

March Standing Committee 2020

**Statement from the Regional Director –
East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Bureau**

Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mothers walking for weeks with their young children to cross a border to safety;

Families living in exile for generations;

Millions displaced within their own countries;

Refugees who have not seen home in years anxiously anticipating a return;

Earnest youth desperate for educational opportunities;

An entrepreneur who just needs access to a SIM card and some start-up capital.....

.....all forcibly displaced and in search of safety and solutions.

These are the people on my mind every day as I perform my functions as the Director of the Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes.

It is my honour to be here with you today to deliver this regional update at Standing Committee, the first since the establishment of the new Bureau(s). I am also pleased that my update will be followed by a field mission of the ExCom Chairperson to the Great Lakes at the end of March, which will serve to shed more light on some of the issues contained in my

update including on unmet needs of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

As you know member states of the region have a long and generous history of hospitality towards refugees. Large refugee hosting countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Tanzania, as well as smaller countries such as Djibouti, Rwanda and Burundi have continued to welcome thousands of their uprooted neighbours for decades despite facing their own socio-economic challenges. With the number of refugees in the region climbing to over 4.6 million people last year (the most recent influxes to which we are responding include new arrivals to Sudan from both the Central African Republic and Chad), and with a further 7.9 million people internally displaced, the needs have continued to grow – meaning that the need for innovation, new approaches, and international solidarity and burden sharing is also greater than ever before.

While we work in pursuit of the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees – for greater socio-economic inclusion, and self-reliance, and ultimately solutions – UNHCR and our partners still consistently face challenges triggered by underfunding in supporting governments to meet the most basic, life-saving needs of refugees. Food rations too often fall short, classrooms at elementary levels remain overcrowded and under-resourced, and young people have too few opportunities for secondary or higher education, leaving many of them in limbo. Health systems are overstretched with shortages of medicines, and sufficient resources to train and employ enough social workers to support unaccompanied children and other vulnerable refugees with special needs are lacking.

Yet, despite the immense need, I am also energized by what I have seen during these past months. Country Operations in the East and Horn and

Great Lakes Region are making great achievements even with limited resources and forging new partnerships with non-traditional stakeholders. We are determined to capitalize on positive political developments from Sudan to Somalia to Ethiopia, which are giving rise to opportunities to find lasting solutions for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

In Sudan we are recalibrating and scaling up our operational engagement to support the Government's renewed commitment to find solutions to displacement including in previously inaccessible areas, and to work with others to create conditions which are conducive for the return of displaced populations in safety and dignity. I also look forward to work with Sudan in its capacity as Chair of IGAD to pursue comprehensive regional solutions to displacement.

Just a few weeks ago, UNHCR joined the people of South Sudan and the countries of the region in welcoming the new unity government, the formation of which carries new hope for an end to the plight of millions of South Sudanese.

A few days before that we assisted a first group of 76 Ethiopian refugees to return home from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya after decades in exile. We estimate that over 4,600 Ethiopian refugees residing in the region would like to return to Ethiopia this year from Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti and Somalia. The increased returns, which will require additional resources, are motivated, in part, by the impact of recent political and economic reforms in their homeland. Over 80,000 Ethiopian refugees remain in protracted exile in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

Following Niger's ground breaking example, the establishment of the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Rwanda last year is an act of solidarity

that provides an opportunity for member states to support the Rwandan Government and the African Union in finding solutions for refugees stranded in untenable conditions in Libya. We thank those governments that have pledged resettlement slots, especially Sweden and Canada who have already received the first groups of departures this past month.

Last week we welcomed Somalia's official deposit of the Instruments of Ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, i.e. "the Kampala Convention" to the AU Commission in Addis Ababa.

Burundian refugees throughout the Great Lakes region and beyond are paying close attention to elections planned for May of this year.

The new Bureau has mainstreamed the coordination of the South Sudan and Burundi refugee situations, and has recently published updated Regional Refugee Response Plans for 2020 involving some 95 and 37 partners, respectively. An updated and complementary Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan for Burundian refugees will follow shortly.

The East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region is central to the High Commissioner's commitment to reposition UNHCR to be more decisive, predictable and effective in situations of internal displacement. Country Operations are actively applying UNHCR's new IDP Policy – from championing the Centrality of Protection through robust protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy, to strengthened cluster leadership and operational delivery. Fundamentally, we seek to work with governments and inter-agency partners to find and support solutions for the internally displaced, and to mobilize additional resources to be able to deliver on these commitments.

Chairman,

We are encouraged when we see the possibilities on the horizon with host countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Djibouti implementing policies that shift the view of refugees in isolated camps, fully dependent on humanitarian assistance, to contributing members of vibrant host communities. This year will see a number of new and expanded World Bank projects under the IDA-18 refugee and host community sub-window become operational. Our partnership with the International Finance Corporation is deepening in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. For example, we look forward to the launch in May of a 25 million US dollar Challenge Fund set up by IFC and the African Enterprise Challenge Fund for Kakuma-Kalobeyei in Kenya.

The eleven countries in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region were well represented at the Global Refugee Forum last December. In addition to senior government officials, we had members of the private sector and other stakeholders making significant pledges that will help bring the Global Compact on Refugees to life in the region. We now need to support these initiatives and take them forward to improve the everyday lives of refugees and the generous communities hosting them.

The IGAD Support Platform that was launched at the Global Refugee Forum will be an important vehicle this year for matching political, technical and financial support to the commitments made by member states. Through the *Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education in IGAD member states*, host governments have agreed to standardize inclusive education for all refugees across Eastern Africa by the end of this year, and to expand economic and work opportunities, as contained in the *Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees, and Host Communities* signed in 2019. These

declarations are more than signed documents – they represent landmark shifts in policy and are changing the reality for refugees on the ground.

Member states must now translate them into national policies and costed plans and we will do our utmost to work with interested donors to support countries in their implementation.

Following up on the pledges made during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness with technical and policy support to move forward with regional and national action plans to eradicate Statelessness is also a key priority of Country Operations throughout the region in 2020.

The effects of climate change on our operations in the Horn of Africa are already apparent and after the drought last year, the devastating floods, and the locust infestation that currently threatens, we know we need to be prepared for further impacts on our persons of concern in Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan. We also need to adapt our operational models, such as by solarizing the dozens of our remote compounds that currently run almost exclusively off diesel generators.

Finally, as we look forward this year, we are cognizant of the need to be ready for the possibility of new displacement, particularly in the Great Lakes region. Relevant Country Operations are taking steps to ensure their preparedness.

As we rise to meet this array of challenges and opportunities in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region this year, the new Bureau holds primary accountability for strategic decision-making, prioritization and quality assurance at the regional level, and will leverage its proximity to country operations and regional actors to support Country Operations in delivering effective and efficient responses while continuing to strengthen oversight capacity.

Let me end by thanking you for your support to our work, your continued commitment and solidarity to refugees in the region.

Thank you.

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Guidance is to limit remarks to 7-10 minutes (900-1300 words)