

EXCOM 9-13 October 2023

Statement by H.E Abdihakim Hassan Ashkir, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs & Reconciliation

Federal Republic of Somalia

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates, and honored guests,

I extend my warmest greetings on behalf of the Government of Somalia as we gather here today. We appreciate the opportunity to address this esteemed assembly and express our gratitude to the High Commissioner for his unwavering commitment and support for Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa region, Yemen, and our internally displaced persons (IDPs).

First and foremost, we wish to thank the countries in the region, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda, and Yemen, for their continued support in providing asylum to Somali refugees since the onset of the Somali civil war in 1991. Our heartfelt thanks also go to the donor countries and international non-governmental organizations, with special recognition for UNHCR Somalia for their invaluable assistance.

As my government has emphasized in various international forums, Somalia has been grappling with significant challenges, including armed conflicts, droughts, and floods that have led to protracted displacement. It is crucial to highlight the prevailing issues:

More than 3.8 million people are displaced in Somalia and some 6.7 million people are struggling to meet their food needs. More than half a million Somali children are severely malnourished.

Today, there are 714,390 Somali refugees and asylum seekers living in neighboring countries like Kenya (308,367), Ethiopia (276,412), Uganda (69,533) and Yemen (46,750). More than 35,600 refugees and asylum seekers live inside the country and nearly 3 million people are internally displaced across Somalia.

Since the end of 2014, 125,000+ people have voluntarily returned to Somalia, mainly with assistance from international organizations, including UNHCR. Most of these returnees came from Kenya.

Distinguished delegates, over the past years, Somalia have faced numerous challenges that continue to impact our nation. These include:

The fight with Al-Shabaab as the government is retaking land back at a record pace. The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs & Reconciliation has been taking the lead on stabilization of these retaken lands. We are also facing flooding and recurring droughts, which have displaced hundreds of thousands of people. We commend the government, the Somali community, and the international community for their remarkable efforts to mitigate the impact of these natural disasters.

We must acknowledge that addressing displacement has traditionally been approached from a humanitarian perspective for nearly three decades. While this approach has been critical and life-saving, it is no longer sufficient or sustainable on its own. The recurrent and protracted nature of the many crises reinforced the importance of longer term interventions that address humanitarian needs as well as development and peace-building challenges, building long-term resilience and peaceful robust communities. We now require development and durable solutions to address these challenges urgently.

The Somali Government recently passed National Policy on Refugee-returnees and IDPs; National Eviction Guidelines and the Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Refugee-returnees and IDPs. The policy and the administrative regulations provide displacement affected communities with various rights. For example, the National Eviction Guideline provides the right to administrative and judicial review in the event of evictions. However, IDPs and other affected vulnerable communities face barriers to access to justice, including lack of available and affordable legal representation and lack of adequate legal aid systems, among others that will hinder displacement affected communities from exercising those rights. Support is needed to fully implement these policies and regulations.

We proudly note that Somalia has adopted and ratified the Kampala Convention, which guides African displacements. This IDP Act will be brought to the council of Minister and parliament soon. Somalia was one of the original signatories to this important agreement.

We are also equally pleased to inform that the Refugee Bill was also recently passed by the Federal Parliament and will be brought before the Senate to be finalized into law. This marks a great step towards providing a legal framework for the management of refugee affairs at the country. We look forward to support from the international community on implementation of this law as well as building the capacity of various asylum institutions that will work together towards enhancing the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in the areas under their jurisdiction.

Ladies and gentlemen, Somalia's stabilization progress is taking root, and we are committed to a comprehensive approach to finding durable solutions for the displaced. We believe that an area-based approach,

focusing on IDPs, refugees, returnees, and host communities, is the most suitable method to address this issue holistically. This approach promotes social cohesion and minimizes resource-based conflicts. Districts and municipalities play a vital role in facilitating returns and require strengthened capacities and resources.

We acknowledge that taking on this issue holistically will increase the government's burden and necessitate significant investment and capacity building at both federal and regional levels. Cooperation among humanitarian and development agencies, as well as support from the donor community, will be essential.

We must address the persistent lack of adequate resources from the international community, which also affects our efforts to receive and reintegrate returnees. We request UNHCR to have the flexibility to implement quick impact projects to meet the immediate needs of returnees and avoid any disruptions that could hinder voluntary repatriation.

In conclusion, while the needs and challenges on the ground remain substantial, there is a window of opportunity for all stakeholders to work together and enhance the capacity of receiving communities, expand access to basic services, and create livelihood opportunities. This collaborative effort requires flexible mandates without relinquishing responsibilities. We, therefore, urge UNHCR to maintain its role in repatriation and reintegration.

I extend my gratitude to all participants and wish you fruitful deliberations as we collectively strive to find durable solutions for the displaced in Somalia. Thank you.