

Statement by Secretary General, Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland

High Level Segment on Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacities and Humanitarian Action for Refugees in Africa

65<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee

29 September 2014 pm

I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres for his invitation to speak at this important event: *Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacities and Humanitarian Action for Refugees in Africa*.

By the end of 2013, one in three of the world's displaced people resided on the African continent. I commend the nations of Africa for their solidarity and generosity for opening their borders and bearing the primary burden for the millions displaced on the continent. Today, Nigeria is facing record displacement, the Horn of Africa and South Sudan are on the precipice of famine, West Africa has the worst Ebola outbreak the world has ever seen, whilst civilians are gripped in a protection crisis in the Central African Republic. Despite these enormous challenges, the world's attention remains largely focused elsewhere, leaving humanitarian responses in Africa under-resourced and politically strained.

**Access:** As humanitarians, we have faced tremendous access challenges in 2013 and 2014, either due to conflict, funding limitations or worsening seasonal conditions. The continued attacks and killings of humanitarian workers serving displaced populations in contexts such as CAR, South Sudan, and Mali is unacceptable. Three months ago, I was in Mali due to the tragic deaths of two of my colleagues killed by a roadside bomb when traveling home after a day working on our legal assistance and shelter programmes with Malian IDPs. I urge all of us in this room today to condemn and demand immediate action for the erosion of respect for humanitarian workers – there can be - and there is - no excuse for attacks on humanitarian workers.

**Partnership:** I commend UNHCR's continued efforts to strengthen partnership with civil society, building on the High Commissioner's own 'Structured Dialogue' process in 2012. These efforts are timely and needed. I also welcome the development of UNHCR's Guidance Note on Engagement in IDP settings and work on defining the Refugee Coordination Model. My organization has been working with UNHCR and other partners on these notes and models. I urge that now is the time to focus on legitimate implementation in the field where NGOs are engaged as strategic and complementary partners, including in the area of the project partnership agreement. Ultimately true partnership requires appreciation of all of our distinct and complementary roles in the service of the estimated 15.8 million refugees and IDPs in Africa.

**Prevention:** As we move into 2015, I would like to urge increased focus on prevention. It is without doubt, much more effective to address food insecurity before it becomes a famine, just as it is much easier to address community tensions before they spiral into sectarian violence. We cannot wait until a situation is classified as a famine or gross violations before we act – even if it is difficult politically – preventative action is cost effective, saves lives and makes recovery easier.

Two weeks ago at the UN Secretariat in New York, I launched the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC) Global Estimates report with Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson. The report tracks the number of people displaced each year by disasters such as floods, droughts, and typhoons. In 2013, 22 million people around the world were newly displaced by disasters – almost three times the number that were newly displaced by conflict or violence. The trends between the 1970s and today are clear: there has been an exponential increase in disaster-induced displacement. While Africa is not yet experiencing the worst of these effects, we know from climate experts, and from witnessing the changing landscapes in the Sahel and Eastern Africa, that the impacts on the African continent are only likely to worsen. African nations and the African Union have been leading efforts to highlight the need for increased prioritization of disaster risk reduction in order to prevent further displacement in the region – which I wholeheartedly support.

**Funding:** Underfunding is hampering humanitarian response in Africa – even where we have the L3 emergencies in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. With an estimated 60% of funding now going to L3s, other protracted crisis in countries such as Mali, the DRC, and Somalia are left struggling to make ends meet. We should begin looking at creative solutions for how to solve the funding shortfalls, and especially how funds can more quickly be directed to INGOs and NNGOs, particularly to support rapid start-up as INGOs and NNGOs perform the majority of the operations on the ground. Similarly, ensuring proportionality between refugee and IDP funding is critical.

**Protection:** It is clear that there is room for improvement in the area of the protection of IDPs and refugees in Africa. Earlier in the year I visited the Central Africa Republic where tens of thousands of Muslims are hiding in enclaves, unable to leave because of the threats by the Anti-Balaka militia. Despite all of our progress with standards, coordination and systems, we still lack adequate means or solutions to address many of the incredibly difficult protection dilemmas that we faced decades earlier in Srebrenica and Rwanda.

Similarly, over the past 30 years I have visited South Sudan many times, and I watched the shift from a country devastated by conflict, to one filled with a promise of recovery. I was on the barges with the Southerners returning to their homes in Bor after 20 years away, and it was an incredibly hopeful time. But when I returned earlier this year, it was devastating to see the progress achieved after the last decade unravelling and the world's newest country descending back into war and violence. Today, nearly 100,000 people are sheltering in peacekeeping bases, preferring to stay in appalling conditions rather than risk being left without protection. Millions more are caught in the conflict and lack access to basic goods and services, whilst facing immense protection challenges including profound risk of gender based violence. It is we, here in this room, and our colleagues on the ground, that must work to change this situation – but the only real solution will be delivered through political leadership.

I firmly believe in African leadership for Africa – I look forward to this leadership bringing a quick and lasting end to South Sudan's devastating conflict. We have seen the leadership displayed in the area of protection of IDPs with the Kampala Convention. A first of its kind - which other regions could and should replicate - 22 countries have now ratified the Kampala convention. My own organization works with many African nations to support implementation.

**Recovery and Solutions:** Emerging from displacement is not an easy process, and the past decades have taught us that we must begin work towards solutions much earlier in the humanitarian program cycle. New actors and new partnerships are needed as we navigate ever more complex displacement crises such as the multiple displacements that are now the norm in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or the protracted insecurity in Somalia. Norwegian Refugee Council is encouraged by the renewed commitment to durable solutions this year through the Solutions Alliance and regional initiatives such as the Global Initiative for Somali Refugees, and hopes that these projects can take on new options that lead to tangible benefits for the people on the ground.

**Leadership and local capacity:** Over the last decade African nations, civil society and NGOs have increasingly led and been involved in humanitarian response and recovery activities. African regional organizations are increasingly taking a greater role in responding to crises on the continent, and have championed African leadership for African issues. I firmly believe that this trend will radically improve the way prevention, preparedness, response and recovery is taken forward in the region. The African Union's Ebola Response Team demonstrates the potential of regional capacity that is waiting to be tapped into as we think about how to respond to emergencies. My own organization recently signed an MOU with IGAD focused on strengthening competencies in a number of key areas including protection, and we employ thousands of African's across the continent.

Prevention, the need for funding, and protection gaps – we have discussed all of these issues many times. These are challenging times in many countries around the world, and only through strong partnership and solidarity can we hope to achieve improved support to refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons in Africa. Norwegian Refugee Council looks forward to continuing its work with UNHCR and African nations, and we hope that there will be many more opportunities in the near future to discuss how we can tackle these important issues together.