

Introductory remarks by Noriko Yoshida, Officer-in-Charge,  
Regional Bureau for Africa, for the overview of UNHCR's operations  
in Africa

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of the High Commissioner's Programme

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Good morning,

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellences,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, Africa is host to a third of the population of concern to UNHCR worldwide. Over three million refugees are scattered across 43 countries, mostly in areas where the host population's needs are also great. The number of internally displaced across the continent is almost triple the number of refugees. There are more than 750,000 stateless people across the continent. The numbers are overwhelming, the suffering experienced by each of the 13 million persons of concern to us is often extreme, and our resources to protect and care for the growing needs are scarce.

Last October, Member States gathered in a High Level Segment on Africa to renew commitments for a set of defined priorities that would

guide our action in 2015 and in the years to come. Some 40 UNHCR Offices in Africa have worked towards progress on the objectives set. They continued to provide support to governments not only to ensure they would keep their doors open to provide safe asylum and protection to the displaced, but also to strengthen the emergency response capacity that is so crucial for the thousands of refugees still fleeing every day from conflicts raging mainly in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and South Sudan.

Efforts to strengthen the protection frameworks for IDPs in Africa are ongoing. Apart from the growing number of signatures and ratifications to the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa*, several African governments made encouraging progress in developing national legislation on internal displacement. However, the delivery of protection to the internally displaced continues to be a challenge, particularly when actual physical protection seems to be in many contexts the most urgent priority for the traumatized men, women and children, caught up in conflict zones.

To bring forward the renewed commitment to end statelessness made during the High Level Segment on Africa and as part of UNHCR's Global Campaign aiming at ending statelessness by 2024, UNHCR and the Economic Community of West African States facilitated the first ministerial-level conference on the matter in Africa, held last week in Côte d'Ivoire.

Progress has also been made to address smuggling and human trafficking across the continent. The *Khartoum Declaration and Plan of Action* is one of the significant steps the African Union, with the support of UNHCR and IOM, took last October, to strengthen the protection environment for the large number of refugees and asylum seekers joining the dangerous migratory flows that often lead to tragic headlines in the news.

Mr. Chairman,

UNHCR's operational landscape in Africa is unfortunately dominated by the response to expanding displacement crises and brutal conflicts that tear apart the lives of more and more African men, women, and children. Sadly, the gains made in terms of repatriation to some countries in the past years have been reversed by these ongoing emergencies. In CAR, Nigeria, South Sudan and elsewhere, conflicts are dividing families, starving children, traumatizing youth, compromising the lives of present and future generations.

In 2015 alone, an estimated 25,000 new refugees fled from CAR to Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo. Half a million people are internally displaced. In South Sudan, efforts to bring fighting parties to an agreement has so far not yielded much fruit. One and a half million people remain displaced inside the country, while thousands cross the borders into Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda every week. In some of these asylum countries, resources are no longer enough to feed the refugee population, land is not sufficient to accommodate the masses of new arrivals; the pressure on host communities is becoming unbearable.

Mr. Chairman,

I now turn to the crisis in Nigeria, which is a growing concern, with major regional implications. The rapidly increasing pace of displacement and the degree of violence being perpetrated against the civilian populations in the north-east of Nigeria have led UNHCR to review our response plans. With attacks recently reaching beyond the Cameroonian, Chadian and Niger borders, we are working tirelessly to scale up our presence and the provision of humanitarian assistance in affected countries.

In this framework of new and aggravating emergencies, we should however not forget that millions of refugees in Africa are in protracted situations that still require our attention and support.

Mr. Chairman,

While we are confronted with emergencies one after another, not everything is grim on the continent. Let me now turn to some positive and encouraging aspects of our work. UNHCR, Governments, host communities, UN and NGO partners, development actors and civil societies are making enormous efforts to allow refugee chapters to be closed through the realization of durable solutions. Decisive steps have been taken for former Angolan refugees. Tens of thousands have returned, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. The Angolan Government is issuing national passports and deploying inter-ministerial teams to host countries to facilitate their nationals' local integration. Host governments are issuing thousands of residence permits, allowing refugees to finally normalize their lives. The socio-economic local integration efforts also continue in Zambia.

The High Commissioner's Global Initiative for Somali Refugees is progressing, after the adoption of the *Addis Ababa Commitment towards Somali Refugees* at the ministerial-level meeting in August 2014. UNHCR is now working on consultations with Governments, humanitarian and development actors and the Somali diaspora to translate this commitment into action.

Spontaneous returns to relatively safe areas of southern Somalia have started and over 1,700 refugees were able to return home from Kenya. Spontaneous returns to Mali and to parts of North Kivu in the DRC are also ongoing. The repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Liberia will resume soon, as Governments are making progress in controlling the outbreak of Ebola in the sub-region. Plans for the 162,000 newly-naturalized Tanzanians originally from Burundi are progressing. Last

year, the number of refugees who were resettled out of Africa was the highest we have ever achieved, with over 32,000 cases submitted and 19,000 refugee departures.

Mr. Chairman,

The state of protection in Africa remains solid overall. We would like to highlight again the enormous and exceptional generosity of African host communities and governments towards people forced to flee their homes. However, instances of *refoulement*, as well as shrinking asylum space in parts of southern and eastern Africa, are posing challenges to the rights of asylum. The civilian character of camps is under threat in several parts of the continent, especially in regions close to conflict areas.

Mr Chairman,

With the number of persons of concern growing due to multiple emergencies, the challenge of saving lives while striving to achieve solutions today is bigger than ever.

Given the current financial situation, emergencies do not have sufficient resources; and fewer funds are allocated to solutions-oriented activities, making protracted situations even more protracted. According to recent estimates, we barely have \$110 per capita per year to address the needs of each person of concern in Africa.

In this context, it is crucial to strengthen partnerships with Governments, the World Bank and other development actors to ensure that UNHCR's persons of concern are included in national and regional development plans.

Let me highlight that UNHCR is taking a number of initiatives to better target interventions and improve performance against key indicators, making the most out of the limited resources available to us. Introduction of biometrics to better target assistance in more of

our key operations is progressing successfully, and the growing number of projects providing cash-based assistance is allowing us to empower refugees and better address their specific needs.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to conclude now by making reference again to the High Level Segment on Africa of last October. It should be recalled that the segment was organized on the theme of *Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacity and Humanitarian Action*. The messages of all the distinguished participants had a common thread: one of solid and reliable partnerships being the way forward to prevent crises, address the consequences of displacement and protect the rights of the displaced people. Conflict and displacement not only affect the displaced, but also Governments, host populations, humanitarian and development actors, and many more. All those affected have the collective responsibility to contribute to build a ‘displacement-free’ Africa, where peace and stability allow the enormous potentialities of African people and land to progress and develop in the years to come.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.