

47th MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

(2-4 March 2010)

REGIONAL STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Bureau for Africa

Part A: Introduction - critical challenges

- Ongoing and new emergencies in various African countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan's Darfur region and Somalia, caused new displacement during 2009.
- Somalia experienced substantial forced displacement, with more than 1.5 million of its citizens uprooted. Continuing fighting in Mogadishu and the border areas triggered a new influx of refugees into Kenya. The Dadaab refugee camps have become among the most challenging operational environments for UNHCR, with continually increasing congestion. Somalis have also been moving further to Nairobi in steadily increasing numbers, straining UNHCR's registration and screening capacities.
- In Sudan's Darfur region, intense military confrontations at the beginning of 2009 caused the displacement of some 137,000 people. While these military confrontations have abated, the overall security situation remains difficult and continues to hinder access to displaced populations.
- Meanwhile, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is entering a critical phase. Presidential and parliamentary elections – the first in twenty-four years – are expected to take place in April 2010, followed by the run up to the referendum in 2011 which will determine whether the south will remain united with the north or will opt for independence. During 2009, inter-ethnic conflict in the Jonglei and Upper Nile States resulted in the deaths of more than 2,000 people and the displacement of thousands more.
- Other long running conflicts in Africa, often removed from international media attention, continued to cause suffering and displacement. Last year, 125,000 refugees fled from the Central African Republic (CAR) to neighbouring Chad and Cameroon, while a further 197,000 were displaced internally. Hostilities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) led to further displacement, aggravating the dire humanitarian situation, hindering economic recovery and impeding the return of more than two million IDPs and refugees.
- A dispute over fishing rights, which involves an ethnic dimension, has forced some 108,000 persons from the DRC's Equateur Province to flee to the Republic of Congo and some 18,000 to flee to the CAR.
- During the year, Angola and the DRC received thousands of each other's nationals, including both refugees and asylum-seekers. In Angola, the sudden influx created an emergency situation which received an inter-agency response. UNHCR is continuing to work with the Governments of Angola and the DRC to re-establish mechanisms for the voluntary repatriation of refugees in conditions of safety and dignity.
- In several key operations, the support of peacekeepers is critical to providing a framework of security within which humanitarian activities can operate, and to ensuring the physical security of refugees and IDPs as well as the civilian and humanitarian character of camps. The presence of peacekeepers in eastern Chad, for example, helps to dissuade attacks on the refugee camps, discourage recruitment, particularly of children, and reduce the threat of banditry and sexual violence. UNHCR is deeply concerned that this critical line of protection in Chad could be

jeopardized if the mandate for MINURCAT (the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad) is not renewed in mid-March.

- The Chad, DRC, Somalia and Sudan operations, in particular, present UNHCR with extremely challenging environments where the imperatives of continuing critical humanitarian programmes and ensuring staff safety are not easy to reconcile. Managing operations in these complex situations is demanding in every sense, including in terms of resources. UNHCR has, since the beginning of the year, been systematically reviewing contingency plans and the state of emergency preparedness for some of these rapidly evolving situations.
- On a more positive note, UNHCR looks forward to working closely with the African Union (AU) to ensure the swift ratification and implementation of the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. The new Convention was adopted at the AU Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs, in Kampala, Uganda in October 2009. Twenty-five AU Member States have thus far signed the Convention, and Uganda became the first to ratify the instrument in February 2010.

Part B: Analysis - challenges and response strategies

Redoubling the search for durable solutions

- UNHCR is pursuing comprehensive strategies aimed at bringing closure to the Angolan, Burundian, Liberian and Rwandese situations in Africa. In each case, UNHCR is developing a “roadmap,” adapted to the specificities of each situation. The roadmap involves renewed efforts to promote voluntary repatriation; initiatives aimed at opening up opportunities for alternative solutions; and measures to ensure continued protection for any remaining refugees, while at the same time undertaking a systematic review on whether to invoke the cessation clause for these groups.
- Progress on voluntary repatriation to the DRC during 2009 varied according to location of origin. Nearly 17,000 refugees returned from Zambia to Katanga Province, exceeding projections for the year. However, returns from the United Republic of Tanzania to South Kivu Province slowed dramatically, as a result of the precarious security conditions in the return areas. Prospects for the repatriation of Congolese refugees from Rwanda and Burundi in 2010 are contingent upon several complex factors, including the possibility for return to take place in conditions of safety.
- Voluntary repatriation to Southern Sudan also slowed in 2009, with only 32,000 refugees going home last year, as compared with 68,000 in 2008. Since the repatriation operation began, some 330,000 Sudanese refugees returned home, or approximately 80 per cent of the registered refugee population in the neighbouring countries of asylum. The operation is drawing to a close and UNHCR anticipates that fewer refugees will return in 2010 and 2011 than initially projected.
- Within Southern Sudan, UNHCR will monitor the situation of returnees and undertake protection interventions aimed at facilitating sustainable reintegration, involving for example, land and property rights and the issuance of documentation. UNHCR’s support for community-based projects that include livelihood activities for groups with special protection needs will continue through 2011, when the last refugees are expected to return.
- Local integration has re-emerged as a viable solution for refugees in Africa. Regional frameworks, such as the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment, provide an important mechanism for achieving solutions through local integration. The United Republic of Tanzania has made an enormous humanitarian gesture by granting citizenship to nearly 170,000 Burundian refugees from the 1972 influx. The possibility of offering local integration to long-staying refugees is now under consideration in several other countries.
- Resettlement has gained increased importance as part of the overall strategy for solutions to refugee situations in Africa. In 2009, UNHCR submitted more than 28,000 cases for

resettlement, involving refugees in exile in 36 countries. The Office has projected that more than 66,000 refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2010. UNHCR will continue to focus on the resettlement of Eritreans and Somalis, who have few other options. However, security conditions and other obstacles, such as difficulties obtaining visas, continue to hinder access by resettlement country officials to these refugees, which is needed for processing purposes. The misperception that certain groups of refugees pose greater security risks has also diminished their prospects for resettlement.

Promoting a favourable protection environment

- UNHCR works closely with governments across the African continent to strengthen their national legislative and institutional frameworks and capacities for the protection of refugees and IDPs, and also collaborates with civil society. Promoting the ratification and implementation of the recently adopted AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, and operationalizing UNHCR's new urban refugee policy, are two key objectives to be pursued during 2010 and beyond.
- With the entry into force of new legislation in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau, UNHCR has intensified its support for the development of national capacities for Refugee Status Determination (RSD) in these countries. In Chad, UNHCR provided technical assistance for the drafting of new legislation for refugee protection and RSD, which is now under consideration. Work on a draft asylum bill in Sudan also recently resumed.
- While encouraged by the continued strengthening of refugee protection in many African countries, UNHCR has witnessed elsewhere with great concern a diminishing respect for international protection principles and a growing tendency to respond to frustrating protracted refugee situations and the challenges of mixed migration with unilateral measures, including *refoulement*.
- UNHCR has upgraded the *proGres* registration software in West Africa and the East and Horn of Africa and has continued its roll out to other countries. In Burundi, Chad, Djibouti, Guinea, Kenya (Dadaab), Mali, Rwanda, Togo and Uganda, *proGres* has been used to issue individual identity documentation to refugees. A verification exercise is currently being prepared for some 7,000 Senegalese refugees in the Gambia, the refugees in Guinea-Bissau, Mauritanian refugees in Benin, Ghanaian refugees in the northern part of Togo, and Somali and Sudanese refugees in Kenya. In 2010, UNHCR will focus on expanding its use of *proGres* to improve its response to persons of concern with special protection needs. Several countries have developed Standard Operating Procedures to reinforce the use of *proGres*. Ensuring continual registration and the use of *proGres* for statistical reporting remain a challenge, as does the mainstreaming of staffing requirements for registration work.
- The prevention and reduction of statelessness is squarely on UNHCR's protection agenda in Africa for 2010. In Cote d'Ivoire, UNHCR and its partners continue to issue vital identity documents to stateless people and those at risk of becoming stateless. Last year, the Thematic Protection Learning Programme (TPLP) on Statelessness strengthened the ability of UNHCR and partner agency staff from nine African countries to identify and analyse statelessness issues and to develop relevant strategies and concrete activities. Following up on the TPLP, UNHCR is mapping statelessness risks and challenges in Djibouti and Kenya, as well as in southern Africa, the results of which will feed into the development of operational planning for 2011 and subsequent years.
- Strengthening the protection response to mixed migration movements is an important priority for UNHCR in Africa. Regional conferences concerning mixed migration movements across the Gulf of Aden, held in Sana'a, Yemen in May 2008, and in Dakar, Senegal in November 2008, provided UNHCR with frameworks for action and collaboration with concerned governments and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). A similar event focusing on mixed migration movements from the Horn and Great Lakes regions of Africa, is in the planning stages.

The meeting, foreseen to take place in the United Republic of Tanzania in May 2010, would bring together governments from the countries of origin, transit and destination, together with UNHCR, IOM and other key partners to develop a common analysis of the challenges, modalities for cooperation and proposals for response actions.

- UNHCR is enhancing its partnerships with the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities. UNHCR's Regional Representation to the AU and the Economic Commission for Africa, which was established last year, provides a strong platform for cooperation on protection and humanitarian issues and related issues of common concern such as peace and security and migration. UNHCR has seconded staff to the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and is considering a similar arrangement with the East African Community (EAC).
- Climate change has the potential to exacerbate forced displacement on the African continent, both as an underlying driver of conflict and more directly through increasingly frequent and severe weather-related natural disasters. UNHCR is grappling with the effects of weather-related occurrences in places like the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, where severe flooding regularly destroys refugee dwellings and affects operations.

Ensuring an environment safe from violence and exploitation

- Widespread and systematic sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains a defining feature of the conflicts and insecurity that persist in several countries in Africa. UNHCR and its sister agencies in the UN, international and national NGOs, and government counterparts, are seeking to face up to this challenge through comprehensive strategies to combat sexual violence, most notably in the DRC. In Southern Sudan, UNHCR has initiated an inter-agency survey on the prevalence of SGBV that will provide an in depth assessment and form the basis for the development of a legislative framework and an inter-agency prevention and response strategy. Similar efforts are underway in Uganda.

Part C: Financial information

- For its ongoing programmes in Africa, UNHCR's Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) budget for 2010 totals some USD 1.12 billion. In addition, the Office has continued to respond to compelling emergency situations accompanied by new operational and budgetary requirements. As of the beginning of 2010, an ongoing influx from the Equateur Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had resulted in a total of 116,000 new refugees in the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. UNHCR's additional requirements are estimated at USD 27 million. In Somalia, with the intensification of the fighting and the ongoing displacement of refugees into Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, the Office undertook a comprehensive contingency planning exercise based on various scenarios. Meanwhile, funding is needed to extend the refugee camp in Dadaab, Kenya, to accommodate new refugees, as well as to meet critical needs in the areas of shelter, health, water and sanitation.

UNHCR
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