

COMUNIDADE DOS ESTADOS DA
AFRICA DO OESTE



ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES

COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE DES ETATS
DE L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

**Address of the Commissioner Social Affairs and Gender of the ECOWAS
Commission Dr. Siga Fatima Jagne on the Occasion of the 72nd UNHCR Executive
Committee Meeting (EXCOM)**

04 - 08 October, 2021

SPEECH

*ECOWAS COMMISSION
October 2021*

Your Excellency, the Chair Person of the 72nd EXCOM

Your Excellency, the High Commissioner for Refugees,

Excellences,

Distinguished Participants,

It is my pleasure to address the 72nd Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **H.E. Jean Claude Kassi BROU**. The ECOWAS Commission is delighted to be part of this important annual event which seeks to address the issues of global displacement, particularly as it concerns refugees. On behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, may I convey the warm greetings of the ECOWAS Commission and that of the entire region to the High Commissioner, **H.E Filippo Grandi** and the entire UNHCR staff for the excellent job you are doing working day and night to alleviate the sufferings of millions of displaced people around the world. Your work in the ECOWAS region stands out and we are indeed grateful. **Your Excellency, the ECOWAS Commission aligns itself with the statement of the African group made by Burkina Faso.**

The world is witnessing a decade-long trend of surging displacement driven by violence and unprecedented natural disasters. UNHCR latest annual Global Trends for 2020 shows that, the number of people fleeing wars, violence, persecution and human rights violations in 2020 rose to nearly 82.4 million people. This accounts for a further four per cent increase above the already high record of 79.5 million at the end of 2019. On the other hand, another 48 million people were internally displaced (IDPs) within the same timeframe. The effects of the pandemic have worsened the humanitarian situation of populations around the world, particularly, the displaced and vulnerable population. Indeed, there is no better time than now for deep and sober reflection on how to contain the mindless violence and the effects of climate change in the world today.

In Africa, the effects of the COVID pandemic has exacerbated the displacement situation and left populations with little or no resilience to cope with social and economic realisms. In West Africa, the last decade has been one we wish not to

remember as several millions of our population have been forced to flee their natural places of residence due to unprecedented crises caused by insurgencies and armed conflict. Climate factors have also played a critical role in current displacements in the region as perennial flood disasters and persistent drought have diminished food production and ignited hunger and starvation. These factors have brought displacement figures in the region over the 7 million mark. The humanitarian situation in the context of the COVID – 19 pandemic has been made worse, severely hurting displaced populations and other persons of concern.

The ECOWAS Commission and its Member States continue to work relentlessly with UNHCR at regional and country levels as well as with other UN agencies and other partners to provide short, medium and long term solutions to alleviate the economic and social effects of the subsisting humanitarian situation in West Africa. At the operational level, ECOWAS has distributed food and non-food items worth over 7 million United States Dollars to support displaced population and communities as well as vulnerable population affected by the effects of COVID – 19 pandemic in West Africa.

At the policy level, ECOWAS has held in-country engagement sessions with critical stakeholders in Nigeria and Burkina Faso to encourage the domestication and implementation of the Kampala Convention. This sensitization and advocacy strategy is meant to expedite the domestication and implementation of the AU Kampala Convention in West Africa and provide the legal platform for the protection and assistance of Internally Displaced persons. This activity focuses first, on Member States now experiencing violent conflicts which have already displaced millions of people and will extend to all Member States to safeguard a regional approach to the prevention of displacement, protection of the rights of IDPs and rendering appropriate assistance.

Concerning refugees, the High Commissioner will recall that in 2020, ECOWAS and UNHCR held an informative session on the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) for the staff of the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Parliament. That meeting ensured that appropriate institutional participation towards supporting Member States to mainstream GCR principles in

national programmes is buttressed to boost robust and timely implementation at country level.

On the same score, ECOWAS in collaboration with UNHCR will be organising by the end of October, 2021, an expert and a ministerial meeting to develop and adopt a regional Plan of Action for the implementation of the pledges made by the ECOWAS Commission and its Member States during the First Global Forum on Refugees in December, 2019. This important activity has been on hold due to the restrictions of the COVID – 19 pandemic. The goal of this event is to guarantee a coordinated regional implementation of the pledges made by the region in line with the principles of the GCR which seek to ease the pressures on host countries by strengthening the resilience of refugees and their host communities, particularly through greater cooperation.

On mixed migration issues, the Commission is partnering with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR on the voluntary return of thousands of ECOWAS citizens stranded in the Republic of Niger while trying to cross to Europe. ECOWAS is also planning to provide resettlement packages to the returnees to enable their reintegration and establishment on return to their various countries.

On the political and diplomatic front, ECOWAS continues to work to promote good governance and the elimination of drivers of conflict and forced displacement in the region.

Excellences

May I on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission express the appreciation of the ECOWAS region on the excellent relationship between the ECOWAS Commission and UNHCR. It is our sincere wish that both institutions continue to work together to the benefit of our people of concern. Once more, we congratulate the UNHCR on its operations in West Africa and request more assistance from your organisation in settling issues of lingering displacements in the region. The recent decentralisation and regionalisation strategy by UNHCR is important as we hope for closer ties with the ECOWAS Headquarters in Abuja.

Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **H.E. Jean Claude Kassi BROU** I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the UNHCR High Commissioner, **H.E Filippo Grandi** for his relentless efforts in our joint mission to finding durable solutions to issues of displacements. The ECOWAS Commission and the entire region commit to work to this end and to put an end to conflicts in our region and promote development.

I thank you for listening.