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**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON THE SITUATION OF
REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS
IN AFRICA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Since the Executive Council met in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003, the AU Commission with the Commission on Refugees and with the cooperation of the partners of the African Union, in particular, UNHCR and ICRC, has diligently engaged itself in implementing among other things, Decision EX/CL/Dec.46(III) on the Situation of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons.

2. The report will therefore present an insight on the developments on the situation of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons and to some extent disasters. It will further present the way forward in finding durable solutions while at the same time alleviating the suffering of the displacement population.

**II. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES,
RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS**

3. Since 2003, Africa is witnessing many positive developments which will for the first time in many years create conducive conditions for many repatriation operations to several countries of origin in Africa. In the coming years, more than half of the continent's refugee population of about 3 million refugees according to UNHCR are expected to return home while a large number of the IDPs would go back to their communities or villages. This will be made possible because of the peace initiatives and agreements in various countries like Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These indeed are positive developments for millions of people who have been in war situations in some cases for decades. Additionally, the on-going programmes of repatriation and reintegration are continuing in many parts of Africa.

4. Indeed, the positive developments come with challenges among which the sustainability of return and reintegration are important and are regarded as prerequisite for conflict prevention, poverty alleviation and long-term development as were emphasized in the UNHCR special meeting on a ***Dialogue***

on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa that preceded the 29th Ordinary Session of the Standing Committee of the Executive Council of the UN High Commission for Refugees. It took place in Geneva on 8 March 2004 and the AU Commission participated in the meeting.

5. Support is therefore needed in various areas aimed at disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, as well as peace-building and reconciliation processes. Therefore, the International Community should commit itself to supporting the governments and humanitarian agencies to fulfill the enormous responsibilities and obligations in all the different areas.

6. While positive developments are taking place, the International Community should not forget the protracted displacement situations which also present particular challenges to Member States. These situations have adverse consequences for the lives of refugees and IDPs who are deprived of basic needs while in camps for prolonged periods of time. In some cases, durable solutions will take time therefore, other ways such as local integration and self-sufficiency is emphasized using the Zambia Initiative, Uganda's self-reliance and the twining of refugee villages with local community villages in Guinea. Other serious problems which affect both the nationals and refugees include natural and man-made disasters, HIV/AIDS, sexual and gender based violence, xenophobia, environmental degradation, and food insecurity. These problems have to be addressed as well.

III. OVERVIEW REGIONAL ANALYSIS

A. Northern Region

7. The Northern Region has protracted refugee cases, about 165,000 refugees from Western Sahara. They have been living in Algeria for three decades. Their situation continues to be of concern to African Union as it has not changed much because of the continued stalemate in the 1991 UN Implementation Plan. On the other hand, in April this year, new developments took place as family visits between thousands of refugees and their relatives in Western Sahara were arranged by the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

B. Central Africa

8. Even though, some unrest is still reported in some countries of Central Africa, many positive developments are taking place in the region. These developments include agreements on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the recent signing of Agreements in Burundi between the Government and the rebel movements, as well as the various Tripartite Agreements between the Governments concerned and the UNHCR. As a result, some refugees have already returned home while the UNHCR is in the process of repatriating thousands of refugees from the neighbouring countries.

9. **Chad** is hosting over 40,000 refugees from Central African Republic. The security situation has prevented them from returning home. In addition to this number, the country has continued to receive new influx of Sudanese refugees from Darfur region of Sudan, now numbering more than 160,000, according to sources from UN Agencies.

10. With regard to **Burundi**, during the period under review, over 10,000 Burundian refugees have returned, mainly from Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is expected that the remaining of close to 400,000 would return in the coming years.

11. In the case of the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, due to the Peace Agreements, most notably the Pretoria Agreement, the establishment of a transitional government and the expansion of the UN Observer Mission, the MONUC, the year 2004 is planned for the return of an estimated 380,000 DRC refugees who are mainly in Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. So far, 15,000 refugees have already returned spontaneously from Zambia. This year, UNHCR is already planning to start organized repatriation of refugees mainly from Central African Republic (CAR) and Zambia to safe areas in the DRC such as Katanga province in the southeast and Equator province in the northwest. According to government estimates, the country has an IDPs population of 2,900,000 and 380,000 refugees mainly from Angola, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Republic of Congo.

12. On the other hand, the country is still faced with the problem of over 8,000 Rwandan Hutus, remnants of the bands

that carried out Rwanda's 1994 genocide. They are still roaming the hills in eastern part of the country, thus making it difficult for refugees to return to that area.

C. Eastern Region

13. The Eastern region which hosts the largest number of refugees about 2 million and more than twice the number of IDPs is faced with many socio-economic and political challenges. In spite of this, the region is witnessing the return of thousands of refugees and to some extent IDPs. Refugees continued to return to Rwanda, North-West Somalia (Somaliland), Eritrea and Uganda. At the same time, the positive developments in the peace talks on Sudan have raised hopes for the possible return of over 600,000 Sudanese refugees mainly from the neighbouring countries. The majority are in Uganda (223,000) followed by Ethiopia (88,000), Kenya (70,000) and DRC (69,000). It would bring an end to one of the protracted displacement not only in the region but also on the continent. It is believed that the return of refugees will greatly decrease the number of refugees in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

14. During the reporting period, **Eritrea** continued to receive its nationals back mainly from Sudan, numbering over 100,000. But, the country has about 60,000 IDPs who need integration assistance as they continue to suffer the consequences of war and drought, resulting from lack of basic needs.

15. **Ethiopia's** refugee population has continued to decrease considerably due to continuation of voluntary repatriation exercises of Somalis. According to UNHCR, 6 out of 9 refugee camps in the eastern part of the country had been closed, but they are still more than 85,000 Sudanese refugees in western Ethiopia. In addition to hosting refugees, the country continued to suffer from drought and famine in particular in the north and eastern parts of the country.

16. It is to be noted that **Somalia's** challenges are still many, just to mention a few, the political and socio-economic problems, and the situation of persistent drought. All these have produced one of the worst humanitarian crisis in the country, as it has contributed mass movements of people, loss of lives and widespread human rights violations. Various leaders under the mediation of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development

(IGAD) are still trying to reach agreements on national reconciliation.

17. On the other hand, all is not in vain as the northern regions of North-West and North-East are enjoying relative peace which as a result the UNHCR has been repatriating thousands of refugees to those areas. Since 1991, about 900,000 refugees have returned to the two regions and the operation is continuing and UNHCR expects to repatriate 35,000 refugees this year from Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya.

18. The on-going peace talks in **Sudan** under the auspices of IGAD have given hope to more than 600,000 Sudanese refugees and the 4.7 million IDPs to return home mainly in the southern part of the country. The repatriation operation will be one of the biggest in Africa and will therefore require massive donor support as well as the reintegration process. At the same time, Sudan is still home to over 300,000 refugees, the majority Eritreans. However, on the other hand, the International Community is very much worried about the situation in Darfur region, western part of the country. The UN and Human Rights Group reported that the humanitarian situation in the region is one of the worst in the world and this was confirmed at the recent UNHCR meetings in Geneva, March 2004. The humanitarian access to the area remained limited even though about one million people are in need of food aid. The people continue to flee the area and have found refuge in Chad. The Darfur region has produced over 160,000 refugees living in Chad and about 700,000 displaced persons.

19. **Tanzania** hosts over 500,000 refugees making it the major hosting country in the region. Currently, the refugees are mainly from Burundi (about 340,000), DRC (149,000) and Somalia (3,200). UNHCR reported that with the new transitional government in Burundi, thousands of Burundian refugees were ready to return to Burundi. While the country is looking after thousands of refugees, in January 2004 the UN Agencies reported that one million of the country's nationals is faced with food insecurity due to poor erratic rains, thus leaving thousands of people without enough food to feed their families.

20. **Uganda** which is home to over 200,000 refugees is faced with one of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country. This is due to insecurity in the region caused by the rebel group, the Lord's

Resistance Army (LRA) which is fighting against the government since 1987. This has culminated into untold suffering to thousands of innocent civilians in the region including refugee settlements, and camps housing internally displaced persons (IDPs). People are abducted, hacked to death, tortured, mutilated or raped. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed and continue to die. The number of IDPs has soared from 500,000 two years ago to over 1.6 million today. Therefore, most of the population is internally displaced and depending on food aid. In the case of Refugees, 32,000 out of the 173,000 refugees under the care of UNHCR became displaced from their settlements in May 2004 while 500 opted to return to Sudan because of insecurity. Therefore, massive movements of both the civilians and the refugees in the area was taking place.

21. Consequently, in February 2004, the Assembly of African Union in Sirte, Libya and the Chairperson of AU Commission strongly condemned the rebel activities of LRA in northern Uganda where there are gross violations of human rights as well as disregard for the rule of law visited the AU Commission and expressed concern over the situation in Northern Uganda and requested the Commission to assist the country. In the same month, the Minister of Defense of Uganda visited the AU Commission.

D. Western Region

22. The West African Region witnessed wars and conflicts that have caused death, torture, mutilation, displacement of millions of people and also destroyed infrastructure (roads, social services, schools and hospitals). The mass movements of people took place in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. To avert the situation, the region is engaged in peace negotiations, most of them under the auspices of ECOWAS, which will ensure the return of thousands of refugees. On the other hand, humanitarian agencies are carrying out assessment missions and appealing to International Community for funds. The presence of peacekeeping troops in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia has helped immensely to improve the situation as well. However, on the overall, the region is still faced with tackling the issues of security, political and humanitarian crises while on the other hand, the assistance of International Community is very much needed.

23. Since the last reporting, the situation in **Côte d'Ivoire** has not improved much as there is slow progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed in last year in France. This has prevented the return of some refugees living in the sub-region. With the deployment of more than 6,000 peacekeeping troops, it is hoped that the situation will improve. In the meantime, more than one million people including the refugees and the IDPs are affected and need urgent humanitarian aid.

24. While refugees from the region were waiting for repatriation, **Guinea** continued to give asylum to them. Some of them have been in the country for more than a decade. At the same time, the country is receiving its youth from Liberia where they have been serving as child soldiers. The country's meagre resources have thus been severely strained with lack of international financial contributions to cater for the refugees and her returnees.

25. During the UNHCR meeting in Geneva in March 2004, the government authorities of **Sierra Leone** reported that out of half a million Sierra Leonian refugees mainly from neighbouring countries approximately 300,000, have returned home. The majority of them returned mainly to eastern part of the country that was most devastated by war. It is expected that the remaining 60,000 in the sub-region would return this year, thus ending one of the protracted refugee cases in the region. With the assistance of OCHA, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) and other partners, an estimated 435,000 internally displaced persons were supported to resettle in the country. Some 70,000 ex-combatants were demobilized and provided with skills for reintegration into society.

26. The government reported that ensuring sustained resettlement and reintegration of the overall estimated 2,000,000 displaced persons and rehabilitation of the social and economic infrastructure have been a major challenge for them and the International Community because of the ten-year massive destruction of private and public infrastructure, massive killing, maiming and raping of women and children. However, today there is hope with the piloting of the UNHCR's 4R's (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction).

27. **Liberia's** civil war since 1987 has produced devastating consequences for the humanitarian situation. Recently, with the transitional government since the departure of former President Charles Taylor and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, there is hope for peace and stability. In the last few months, about 6,000 refugees returned spontaneously from Guinea and Sierra Leone. It is expected that starting from this year, more than 320,000 refugees and almost half a million IDPs will go back home or to their villages in the near future. According to UNHCR, many refugees are in neighbouring countries mainly in Guinea (146,000) while Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire each hosts 67,000 and Ghana 42,000. The country still faces the problem of disarmament and demobilizing the ex-combatants.

E. Southern Region

28. Southern region is still gripped with the food crisis even though there were some improvements in some countries. At the same time, some countries are also experiencing an increase of new refugee arrivals in particular Malawi, South Africa and Zambia. On the other hand, the Angolan refugees in the region continued to return home, thus decreasing the Angolan refugee population in the region. The number of refugees in the region was reported to be close to 430,000 with Zambia hosting the largest number (over 272,000) followed by South Africa (over 90,000), Namibia (26,000), Malawi (12,000), Zimbabwe (10,503) and Mozambique (8,000). The most pressing challenges facing the region is the repatriation of Angolan refugees and the return of IDPs as well as the reconstruction of the country of which massive international assistance is urgently needed to cope with the situation.

29. In **Angola**, following a Peace Agreement in April 2002 between the government and UNITA, the rebel movement, the humanitarian situation considerably improved with about half a million refugees and IDPs returning either to the country or to their villages. In 2003, UNHCR estimated that 133,000 refugees returned home from DRC, Zambia and Namibia, thus bringing the number to 218,000 returnees since 2002 and 1.5 million IDPs. The refugees are returning within the legal frameworks of Tripartite agreements signed between UNHCR and six main countries of asylum namely: Zambia, Namibia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Botswana and South Africa.

30. The country is faced with serious problems which at times hamper the repatriation operations from neighbouring countries. These include presence of thousands of landmines as the country is believed to have the largest number of them in the world, lack of access to roads, broken bridges, absence of education and medical facilities, among others. Angola therefore needs massive aid from donors in the areas of reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. This will help to bridge the gap between short-term reintegration activities and long-term development and also ensure that returnees stay home.

31. **Zambia** which has been hosting refugees for almost four decades will soon be eased of the burden of having a large number of refugees on her soil as Angolans who make up the majority of the refugee population started returning home since 2002.

32. The country is also committed to implement the Zambia Initiative which was launched in 2003 following the Donors Mission that took place in March 2002, in Lusaka, under the umbrella of the Government and was also presented to the meeting of the fifty-third session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR High Commissioner's Programme in October 2002. Consequently, the Donors Mission and the UNHCR Programme fully recognized the urgency in addressing the needs of refugee hosting communities and the reintegration of refugees in the local communities so that they become productive in the country's socio-economic development. They therefore endorsed the rationale for the Initiative. Since then, the Donors have made substantial financial contributions for a five-year plan. Other countries of asylum could also use it as a role model.

IV. CONCLUSION

33. The plight of refugees, displaced persons and returnees on the Continent is a source of great concern. Sustained and considerable material, financial and human resources are needed to address the numerous challenges arising therefrom. In the same vein, beyond the political will and solidarity of Member States, the establishment of a climate of peace and security is a sine qua non for the resolution of the thorny problem posed by the humanitarian situation in the Continent. The Commission in close co-operation with its traditional and new partners will pursue the actions it has initiated in this

regard and will continue to plead for a united and concerted action on the part of the international community.

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