

**Side Event to the 60th Session of
the Executive Committee**



UNHCR/P. Wiggers

**The African Union's role in the protection
of forcibly displaced persons in Africa**

**Panel discussion moderated by the
Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, Mr. George Okoth-Obbo**

Panelists

**Chief Segun Olusola, Executive Director, African Refugees Foundation
Ambassador Emile Ognimba, Director, AU Department of Political Affairs**

**Dr. Walter Kälin, Representative of the Secretary-General
on the Human Rights of IDPs**

**Mr. Tarsis Bazana Kabwegyere, Ugandan Minister for
Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugees (to be confirmed)**

**Thursday, 1 October
13:30-15:00**

Palais des Nations, Room XXIII

CONCEPT NOTE

“The role of the African Union in the protection of forcibly displaced persons in Africa”

UNHCR, in collaboration with the African Union (AU), will hold a panel discussion on the AU's role in the protection of forcibly displaced persons in Africa. This comes on the eve of the AU's Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, which will take place from 22 to 23 October in Kampala. During the Summit, Heads of State and Government are expected to debate pertinent issues affecting uprooted people on the continent and to adopt the historic *AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa*. The year 2009 also marks the 40th Anniversary of the 1969 OAU Convention.

Africa remains the continent hosting the largest number of persons forcibly displaced by conflict: 2.7 million refugees, 295,000 returned refugees and approximately 11.6 million IDPs. (Climate change and natural disasters are also sources of displacement). Guided by a pan-African spirit, the AU has taken a number of initiatives aimed at consolidating peace on the continent related to the prevention of forced displacement and solutions. These include, *inter alia*, the deployment of peace support operations, the appointment of special envoys and special representatives, and the mobilization of international support for post-conflict reconstruction.

The Special Summit is a further reflection of the commitment of African States towards the realization of solutions for forcibly displaced persons. It will aim to throw a spotlight on current and outstanding challenges and the important initiatives being taken by a number of African countries to prevent displacement and bring closure to protracted situations through comprehensive solution strategies. It is hoped that these positive examples may inspire other States to take similar steps.

The AU Convention on IDPs would be the first legally binding instrument on internal displacement having such broad regional scope. The Convention was inspired by the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* and incorporates relevant provisions of international humanitarian law and international and regional human rights law. The latter includes: the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1986; the Declaration on Gender Equality, July 2004; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, on the Rights of Women, July 2003; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999. The Convention, when adopted, would provide a comprehensive regional framework governing the protection of IDPs.

The development of a normative framework for the continent, in favour of displaced persons, is quite remarkable. The 1969 OAU Convention remains the most generous and flexible international agreement of its kind. It has saved the lives and preserved the futures of millions of persons. It expanded the refugee definition to include, “every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order (...) is compelled to leave” (Art.1.2); reinforced the principle of *non-refoulement* and emphasized the notion of voluntary repatriation.

The 40th anniversary of the OAU Convention draws attention to the steps taken by African States and the AU to address the challenge of forced displacement on the continent. It also creates an opportunity to encourage African States to complete the process of universal accession and full and comprehensive implementation of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and 1969 Conventions. The 1969 African Refugee Convention recognizes that the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol constitute the basic and universal instruments for refugee protection, and functions as “the effective regional complement in Africa” to those instruments.

The Side Event will build upon previous awareness-raising activities for the Special Summit. See reverse side for timing and further details.