But at the same time, a lot of these refugees at the end were from Tanzania, but also a lot from the Congo. I would say more than a million. Rwanda would say almost two million; a quarter of their population had returned. But there are some still who are… and we had an enormously difficult rescue operation out of Congo. But there are some who are left behind and they add to the instability of Congo.

DEEN: Mrs. Ogata, during your tenure as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, what other countries that were liberal in their policies about intake of refugees?

OGATA: Well in Western Europe for example, the refugees from Yugoslavia, there was an enormous problem because the numbers were large and we had to appeal for acceptance of these Balkan refugees across the board. We asked for temporary protection, temporary receiving them, not going through the various channels of processing them. And I would say about eight hundred thousand did go to European countries and Germany was

maybe the largest provider, but for the Nordic countries that was a lot of Balkan refugees. But when the war was over, and then they wanted all these war refugees to go back - to Kosovo and to the Balkans - and since then, they have become much more strict again for processing refugees in accordance with the claim that they can present.

WILLIAMS: About that, you write on page fifty three "…in the short run, the international response to the Kosovo crisis brought success, but the ethnic problem remains now with the Serb minority facing insecurity in the liberated Kosovo and with the future status of Kosovo unsettled". This raises the question, is the international community the better at short term emergency response than long term political solutions?

OGATA: I'm afraid so, yes. Short term response, there is a lot of feeling for humanitarian expression and doing something about people who are really wronged and in miserable situations. But once that phase is over, either the cameras turns away, or it becomes too complicated taking people back to their… The refugees from Kosovo, the Albanians were the ones who had been wronged, and their return was lauded in many ways. But then very soon, there was some kind of violence against the Serb residence there, and also the Roma's. Roma's, were the one who were always wronged all over Europe, and so this was a problem that I foresaw very early. Then there was a slow integration process, reconstruction… it takes time. You have to bring in not only humanitarian agencies but bi-lateral assistance, international development agencies and it takes a longer period and that's when the attention dies very often.

LEOPOLD: To change the subject slightly. What do you recommend women do if they're raped in a refugee camp, which is not that infrequent? Voluntary abortion, morning after pill or something like it; and other such belated contraceptives that the US government disapproves and would cut off your money.

OGATA: Well, we did have a very close contact with the UNFPA because they have the expertise and we wanted to have their advice and their operation in the camps. So I think there was a lot of very difficult standards to set up in the refugee camps where you cannot really follow everybody's movement all day and all night. But we were able to get UNFPA's assistance and advice and that is the way we coped with it. I'm not saying its perfect or anything but that was the best. You know, you have to remember, in a refugee camp – a million people suddenly move in and you cannot expect the same kind of order, standard of behaviour, assistance or services, as you would normally get in a city of one million, which is never easy.

WILLIAMS: And when rape is a weapon of war it does bleed into the camps.

OGATA: It became much, much more a rape of war in the Bosnia. This was very clearly used as a weapon of war. And we raised our voices and did everything possible to get down to…it becomes protection of security. And women especially; women in Rwanda too - there was that feature. We tried to do the prevention but sometimes it is beyond the prevention. What we tried to do afterwards as the peace settled down, we took what is known as women's initiative - both in Bosnia and also in Rwanda. We tried to have a grouping of women for various educational…what shall I say… just bringing them together does reinforce their feeling of togetherness and that they are not left alone. So we set up women's centers, special training for women and tried to get them job opportunities, some legal methods too are introduced.

DEEN: I presume you have a multi-million dollar budget for refugees. How big was this problem in terms of funding? Were you able to get enough funds?

OGATA: Yes, in nineteen ninety – four, five, six. That was the time when I had not only the big Balkan operation, but the Great Lake region. Probably the number of people we were responsible for was about twenty six million. At that point, the budget was about one point five or six billion.

DEEN: This is voluntary contributions?

OGATA: Yes, and we got the money because the world recognized that it was a very important function of the kind that UNHCR was performing with its very best efforts.

DEEN: What do you think of this proposal for an international fund for humanitarian crisis?

OGATA: I don't think a fund would work because there was something like that. But you know it's important that you have money that you can use immediately and there's no time… as a crisis develops, immediately we would try to get an estimate of the needs and I went fundraising. I was fundraising all the time.

WILLIAMS: This is World Chronicle our guest is Sadaka Ogata, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. She is the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees and author of the book, The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crisis of the 1990's. Let's take a look now at this report about refugees in the African nation of Zambia.

VIDEO BEGINS:

NARRATION:

"A truck loaded with Angolan refugees arrives at a refugee settlement in Zambia. They have been escorted by officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Many of the refugees are old people and many of them are women and children. Zambian security officers search them for arms and illegal substances. Ex-combatants are not allowed into the settlement.

There are more than 250,000 refugees in Zambia. Most of them are from Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The rest come from other countries in the Great Lakes region and even the Horn of Africa Mehaba settlement near Solwezi in Northwestern Zambia is home to more than 52,000 refugees. Most are from Angola. All need help. The UNHCR Deputy Representative in Zambia is Martin Bucumi:

BUCUMI:
"The first assistance that we give the refugees when they arrive in Zambia is to transport them from the border to the refugee camp, in order to give them the basic assistance."

NARRATION:
On arrival, refugee families are registered and allocated a 2.5-hectare plot of land donated by the Zambian government. They are also given clothes, utensils and tools. The Fernando family was among the recent arrivals. Until their first harvest, the United Nations' World Food Programme also provides them with a monthly food ration. It includes maize, beans, and cooking oil. Later, they are expected to grow their own food. UNHCR staff and local workers brought Jose and his family to their plot. They helped them put up a temporary shelter, a tent donated by the refugee agency. After a brief welcome from their new neighbours, Jose and family are finally settled and can feel safe – and grateful.

JOSE FERNANDO: (in local dialect)
"I would like to thank the government of Zambia and UNHCR for the hospitality accorded to me and my family. I'd like to stay here as long as the war continues in Angola. And when peace returns, I will go back to my country."

NARRATION:
Refugees receive assistance from a number of other international organizations as well. The well-known Doctors Without Borders provide health care to both refugees and the local population.

Each settlement has a government-provided school, because primary education is mandatory for all refugee children. Many also attend secondary schools. Recreational facilities are available, including the inevitable soccer games.

As long as internal conflicts rage in Africa's Great Lakes region, people will continue to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Until the uncertain date of their return, refugees will be doing their best to preserve a form of familiar home-life in safe havens like these."
VIDEO ENDS

WILLIAMS: Mrs. Ogata, most people understand that the refugees, such as the ones we've seen, want to create a feeling of home in the refugee camps - but they end up staying there for a very long time. Is what I've said accurate?

OGATA: Well, they end up being…well, we try not to keep refugees as refugees forever, but their situation either their original homes, in the home country or acceptance by the government that takes them as temporary refugees. If that works out – they can create a home where they are, or they can wait and go back. There are solutions but it takes an awfully long time.

WILLIAMS: What you're saying again, there are political solutions?

OGATA: There has to be security and readiness to reintegrate them in their home country if they're going to go back. It requires a lot of political considerations and agreements.

LEOPOLD: On the subject of refugees settling somewhere else. After World War Two in Europe the vast majority - they may not have been happy but they settled you know - Germans came west, Jews went all over the world they were probably a larger number of refugees in short period of time than ever before. This is what's happening. Palestinians are refugees in their own country, they are not necessarily being given citizenships by neighbouring countries – some do and some don't – and we just saw the situation in Zambia, the Congo and Angola wars have been going on for quite a while – at least Angola has been.

OGATA: There is change now - and Congo too. I mean Congo has gone through a series… independence. You see, in Africa, after the European refugee problems were solved, then the liberation movement started in Africa and this is where UNHCR for the first time moved to Africa. Because these countries were fighting a war to become liberated from the colonial domination from those countries; and so from there, they did achieve independence many of them – there are fifty three is it now? Independent African countries and UNHCR spent a lot of time and care in order to help them become independent. And those who fought in the liberation wars would be able to be accepted in their new countries, so I think there is a lot of progress and the fact that there is still instability in some parts doesn't mean that nothing has happened.

LEOPOLD: Yeah, but how many parts of the world do you have refugees forever? I mean for five years, ten years…

OGATA: The Palestinian issues…

LEOPOLD: Well that's a different one...

OGATA: That is a different one…

LEOPOLD: Because that's a political one…

OGATA: But you know, even, even Afghanistan…which is probably the one that had the longest period of refugees that I know of – when I became High Commissioner, there were more than six million refugees in the neighbouring countries. When I left, there was still that many – about three or four million – but after in the last two or three years, Afghanistan has a democratically elected president. There is a lot of security that is being helped by the various countries – and some reconstruction. Almost four million people have gone back together with those who were displaced in the countries, so I would not give up. There are differences that can be made with UN agencies and with various governments who are determined to help. I think recently, there is recognition that helping refugees return home is not just a question of charity or humanitarian compassion, it is a security issue, it's a justice issue. And I am a little bit encouraged that this kind of thinking is now coming through. Not enough maybe.

DEEN: Traditionally, the UN has played a very important role in helping refugees. What about the role played by humanitarian organizations? Now they refer to Doctors Without Borders, International Committee for the Red Cross…

OGATA: International Committee for the Red Cross has a special mandate to deal with displaced persons, especially war victims. They are the organization in war. The Medcines San Frontier has been very helpful in medical care, especially in conflict situations. They are not afraid to just go there.

WILLIAMS: Can you distinguish for the benefit of our audience, the difference between the ICRC – International Committee for the Red Cross and the UNHCR?

OGATA: UNHCR is a refugee agency. Put it very simply - we would take the refugees when the ICRC would be taking care of the prisoners of war. Sometimes we have to collaborate because there are prisoners of war whose term is over and they can be sent back. And sometimes we have to help and deal with them as if they were refugees and help them go home. There's a lot of collaboration possible.

WILLIAMS: A number of critics have said that the UN humanitarian efforts, particularly in the Balkans, under the leadership of the UNHCR became a substitute strategy for bringing the war to an end, they called it a very expensive failure – five hundred million dollars a year was it?

OGATA: Well five hundred million dollars is nothing when you think that without that, how millions of people could have been totally killed or displaced. At least these people survived. There was some military action in a sense that there were UN peacekeepers to protect and help the humanitarian work – that was very expensive too. But what was the price? What had to happen was to deal with the basic problem of what kind of new ethnically

composed states is Yugoslavia going to consist of? And that was not what I could solve. But at least in the midst of ethnic cleansing war everybody, because of your nationality, was a target. And the relative limited number of people rarely killed in that war, relatively speaking.

DEEN: When you talk of refugees, you usually focus on political refugees.

OGATA: Yes.

DEEN: But there is a totally new concept of environmental refugees

OGATA: There is that too…

DEEN: Countries like Tuvalu, the Maldives. They are going to vanish off the face of the earth and they are looking for places to….

OGATA: You have to move them from the places that they were, for environmentally serious reasons you had to move. But there is a difference – you see? Recently there was the big tsunami in the Indian Ocean region. Everybody in the world, every country could help without saying that helping these victims would be politically incorrect. There was nothing. In that sense, natural disasters even environmental disasters can mobilize much more straight forward support across the board. But political ones are difficult because helping one group of people might mean antagonizing the other. Because usually it's political tension that bring outrage against the other.

DEEN: Are you making a distinction between man -made disasters and natural disasters?

OGATA: I'm afraid so. Like when man-made disasters of a conflict sort, it's always difficult to be neutral and impartial; and that's where organizations like International Committee of the Red Cross or the United Nations Human Rights Commission for Refugees can come through. Natural disasters almost everybody can come through.

LEOPOLD: Mrs. Ogata, you were legendary as the High Commissioner, your successor was not. Now that the UN is getting ready to choose another High Commissioner, what do you think the qualifications should be?

OGATA: Well I would trust and hope that the best person available who can really focus on refugees and can manage a very large spread out organization will come through. It's unfortunate that things sometimes go wrong. But I think this is an organization with good professional devoted people and I wish the best in this election process

WILLIAMS: And that's a diplomatic answer. Thank you for being with us Mrs. Ogata. Our guest has been Sadaka Ogata, President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees. She was interviewed by Thalif Deen of IPS

and Evelyn Leopold of Reuters. I'm Mary Alice Williams inviting you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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