

MARCH STANDING COMMITTEE 2023

RBSA Director's Remarks (Standard: 5 mins, Maximum: 7 mins)

WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2023

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am greatly honoured to join you today and to provide an update on UNHCR's operations in the southern Africa region.

The Regional Bureau for southern Africa covers 16 countries, which together hosted 9.8 million population we serve at the end of 2022. This includes some 8.7 million internally displaced people and IDP returnees, as well as 1.1 million refugees, asylum-seekers and refugee returnees. Southern Africa's **displacement landscape is diverse and varied**. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) accounts for over two-thirds of the people UNHCR serves in the region, and the crisis in the country continues to be one of the most protracted humanitarian situations in the world. Mozambique is the second largest emergency in the region. Besides these emergencies, the region is also home to long-standing and forgotten situations. Refugees have been living in camps or settlements for decades in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Displaced persons in urban areas are integrated in host communities in the

Republic of the Congo and South Africa. Furthermore, Comoros, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa are among the countries most impacted by mixed movements.

In Southern Africa, economic instability, social inequalities, the impacts of COVID-19, conflicts, climate change and food insecurity are intertwined and cause **great challenges** to humanitarian work. The ongoing instability in eastern DRC and northern Mozambique poses high protection risks to communities, reduces humanitarian access and puts humanitarian personnel at risk, including UNHCR staff.

Countries in the region are also vulnerable to the effects of the war in Ukraine, ranging from food and fuel shortages to surging commodity prices, which further deepen the socioeconomic and development crises. According to the 2022 Global Report on [Food Crises](#), over 43 million people in the region experienced acute food insecurity last year. It is expected that the food-insecure population will increase to 55 million by March 2023.

Lastly, extreme weather events recurrently cause loss of life and destruction of property and livelihoods in the region. The adverse impacts of climate change have especially devastating consequences for refugees and internally displaced populations.

Chairperson,

With great pride, I wish to highlight some **key achievements**.

First, we continued to enhance protection and solutions through the promotion of strengthened asylum systems. We engaged with States and the Pan Africa Parliament on a Model Law on Nationality in Africa and reinforced the capacity of our partners and of communities to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. We also supported States to reduce asylum backlogs by 7 per cent. Moreover, we assisted 18,300 refugees in returning to Burundi, Central African Republic, the DRC and Rwanda and submitted 6,700 refugees for resettlement.

Second, our region carried on enhancing and delivering effective **emergency preparedness and responses**. In 2022, following Cyclone Gombe's devastating impact in Mozambique, UNHCR declared an internal Level 2 emergency response, building sustainable, climate-resilient housing, repairing infrastructure and kickstarting a longer-term engagement for protection mainstreaming within national systems. Similarly, UNHCR in the DRC organized situational emergency trainings for partners, UNHCR and the Government, including building capacity for rapid deployment.

Third, we kept advancing **education and livelihoods inclusion** in the region through partnerships. In 2022, we supported 76,600 refugee children, including girls (48%) to access education. Furthermore, 396 scholarships were awarded to young refugees through the DAFI programme. 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of DAFI program, representing a remarkable history of supporting refugees and returnees to access tertiary education. In Mozambique, a three-year project was launched to improve the socioeconomic conditions of 4,000 displaced

persons and host community members. In Zimbabwe, the Government availed 100 hectares for agricultural activities for refugees and host communities.

Lastly, regional partnerships with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), academia and development actors helped us improve lives. SADC adopted an action plan on asylum, statelessness and inclusion; the University of Cape Town and the International Association of Refugee and Migrant Judges trained 100 judges and legal practitioners on refugee law and statelessness; and the World Bank and the African Development Bank funded projects to connect 1,500 households to the national electricity grid in Mozambique.

Chairperson,

Moving ahead, UNHCR in Southern Africa will **prioritize the following**:

First, UNHCR will work with the stakeholders who made 146 pledges at the 2019 **Global Refugee Forum** to ensure effective implementation and prepare for new pledges during the next forum, scheduled for December 2023.

Second, we will continue strengthening **our emergency preparedness and response capacity** through strategic partnerships and protection mainstreaming.

Third, we will keep **advancing regional partnerships and collaboration to bolster the protection response and provide multi-sector assistance**. UNHCR will also continue working with development partners, NGOs and other stakeholders to support the inclusion of

displaced populations in national services and the mainstreaming of protection in development programmes.

Chairperson,

Before concluding my remarks, I must speak of the **concerning funding situation** in Southern Africa. The region has dire and long-running crises, and while the humanitarian needs greatly increased in 2022, the funding level unfortunately did not keep pace. The food situation in 2023 will be especially challenging due to reduced funding availability of both UNHCR and WFP. Our Bureau and all operations in the region have been forced to re-prioritize our activities more than before and worked around the clock to diversify donor bases and attract additional resources. However, that was far from enough. Millions of lives suffered and will continue to suffer from the consequences of underfunding. We count on your continued support to secure protection and assistance to the most vulnerable.

Chairperson,

On behalf of the Regional Bureau for southern Africa and all UNHCR operations in the region, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to our donors and partners for the support they have given to us in 2022. We look forward to continuing working with you to reduce human suffering and rebuild hope for those forcibly displaced in Southern Africa region in 2023 and beyond.

Thank you very much.

****End of Speech****

Additional Background information

- Angola has submitted a request to become an EXCOM member. While the General Assembly 3rd Commission has adopted the draft resolution in November 2022 to increase the membership, the ECOSOC has set 5 April 2023 to convene a dedicated Management meeting to conduct elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC and related bodies. We hope that this will then conclude the process of Angola's membership to EXCOM.

The End.