

Eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee

Statement by Ms. Chansa Kapaya

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Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is my first address to this august assembly since taking up my new role as Director for the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa two months ago. I would like to seize this opportunity to update you on key developments and the main priorities in the region.

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to begin by thanking the governments of the Southern Africa region who continue to receive and protect forcibly displaced and stateless persons, despite socio-economic challenges, prolonged conflicts in some parts and adverse effects of climate change with limited resources to respond.

The conflict in **the Democratic Republic of the Congo** remains a major concern. In the past weeks, over 144,000 civilians have fled their homes near Sake town towards Goma. Women and children are paying the price of the conflict in the absence of political and diplomatic solutions to the crisis.

The new displacement in eastern DRC is compounded by a pre-existing pressing humanitarian situation. More than 7 million people remain internally displaced across the country, including half a million refugees. Both groups contend with inadequate basic services and limited income-generating opportunities. In 2023, UNHCR recorded 114,000 human rights violations, including 9,600 cases of GBV. The humanitarian needs in the DRC as reflected in the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan requires US\$ 2.6 billion to help some 8.7 million people.

The 2024-2025 inter- agency Regional Refugee Response Plan launched by UNHCR at the end of February to provide protection, assistance and solutions to some 950,000 Congolese refugees currently hosted in 7 neighboring countries will require US \$668.3 million to respond to the plan in 2024.

Turning to **Mozambique**, the humanitarian situation in the Cabo Delgado province where I visited last week with the High Commissioner continues to be complex and dynamic, triggered by continuous attacks of armed groups, which has resulted in the forced displacement of 709,000 persons, including 45,957 who were recently displaced from Chiure district in Cabo Delgado to Erati in Nampula province.

Civilian populations are exposed to a multitude of protection risks, despite constrained resources, the government has relentlessly made efforts to assist the displaced and in support, several UN agencies and NGO partners have established a presence responding to the needs of the displaced in Cabo Delgado. The Government is seeking longer term solutions to the displacement.

UNHCR and IOM are working together to support five countries in the region (Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), using a route-based approach to address mixed movements, in coordination with the Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa & Great Lakes. UNHCR's presence at the border areas of the 5 countries will be reinforced to support border management officials on the identification and management of refugees and migrants. A concept note is under development to guide the approach.

This year, **Zambia** adopted a progressive refugee policy. When operationalized through the Refugee Act, the policy will safeguard the socioeconomic rights of refugees in the country. There is a momentum to realize long-term solutions for refugees and former refugees due to the government's political will including engagement of development actors. Zambia is in the process of accessing the World Bank International Development Aid (IDA 20) grant, under the Window for Host Communities and Refugees.

South Africa has taken a step to harmonize three key legislations on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection. UNHCR is working with South Africa to ensure potential conflict does not arise between the three legislations.

On statelessness, we applaud **the Republic of Congo** for ratifying the two conventions on statelessness in 2023. Elsewhere in the region, Malawi and Namibia's policy and law reforms are ongoing to remove barriers to statelessness, including gender discrimination in nationality laws.

The Republic of Congo and Zambia are committed to include refugees in their national systems, through national social protection and the issuance of identity documents, which pave the way for inclusion in national development plans.

In Angola, the government launched the registration of all refugees, the outcome will address the asylum application backlog of 28,000 asylum seekers. In **Malawi**, I was briefed on the refugee law review process; the revised law will be instrumental in promoting a progressive approach to the refugee protection framework and refugee management.

On the regional front, UNHCR and SADC continue to implement the 2019 Regional Policy Framework on Management of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, as well as stateless persons. A regional workplan to address asylum application backlogs, remove barriers to asylum, promote inclusion and reduce the risk of statelessness, has been jointly developed with the SADC Secretariat in support of Member States.

Recalling commitments from stakeholders in the Southern Africa region, increased participation was recorded from the 2019 and 2023 Global Refugee Forum with 202 pledges. There was high participation of UN Country Teams in 9 countries, NGOs, Refugee-led Organizations and Private sector Organizations.

To conclude, allow me to express sincere gratitude to our donors and partners for the invaluable support to UNHCR. In 2024, we shall continue to join hands with you to provide life-saving and longer-term solutions for the forcibly displaced and stateless populations in the Southern Africa region.

Thank you for your kind attention.