

Statement of the Director of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa

Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (83rd meeting)

8-10 March 2022

**The Chairperson of the Executive Committee,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Warm Greetings from Dakar. I come before the March Standing Committee deeply aware of the challenging times that we are facing and which have been the subject of updates by other bureaux since yesterday. I welcome the call by the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner on the need to respond to the monumental needs arising from the Ukraine Situation while sustaining our attention on the multiple fronts that require our emergency responses around the world. We must do both and know that we can also count on the support of you, the members of the Executive Committee for this.

As we indicated in our Update on UNHCR's Operations in the West and Central Africa region, recent political instability in the region have engendered high levels of uncertainty in a region that was already grappling with myriad challenges which have forced massive numbers of people from their homes. There is a real risk of further displacement within the Central Sahel and southwards to the coastal countries. We are now working with relevant governments to re-evaluate the risks and revise contingency plans.

Chairperson, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Last December, UNHCR declared a level 2 Emergency in Chad to ensure an effective emergency response to the sudden influx of refugees from Cameroon's Far North region. We remain very thankful to the Government of Chad for continued hospitality and generosity in the face of this new crisis. Let me mention that we have agreed with the Government of Chad to maintain a hybrid approach to the refugee relocation and settlement allowing for both camp and out-of-camp approaches. In this regard, we continue to establish formal sites for the relocation of the refugees away from the border and are paying attention to the prevailing delicate inter-ethnic issues. Inside Cameroon, we are working with the Government and other actors on the emergency response to new IDPs from the same crisis but also for solutions, in particular, to address the tensions over resources, especially water. On the financial side, a supplementary budget has been established and appeal put out. An inter-agency refugee response plan for the next 12 months is set to be launched.

Overall, the **protection** environment across the region remains very fragile. With strong support of the UK Government through the FCDO, we have linked up with other actors to scale up protection monitoring, particularly in the Central Sahel where a collaboration with the Danish Refugee Council is enabling the collection and analysis of key protection data to ensure evidence-based programming and to ensure that cross-border coordination is enhanced by a shared and common analysis. After an initial pilot phase, we are expanding this project to more countries within the region.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to solutions. You will recall that during the 2021 plenary session of ExCom, the High Commissioner recommended to states the cessation of status for Ivorian refugees to take effect on 30 June 2022. We had further recommended to government to consider making this announcement at the beginning of this year. Let me take this opportunity to commend the governments of Liberia and of Benin for the formal actions they have taken to invoke cessation of refugee status for this group of refugees in their respective countries. We continue to work with governments to ensure implementation of all other actions in the Roadmap for Comprehensive Solutions for Ivorian refugees. Crucially, we continue with sensitisation to ensure that all refugees understand their options.

Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

We continue to work with Governments to search for solutions for forced displacement including of refugees and IDPs. In this regard, and with thanks to the Government of Cameroon, a regional ministerial meeting on solutions for the forcibly displaced, among them refugees from the Central African Republic is planned in Yaounde, Cameroon at the end of April.

Mr. Chairperson,

Considering that the Sahel is considered one of the “hotspot areas for Climate change”, I would be remiss not to update you on measures to mitigate the risks of Climate Change and climate adaptation strategies being instituted. Following the release by the High Commissioner of the Strategic Framework for Climate Action, we have carried out a preliminary internal review of our actions to mitigate or adapt to Climate change. We started the review in our operations in the Central Sahel and plan to expand to other countries in the region by the end of the first semester as a precursor to the development of a regional climate action plan.

The Deputy High Commissioner spoke about the ongoing improvements to UNHCR’s systems and tools through the Business Transformation Programme. Alongside the gradual roll-out, we are also taking measures to ensure that policy revisions aimed at ensuring simplification and efficiency are implemented by field operations. A case in point is the delegation of some authorities right down to the sub-office level. Let me also confirm that we are taking measures to implement the new policy on Accountability

to Affected Populations. The Division of International Protection is helping us bring in additional staff to work with countries in the region not only to ensure a fuller understanding of the revised policy by our staff and beneficiaries but crucially to ensure that our beneficiaries, including women and girls, know what they can and should expect from us.

I would not conclude without confirming that we continue to remain attentive to the health, well-being and safety needs of our staff, many of them in very high-risk environments.

Chairperson, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In spite of the numerous challenges we are facing in the region, I remain hopeful for what we, as UNHCR can do and because of the progress we have made over the last year, thanks to your enduring support.

I thank you.