

# Pressed U.N. refugee agency seeks European allies

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BUDAPEST, April 25 (Reuter) - The United Nations' hard-pressed refugee agency will increasingly have to rely on grassroots groups to help it cope with mass movements of people driven from Europe's trouble spots, officials said on Monday.

"We have to define our impact and see how others can help up handle refugees and asylum seekers," John Horekens, director of the European secretariat of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told Reuters.

He spoke after opening a regional conference to help strengthen cooperation among 120 humanitarian, human rights, religious and child defence groups from 36 countries.

Sponsored by the UNHCR and the International Council for Voluntary Agencies, the three-day conference was discussing how to assist the world's 40 million registered refugees, help them in crisis situations and integrate them into society.

Calling the UNHCR "very thinly stretched", Horekens said such non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would become increasingly important allies for the UNHCR.

"If there was a major problem right now, given our heavy involvement in just two places - Yugoslavia and Rwanda - we would have great difficulty in moving fast," he said.

That poses potential trouble given the number of areas that could develop refugee crises.

"If one looks at the former Soviet Union there are plenty of possibilities," he said, calling the Caucasus a troubled area and citing political development in countries like Ukraine and the situation of minorities in the Russian federation.

"We are fairly new in Central and Eastern Europe, and if we want to expand we have to take (resources) away from somewhere else," he added.

Hungarian President Arpad Goncz told the conference's opening session that grassroots groups had a wider role to play in Eastern Europe and that countries long used to tackling problems alone should welcome this.

"Governments in this region will now have to learn to live with NGOs, how to cooperate with them, to learn to look at grassroots movements without suspicion," Goncz said.

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