

MARCH STANDING COMMITTEE 2020

RBSA Director's Remarks (7-10 min)

10 March 2020, 10:00 – 13:00

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you today to provide an update on the region covered by the new Regional Bureau for Southern Africa.

The 16 countries covered by the newly established Regional Bureau for Southern Africa currently comprise of **over 8.8 million persons of concern**. This includes 5.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 765,000 refugees. The figures represent two main types of situations. Over 90 per cent of the total figure for this region can be linked back to the acute and complex conflict-induced humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since mid-2019 we have seen an increase of violence in eastern DRC leading to over 5 million internally displaced persons - one of the largest IDP population globally and the largest in Africa. At the same time, more than two million people have returned to their home areas in the past 18 months, a clear reminder of the desire of affected populations to rebuild their lives and the need for support. Another recent emergency is the conflict ravaging Northern Mozambique which has forced over 156,000 persons to leave their homes in Cabo Delgado, an area previously impacted by Cyclone Kenneth and recurrent natural disasters. The second challenging type of situation which is equally far from media headlines are refugees in protracted situations. The majority have been dwelling in camps or settlements over many

decades in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Year after year, Governments and host communities continue to share scarce resources with them.

Chairperson,

There are two other trends in the region. While **climate change** is a global issue, its impact is definitely being adversely felt in Southern Africa. Every year, intertwined sudden and slow onset natural disasters are detrimentally impacting the region, causing loss of life, destruction to property and setting countries back on their path of development. Such events also cause internal displacement, as was the case last year in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. As this happens yearly and is predictable, this is where UNHCR's protection expertise in situations of forced displacement is most needed.

Overly-challenged **asylum systems** are a major concern, often as a result of mixed flows and ill-equipped national migration systems. Coupled with economic downturn and high unemployment rates, has been leading to a politicization of asylum and an increase in xenophobic violence.

Furthermore, donor funding continues to shrink, with very limited interest for protracted refugee situations and never-ending emergencies. Currently the most dramatic impact of this is the food ration cuts for refugees in the region. This is only going to get worse with further reductions forecasted this year. This translates into over 450,000 refugees in the region whose health and nutritional status may be at risk due to reduced food rations.

Chairperson,

What is **our vision** to tackle these challenges? **We will seek to strengthen protection and implement pragmatic solutions proactively and innovatively.** While resettlement is now severely constrained, having decreased from 4,700 to 1,500, we are enhancing voluntary repatriation support whenever possible. During the first quarter of 2020, over 450 refugees have been able to voluntarily return home from Botswana to Zimbabwe, and from Angola to

the DRC. Consultations and plans are ongoing for voluntary repatriation of DRC refugees from the Republic of Congo, South Africa and Zambia. Refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) in the Republic of Congo have also expressed intentions to return. Resource implications to enable such returns and appropriate reintegration will be significant but we will ensure that resources are prioritized. We cannot afford to stop refugees from going home and achieving a durable solution.

Chairperson,

There is one thing however which *has* changed in the region. At the **Global Refugee Forum** in December 2019, the Southern Africa region together showed extraordinary political will with 87 pledges; of which 69 were made by states and 18 by non-governmental actors. State pledges ranged from supporting integration of refugees and former refugees, ensuring registration and access to Identity Cards, providing agricultural land and work permits, enrolling refugees into higher education and strengthening asylum procedures and legal frameworks. In addition, 12 States of the Southern Africa region and the Republic of Congo delivered a total of 51 pledges towards the eradication of statelessness.

I would like to take the opportunity to **acknowledge and commend these States** and partners for this expression of generosity, good will and strong resolve to stand with refugees and stateless persons. This is an unprecedented window of opportunity that we cannot miss.

Now, looking forward, our **regional strategic priorities** for the coming year are the same areas encapsulated by these pledges. Allow me to mention some of the key points. **Our first priority** is to strengthen the basics – by improving the quality and integrity of registration and socio-economic data. The new Data and Identity Management Analysis unit will be implementing this cross-cutting approach across the Bureau. **Secondly**, we will work to reinforce **asylum systems and legal protection frameworks**. As a result of the Global Refugee Forum, we now have an Asylum Capacity Support Group which has expertise and

resources to support states in need. Asylum backlogs in the region need to be tackled in a sustainable manner in the context of mixed flows. **Thirdly**, with the impetus of many pledges made at the GRF, we will seek to ensure that, at a minimum, all refugees receive **primary education**. As Nelson Mandela said: Quote “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Unquote.

Several host countries such as – Eswatini, Namibia and Zambia – have pledged to give refugees land to cultivate as a source of livelihood. Others such as Malawi are also willing to provide work permits. By engaging UN agencies such as WFP and FAO, and other partners, our goal is to **scale up joint livelihood, financial inclusion and self-reliance strategies**, to alleviate poverty and bring solutions to refugees. We will also seek to innovate our operational responses integrating **sustainable sources of energy** to mitigate the impact of climate change. **Emergency preparedness** will be strengthened considering the recent displacement of populations due to Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019.

Underlying all this are **partnerships**. We cannot do it alone. The Bureau, as a second line of defence, will strive to provide technical assistance and oversight, and to catalyse targeted investments and expertise from partners. Since last year we have strengthened ties with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) through a revised Memorandum of Understanding and a plan of action to implement the MoU. Together we will join forces to pursue a regional approach to the implementation of the pledges from the GRF and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. In April 2020, we will co-convene a joint SADC-UNHCR regional conference under the theme “Pledges to Reality” which will seek to develop a regional action plan on statelessness and asylum solutions. We will heavily invest in fostering synergies with the Governments, UN Agencies, NGOs, development actors, the International Financial Institutions and the private sector. Let us find together solutions for the people we care for by thinking outside the box. We will aim to bring to life the **humanitarian-development nexus** to bring in a solutions oriented approach for the persons of concern in the region both in crisis and protracted situations.

Chairperson,

With the **transformation of UNHCR**, we are now closer to the operations, and have been able to strengthen local planning and budgeting processes as well as to support resource mobilisation. Our proximity to the field is already facilitating faster and easier communication and improves our understanding of operational needs, with quick deployments to support the activation of the internal Level 3 emergency across Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe last year due to Cyclone Idai. Close monitoring and technical support provided to field operations last year is allowing us to be more accountable to our donors and persons of concern for the funding we receive – with an overall implementation rate exceeding 95 per cent. The Bureau is actively assisting operations to manage risks and ensure compliance.

Chairperson,

To conclude, we seek the support of all member states to jointly overcome the challenges, and to seize the opportunities which I mentioned. We already have the political will and now what we need is targeted and timely funding as well as expertise to ensure that the pledges become a reality and have a real impact on the lives of our persons of concern. Let us not forget that in the bigger scheme of things, these actions are crucial if we are to deliver on the 2020 Theme of the African Union on “**Silencing Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development**” and the achievement of the Agenda 2030/ Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind and AU Agenda 2063 to “see the Africa we want”.

Thank you.