

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS ON NEW APPROACHES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS IN AFRICA

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

Mr. High Commissioner,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

These informal consultations on new approaches and partnerships for protection and solutions in Africa has provided a unique forum for discussions with high level delegations from African States, cash donor countries, UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs. I must say that the meeting has indeed lived up to our expectations, with very substantive discussions on a wide range of issues.

Delegations broadly agreed that the Comprehensive Implementation Plan adopted by the Conakry Meeting offers a viable framework for action aimed at meeting the ever more complex protection challenges arising in Africa. Delegations also felt that the new strategy proposed by UNHCR to address protracted refugee situations contained a number of important elements, which could help, if successfully applied, to turn a problem into an opportunity.

It is difficult to reflect the richness of our debate today in a Chairman's Summary. I shall nevertheless try to summarise our discussions by pointing out the main themes that have emerged.

- (a) the need to put refugee protection into its historical and political context in Africa;
- (b) the need to acknowledge Africa's contribution to the development of international refugee law and the concept of international solidarity and burden-sharing;
- (c) the importance of addressing root causes and engaging in conflict prevention;
- (d) the need to strengthen emergency preparedness and response mechanisms;
- (e) the need to support national efforts in legal and institutional capacity building, including training of officials in charge of refugee issues;
- (f) the challenges posed by separating armed elements from the civilian refugee population;
- (g) the nexus between asylum and irregular migration;
- (h) the importance of making sufficient resources and adequate funding available to support countries hosting refugees, both in terms of local capacity building as well as community-based assistance benefiting the local population;
- (i) the importance of adoption and implementation of domestic refugee legislation and administrative procedures.

In the morning discussions on reinvigorating protection in Africa, delegations were generally in favour of associating regional and sub-regional organisations in the management of refugee issues in Africa.

There was a general consensus that the prioritised recommendations for implementation of the CIP offer an adequate framework for action in addressing refugee protection problems in Africa.

A number of States expressed the view that the lack of adequate resources makes it difficult for host countries to live up to their commitment to refugee protection, particularly in view of the daunting challenges posed by large-scale refugee influxes or mixed flows of refugees and economic migrants.

There was therefore a need to do more in terms of burden and responsibility sharing by cash donor countries to support refugee-receiving countries.

Many delegations also emphasised the need to address the root causes of refugee flows by engaging the countries of origin in conflict resolution and good governance, which would both prevent new refugee situations from arising and promote an environment conducive to voluntary repatriation.

In the afternoon session on Addressing Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa, the meeting acknowledged the fact that many host countries in Africa experience economic problems limiting their ability to offer meaningful integration programmes.

Despite these constraints, host countries, with the support of the international community, continue to provide asylum to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Many delegations supported the general principles of self-reliance and empowerment of refugees, provided they were tailored to the individual country situations and supported by additional resources from the international community. Other delegations urged a step-by step approach taking into account the socio-economic realities of the host country.

Considering that self-reliance programmes in Africa are not new, several delegations suggested that lessons learned from previous experience should be taken into account in formulating new approaches.

Delegations from cash donor countries and NGOs were fully supportive of new initiatives to address protracted refugee situations and offered active partnership in these endeavours.

Delegations generally agreed that voluntary repatriation remains the key durable solution to the problem of refugees in Africa. However, it was acknowledged by many that attainment of self-sufficiency pending voluntary repatriation would empower refugees to make a positive contribution to the host country and prepare them for successful reintegration when they eventually return home.

In conclusion, I think we can all be satisfied of these informal consultations, which have offered a unique opportunity for delegations to engage in substantive discussions on the future of refugee protection and the search for durable solutions in Africa.

Delegations have used this opportunity not only to express their concerns at the complexity of current refugee problems, but also to discuss the broad outlines of a strategy to address such problems. Despite the magnitude of the challenges ahead, this augurs well for the future. Now it is time to translate words into deeds and plans into action to make a positive difference in the lives of African refugees for the years to come.

In conclusion, I would like to thank UNHCR for having taken the initiative to organise these Informal Consultations. I have no doubt that the constructive spirit in which they were held signals a renewed commitment to addressing the plight of African refugees.

Thank you.