

MARCH STANDING COMMITTEE 2022

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

Wednesday 9 March 2022, 15:00 (Geneva Time)

Speech Length: 794 words

Reading Time: 7 mins

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is my great pleasure 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 host more than 9 million persons of concern to UNHCR by the end of 2021.

This included around 6.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), nearly 1.1 million refugees and asylum-seekers and more than 1 million IDP returnees.

Several trends continued in our region and brought **multiple challenges** to our work. First, **worrying socioeconomic trends** worsened by the COVID-

19 pandemic severely affected persons of concern and host countries in the region. Second, the continued **deterioration of security** in Eastern DRC and Northern Mozambique posed risks to persons of concern and created further displacement while impacting our staff and our capacity to access those in need. Third, despite joint efforts with WFP, concerns remain related to **food security** in the absence of livelihood possibilities. Furthermore, **climate change and natural disasters** are negatively impacting refugees and IDPs in the region and may lead to further forced displacement and vulnerability.

Chairperson,

While facing these complex challenges, UNHCR staff persevered with delivering life-saving assistance and providing protection and solutions, by living up to their commitment to stay and deliver, supported by the Bureau's constant efforts to enhance duty of care, particularly for staff in high-risk environments. In the interest of time, I will focus on a few key **achievements**.

First, our region responded effectively to emergencies in 2021. UNHCR in the DRC and Republic of Congo responded to the refugee influx from the Central African Republic. A total of 51,700 new arrivals were assisted, through the implementation of out of camp policy. Further, the DRC was

impacted by the volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo. More than 13,000 people were assisted with emergency protection and life-saving assistance. Meanwhile, UNHCR continued the emergency response in Mozambique and stepped up substantially in taking on our Cluster responsibilities.

Second, UNHCR continued to enhance protection and solutions. We have supported States in the region to strengthen asylum systems. For instance, UNHCR signed a “backlog project” agreement with the Ministry of Home Affairs in South Africa last year aiming to reduce 88 per cent of pending asylum applications. Furthermore, **Cash-based interventions** were mainstreamed in regular programming and over 222,000 vulnerable people received cash assistance in 2021. In addition, **durable solutions** were provided for more than 14,000 refugees who repatriated voluntarily and for 1,300 persons who departed for resettlement.

Third, regional initiatives and partnerships yielded fruitful results. UNHCR developed an Africa-wide action plan with the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges. A training centre is up and running in Cape Town, aiming to train 2,000 legal practitioners and judges by 2023 in the Southern Africa region. We continued to lead coordination and fundraising with more than 60 inter-agency partners under the DRC Regional Refugee Response Plan and convened virtual Regional NGO

Consultations that involved around 600 participants. Furthermore, partnering with the World Bank and the African Development Bank, we advanced inclusion of persons of concern into 10 development projects in four country operations in the region.

Fourth, UNHCR leveraged technology to energize innovative operational responses. The use of solar-powered boreholes was intensified in Malawi and Zimbabwe, and the reliability of the water distribution systems was improved by piloting real-time monitoring technology. The instant network school programme by UNHCR and the Vodafone Foundation was expanded to 12 schools in the DRC and 10 schools in Mozambique.

Chairperson,

Moving forward, UNHCR in the Southern Africa region has **prioritized the following aspects:**

First, we will **continue providing support to secure protection and advance solutions** for persons of concern, including supporting countries to implement pledges made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and the high-level segment on statelessness.

Second, we will reinforce **emergency preparedness and response** for the ongoing emergencies in the DRC and Mozambique and strengthen training for our staff and partners in countries prone to emergencies.

Third, we will continue to place **emphasis on inclusion and empowerment** by scaling up advocacy and support for governments to secure the inclusion of persons of concern in national systems and empowering refugees in delivering protection through effective community engagement.

Fourth, we will **enhance regional partnerships and collaboration** including continuing the implementation of the five-year joint action plan (2020-2024) with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and strengthening cooperation with other UN agencies such as IOM, ILO and UNODC in the region.

Chairperson,

To conclude, the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa sincerely thank our donors and partners for the great generosity and invaluable support. We look forward to continuing joining hands with you to reduce human suffering and rebuild life in the region in the years ahead.

Thank you.
