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AFRICA DO OESTE



ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
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COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE DES ETATS
DE L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

**Address of the Commissioner Social Affairs and Gender of the ECOWAS
Commission Dr. Siga Fatima Jagne on the Occasion of the 71st UNHCR Executive
Committee Meeting (EXCOM)**

05 - 09 October, 2020

SPEECH

*ECOWAS COMMISSION
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Your Excellency, the Chair Person of the 71st EXCOM

Your Excellency the High Commissioner for Refugees,

Excellences,

Distinguished Participants,

It is my pleasure to address the 71st ExCom on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **H.E. Jean Claude Kassi BROU**. I wish to convey the greetings of the ECOWAS Commission and that of the people of the West African region to the High Commissioner of the UNHCR, **H.E Filippo Grandi** and his hard-working team for the enormous efforts you are putting to reduce negative impact of displacement on populations around the world particularly, in the ECOWAS region. **The Your Excellency, the ECOWAS Commission aligns itself with the statement of the African group.**

The situation of displacement in the world has continued to worsen year after year. In 2020, West Africa has witnessed unprecedented rise in population displacements, predominantly caused by insurgencies and internal crisis. Another critical factor is climate induced disasters. Studies show that on the average, as many as 27 million people become displaced from their homes every decade because of natural disasters. West Africa has its fair share of perennial drought and flood disasters displacing thousands of people. A combination of these factors has brought displacement figures in the region over the 7 million mark. The humanitarian situation in the context of the COVID – 19 pandemic has been made worse, severely hurting displaced population and other persons of concern.

The ECOWAS Commission is assiduously working with our Member States, UNHCR and other partners at sub regional and state levels to support displaced populations as well as host and affected communities to cope with the critical effects of displacement and the COVID – 19 pandemic.

Accordingly, the Commission has outlined short, medium and long-term initiatives to address these humanitarian concerns. In the short-term, the ECOWAS Commission has provided food palliatives worth over 3 million Dollars to the most vulnerable population in Member States severely impacted by the effects of conflicts and the COVID – 19 pandemic. The Commission has also mobilized additional funds to extend humanitarian support to all other ECOWAS states affected by severe flood disasters in 2020, noting the additional strain on the social and economic well-being of the people resulting from the effects of the COVID – 19 pandemic.

In the medium and long-term, ECOWAS through its political, diplomatic and legal structures has been working to eliminate certain drivers of forced displacement such as conflicts. In the same vein, the Commission is building capacities of Member States to enhance electoral processes,

good governance, peaceful making and peace building. Through its regional programmes, ECOWAS is equally promoting economic resilience and development to encourage the shrinking and elimination of the humanitarian-development divide.

Excellences,

Linked directly to ECOWAS efforts to tackle the drivers of displacement is the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). The 2016 United Nations New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants is a landmark political declaration to improve the way the international community responds to the large movement of refugees and migrants as well as to protracted refugee situations.

In this regard, implementing commitments made by ECOWAS Member States at the First Global Forum in December, 2019 is of paramount importance. To achieve this significant objective, ECOWAS is closely collaborating with UNHCR to expedite actions towards the implementation of these commitments.

Along this line, ECOWAS and UNHCR just held an informative session on the GCR for the staff of the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Parliament. The major objective of this meeting was to ensure appropriate institutional participation towards supporting Member States to mainstream GCR principles in national programmes for robust and timely implementation at country level.

In furtherance to the above initiative, one of the cardinal programmes planned by ECOWAS in 2021 is the organisation of regional experts' and ministerial meetings on the development of a regional strategy for the implementation of the GCR in the ECOWAS region. This programme was planned to hold in 2020 but was interrupted by the current COVID – 19 pandemic.

The goal of these regional meetings is aligned to the objectives of the GCR which seek to ease the pressures on host countries by strengthening the resilience of refugees and their host communities, particularly through greater cooperation. To this end, ECOWAS calls for an all society approach to finding durable solutions to displacement in the ECOWAS space.

Excellences

The Search for solutions could meet with challenges, nonetheless, there are opportunities that could be seized by ECOWAS, Member States and host communities in line with burden and responsibility sharing to achieve our goals in record time. It is my strong conviction that we can change the existing narrative on displacement if all stakeholders work towards the burden and responsibility sharing formula.

At this juncture, the ECOWAS Commission wishes to recognise and extol the rare partnership existing between the ECOWAS Commission and the UNHCR. We express our sincere appreciations to the UNHCR, particularly the UNHCR Country Office in Nigeria. We congratulate

the UNHCR for its recent regionalization and decentralization strategy. This will better position the organisation to function more effectively in the regions and countries. While applying this important reform, the UNHCR should anticipate possible initial challenges of coordination. ECOWAS and UNHCR need to deepen their partnership to ensure more outcomes. There is need to create a seamless interface between UNHCR regional Office in Dakar and the ECOWAS Headquarters in Abuja.

Excellences, Distinguished Participants,

May I on behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, **H.E. Jean Claude Kassi BROU** express our sincere thanks to the High Commissioner of the UNHCR, **H.E Filippo Grandi** for his recent visit to ECOWAS region where he inaugurated an innovative housing site in the Republic of Niger that aims to address urgent and growing humanitarian needs in the Sahel region of West Africa. The ECOWAS Commission will continue working with the UNHCR to develop long-term solutions for refugees and vulnerable persons in the ECOWAS region.

I thank you for listening.