

## March Standing Committee 2019

### Africa Bureau Director's speech

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide a regional update on Africa.

Over the past 10 years, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa almost tripled. We went from 2.3 million refugees in 2009 to over 6.1 million today and from 6.4 million internally displaced to more than 15.5 million today. The trend remains on the increase as conflicts and other causes creating displacement endure. The five main asylum countries host almost 4 million refugees, 64 per cent of the refugees in the whole region. Refugees originate primarily from Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

It is important to note however that the strong tradition of hospitality characterizing the African continent remains. This was reconfirmed last month during the African Union summit held in Addis Ababa. A year of celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the OAU Convention and the tenth anniversary of the Kampala IDP convention was launched.

2019 was declared the year of “Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons” with focus on Durable Solutions to Forced

Displacement in Africa”. UNHCR will support the African Union Commission in organizing a series of commemorative events that will bring global visibility to forced displacements in Africa. These activities will also contribute to the preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum taking place in Geneva in December.

This year will also be an opportunity to reflect on ways of strengthening the respect for the rights of refugees and internally displaced. We will be engaging with our government counterparts to enhance asylum management, including support for refugee legislations to be adopted or improved. In that regard, please allow me to make reference to the very progressive legislation recently adopted by the Government of Ethiopia, the country hosting the second largest refugee population in Africa. The new legislation allows refugees to effectively contribute to the economic life of the nation.

With the relevant Government counterparts, we will continue to address situations where refugee rights are not respected and, more importantly, we will find constructive ways of preventing such occurrences. Improving on the quality of refugee registration and the inclusion of biometric refugee data into national systems will continue to be a priority.

Chairperson,

The funding available to UNHCR for programmes in Africa has grown over time – and we would like to express appreciation to member states for their generosity. However, needs have also increased. Less than fifty percent of the refugee requirements are met. An area where the effects of funding shortfalls has been felt most acutely is in the provision of food assistance, resulting in our colleagues from the World Food Programme

being regularly forced to reduce rations below the minimum standards in several of our operations.

While continuing to appeal for greater financial support from Member States, it is obvious that as a **refugee situation prolongs**, a response solely made of humanitarian support is not sustainable. In a number of situations, such an approach has also been detrimental to the host populations, creating and reinforcing dependency. In many other situations however – especially in rural settings – the presence of refugees had a positive impact, for instance in increased agricultural production.

The Global Refugee Compact adopted last December actually speaks to such situations where the right support and investments can result in a gain for the host populations and their refugee guests. The IDA18 refugee sub window for refugees and host communities established by the World Bank with its US\$2 billion for the first time offers significant development resources to support refugee hosting areas. Eleven<sup>1</sup> countries have been approved by the World Bank to benefit from these grants and concessional loans in 2018 and more countries will be proposed in 2019. A number of countries in the East and Horn of Africa region have benefitted from the World Bank Development Response to Development Impacts Projects (DRDIP). We have been working with the African Development Bank and host governments on the implementation of innovative projects benefitting refugee and host communities in Burundi and Zimbabwe. The EU Trust Fund has also contributed critical resources aimed at supporting inclusion. Finally, a number of bilateral cooperation initiatives are increasingly looking at refugees and their

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<sup>1</sup> Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Chad, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, E6thiopia, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda.

hosts through the lens of potential mutual benefits resulting from socio-economic inclusion. The eight nations which opted to be CRRF countries provide diverse concrete examples of the benefits of inclusion.

There are also less known examples in many other countries which did not opt to be CRRF pilots but where refugees are active in the formal or informal sectors.

UNHCR is determined to continue to invest in increasing cooperation and staff capacity on development issues. We are working more closely as part of UN country teams to better include refugees' needs in national plans in addition to forging new partnerships with the private sector and the World Bank, including its private sector branch, the International Financial Cooperation.

There is strong evidence that socio-economic inclusion, if properly supported and planned, strengthens the attainment of durable solutions, be it local integration, repatriation or resettlement.

Chairperson,

Turning to these three durable solutions, Tanzania remains the country which has in the recent past provided actual legal local integration to the largest number of refugees, some 160,000 Burundian nationals in 2014. Some 40,000 Burundi refugees have recently been verified and we are working with the Government of Tanzania to ensure that they will also benefit from this extraordinary gesture of solidarity. More recently, the governments of Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Senegal have started the implementation of local integration solutions for some 20,000 refugees. A way forward will also need to be found for Rwandan refugees, some of whom have been in exile for a quarter of a century, and who have not opted to return to their country of origin.

Over 100,000 refugees (Burundian, Central African, Chadian, Ivorian, Malian, Mozambican, Nigerian, Rwandan, Somali, South Sudanese and Sudanese) chose to repatriate in 2018 and movements are expected to continue in 2019. In this context, we welcome developments such as the Peace Agreements recently signed by the Government of South Sudan. This is an important step towards the end of one of the worst displacement crises.

Departures for resettlement countries also increased from 15,800 in 2017 to 19,300 in 2018. In 2019, UNHCR expects to submit the cases of at least 35,000 refugees in the Africa region for resettlement. While numbers are limited, resettlement remains an important option for refugees who cannot find protection or durable solutions in their first country of asylum.

I am pleased to share that almost 2,500 persons have been evacuated from Libya to Niger through the Emergency Transit Mechanisms established in late 2017, and 1,200 of them have been resettled to Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of Niger for the life-saving opportunity offered to many extremely vulnerable asylum seekers and to appeal for more countries to support this programme either by establishing a similar mechanism in their country or by welcoming more evacuees through resettlement.

UNHCR will continue to play an active role alongside other United Nations Agencies in the provision of protection and assistance of IDPs. Limited funding remains a significant obstacle to ensuring a quality response. It is also hoped that many countries will join in ratifying the Kampala Convention and adopting national laws.

The year 2019 will mark the mid-point of UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024. It will therefore afford an important opportunity for African countries to take stock of achievements and to identify what more needs to be done to meet the Campaign's goals, as set out in the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. An Eradication of Statelessness in Africa Continental Consultative Meeting will take place in Banjul in August 2019 under the auspices of Project 2019. Included in the meeting will be promotion of the adoption in 2019 of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Right to a Nationality in Africa; and the promotion of the implementation of the legal identity provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Chairperson,

In the past two years, as a result of a number of cases of fraud in the management of operations on the African continent, the organization's operational oversight capacity has been tested. As a result, we have strengthened our risk management architecture as part of the Risk Management 2.0 initiative. Senior oversight positions have been established in all key operations. Their main task is to help better articulate the extraordinary risks the organization is confronted with and help strengthen risk mitigation measures. We will continue to work with governments of host countries and donor countries to improve the oversight capacity of our country offices and regional bureaux.

Let me reiterate in this context the commitment of all UNHCR's operations in Africa to fight Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and to the zero tolerance policy for related incidents. In this regard, the organization is implementing specific programmes to prevent cases of SEA or ensure fast and effective responses to incidents. These include sensitization and awareness raising activities, revision of standard

procedures for programme implementation and strengthening monitoring systems.

Finally, I would like to refer to the regionalization and decentralization process in which the organization has embarked with the objective of rebalancing the organizational design, placing capacities, authority and resources closer to the point of delivery, enabling greater flexibility in the use of resources and leveraging partnerships in the context of broader UN reforms and in line with the Global Compact on Refugees. Africa will host three of the seven regional structures UNHCR will establish. One Regional Bureau will be in Nairobi (covering the East and Horn, and Great Lakes), another in Pretoria (covering Southern Africa) and the third one in Dakar (covering West and Central Africa). For specific situations, we will strengthen country operations and establish strong situational coordination structures.

We seek the support of all member states in the challenging transitional phase UNHCR will face on the continent.

Thank you.