

**DÉLÉGATION PERMANENTE DE  
L'UNION AFRICAINE A GENEVE**

Téléphone : (41-22) 716 06 40  
Téléfax : (41-22) 731 68 18  
Email: mission-observer.au@africanunion.ch



**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF  
THE AFRICAN UNION IN GENEVA**

36, rue des Pâquis  
C.P. 127 – 1211 Genève 21  
Suisse (Switzerland)

Référence :

**ADDRESS BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SAID DJINNIT,  
INTERIM COMMISSIONER  
OF THE AFRICAN UNION IN CHARGE  
OF PEACE AND SECURITY  
AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS,  
TO THE FIFTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME  
FOR REFUGEES**

**1<sup>st</sup> October 2002, Geneva, Switzerland**

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. High Commissioner,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR on behalf of the African Union. I would like, at the outset, to express satisfaction at the excellent relations established, over the years, between the OAU – today African Union – and the UNHCR.

Today, this cooperation is engaged in a deeply renovated African context marked by fundamental changes on the Continent, the most striking one being the establishment of the African Union and its formal launching in Durban, last July. This change provides a golden opportunity and brings renewed hope for the Continent and its people as they grapple with the fundamental issues of peace, security, democracy and development. It also opens good prospects for the development of new approaches and initiatives to deal with humanitarian challenges facing the Continent in order to reduce and put an end to the suffering of our people, particularly the refugees and displaced persons.

Indeed the African Union, through its peace and security agenda, as embodied in its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and the recent adoption by the inaugural African Union Summit in Durban of the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council as well as its initiatives namely: NEPAD and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) has brought to the fore the need to decisively address the humanitarian concerns on the Continent. I commend the UNHCR for having scheduled a Panel discussion on Durable Solutions for refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the NEPAD. I am confident that the discussions tomorrow will open new avenues for more robust partnership within the context of NEPAD in meeting the needs of refugees and displaced persons in Africa. For many, the role of the former OAU in alleviating the plight of our people who were afflicted by humanitarian tragedies including the refugees and displaced persons has been hampered by the respect of the sacrosanct principle of non-interference in internal affairs of

member States. In order to address the problems which inhibited, in the past, the action of the OAU in the area of humanitarian intervention, the Constitutive Act of the African Union has incorporated a far-reaching principle that could be called the “principle of non-indifference” in providing in its Article 4(h) the right of the Union to intervene in member States pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Chairman,

The present Session is being held at a time when sustained efforts are being made on the Continent to address the scourge of conflicts which is one of the main causes generating refugees and displaced persons on the Continent.

Over the past years, we have witnessed progress towards the end of some conflicts on the Continent, which resulted in the repatriation of refugees. This progress has opened a window of opportunity for UNHCR and the international community at large to accelerate the repatriation and re-integration of those refugees still in exile and to assist the countries concerned in addressing their huge humanitarian challenge. It is our hope that this progress will galvanise the international community at large into rallying behind the Continent in its monumental task of resolving conflicts and refugee problems in Africa.

As we are gathered here today, we should bear in mind that there are still millions of refugees in Africa who need help and who are looking to the international community and Africa for that help. I wish to reiterate our concern at the African Union on the need to mobilise the necessary resources including additional resources to assist the refugees and displaced persons on the Continent whose plight has been worsening over the years despite the generous contribution of the countries of asylum whose socio-economic conditions have been declining.

The shocking news of what has become known as Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) directed at refugee populations

mainly in West Africa was yet another manifestation of the worsening conditions of refugees on the Continent. We, at the AU have taken serious exception to this and suggest that every means at the disposal of the international community be used to ensure that such anti-humanitarian acts not longer occur. We feel encouraged and reassured by the speed and firmness with which the UNHCR moved towards stamping out this very unfortunate phenomena.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our support to the High Commissioner in his endeavours towards alleviating the suffering of the refugees throughout the world. We would like to assure him of our continued full cooperation in addressing the specific situation of refugees on our Continent and urge him to continue to pay them the special attention they deserve. On this occasion, I wish also to reiterate the commitment of the African Union to the cause of refugees and displaced persons on the Continent, its disposition to continue to do its utmost, in cooperation of all the humanitarian agencies, particularly the UNHCR, towards alleviating the suffering of the refugees and displaced persons and its determination to address the root causes of the problem. That is why, we fervently appeal to our partners within the international community to give Africa a chance by strongly supporting its agenda for peace, security, democracy and development.

2002

Address by H.E. Ambassador Said  
Djinnit, interim commissioner of the  
African union in charge of peace and  
security and political affairs, to the  
fifty-third session of the United Nations  
Executive committee of the high  
commissioner's programme for refugees

Permanent Delegation of the African Union in Geneva

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