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REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES,
RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY
DISPLACED PERSONS

REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

1. The present report provides current situation of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons including natural and man-made disasters on a regional basis. It further presents implementation of programmes and activities by the Commission of Africa Union with the Commission on Refugees and its operational partners in search for durable solutions to the problems of uprooted populations as well as the way forward.

II. SYNOPSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

2. Conflicts in some parts of Africa continue to produce mass displacements of people on the continent which have resulted in untold human suffering of the innocent people, especially women and children. Furthermore, floods, droughts, and perpetual famine in some Member States have further complicated the humanitarian displacements.

3. The complexities of these situations is clearly demonstrated in the fluctuation of the numbers of refugees, an increase from 3.5 million to 4 million according to UNHCR in spite of the on-going repatriation operations in a number of Member States. Close to 15 million internally displaced persons face the same scenario despite the integration exercises going on alongside displacements of others.

III. ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

4. During the period under review, there have been many positive developments in the situation of refugees and displaced persons. This is due to peace initiatives and agreements that have encouraged the return of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to their communities. However, on the other hand, there are still some disturbing humanitarian issues in some parts of the continent. Therefore, the situation on a regional basis reflects the following picture:

A) NORTHERN REGION

5. In North Africa, thousands of Saharawi refugees estimated to be 165,000 are located in Algeria. They have been living in harsh climatic conditions in Tindouf refugee camps for almost three decades. The region is also home to other refugees mainly from Sudan, Somalia and as far as the Middle East.

B) WESTERN REGION

6. During the period under review, progress was made towards peace and security, in particular in the areas of disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants which are regarded as some of the critical areas for stability in the region. However, there are still many challenges that need the attention of international community in the region, which includes among others, funding for the on-going repatriation operations, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

7. In the case of **Côte d'Ivoire**, the humanitarian situation throughout the country continues to be of great concern to the AU. Fighting in early November 2004 which led to the evacuation of some humanitarian aid workers has affected the humanitarian activities throughout the country. In the meantime, the security situation for humanitarian workers in the country remains precarious and the 2.5 million IDPs in addition to the Liberian and Sierra Leonian refugees cannot be provided with the necessary aid.

8. **Liberia** has made remarkable progress since last year in the efforts to bring about peace to the country. As a result, 350,000 Liberian refugees continued to return home from neighboring countries mainly from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone and to some extent, Ghana and Nigeria. The 300,000 IDPs were also returning to their villages. Due to the free access of humanitarian agencies throughout the country, they are able to provide assistance to returnees in areas of shelter, food, medicine, income generating projects, rehabilitation of schools, clinics and counseling. So far, the disarmament and demobilization exercise is going on smoothly as over 76,000 combatants have been demobilized, and the overall program of the DDRR is expected to last for a period of three years.

9. On the other hand, the country still faces many challenges in terms of adequate funding for the overall projects, in particular reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants; as well as rebuilding the communities outside Monrovia for the reintegration of demobilized combatants.

10. The repatriation exercise of over 300,000 refugees in **Sierra Leone** is about to come to an end. The timely disarmament and demobilization process as well as resettling the returnees and IDPs has contributed immensely to the country's security.

C) CENTRAL REGION

11. The Central African region is trying to come to grips with its conflicts which seem to have gone on for several years, but now there is hope as some agreements are being honored.

12. In **Burundi**, because of honouring the peace agreement signed between the government and rebel groups except the Forces Nationales de Liberation (FNL), the security situation continued to improve in many areas of the country. The disarmament programme has started. As a result, thousands of refugees are returning to the country and IDPs to their villages. UNHCR reported that since the beginning of 2004, about 54,000 Burundian refugees have returned home from Tanzania bringing the returnee numbers since 2002 to 187, 956. The number of people in IDP sites, which was over 281,000 in mid-2003 is today estimated to be 140,000.

13. While positive developments are taking place, there are still some concerns; the activities of FNL continue to produce new cases of displacements. The situation even became worse when in mid-August, nearly 160 Congolese refugees were killed in Gatumba transit center outside Bujumbura and near the DRC border of Uvira.

14. The situation in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** remained precarious in spite of the existing peace agreements. Fighting continued in some parts of the country, especially in the east and thousands of people are constantly on the move. However, in August 2004, the country concluded tripartite agreements with Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and UNHCR which will enable large-scale assisted movements of about 380,000 refugees to take place in the three countries. It is also expected that close to 3 million IDPs will go back to their villages.

15. According to UN agencies, **Chad** is hosting about 200,000 refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan in addition to the 40,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) and 80 percent are women and children. The situation of refugees from Darfur is extremely fragile and precarious as their living conditions are harsh mainly due to weather and scarcity of water.

D) EASTERN REGION

16. In East Africa, the Leaders are struggling to create peace and stability and also to provide a better place for their nationals.

17. The recent peace agreement in **Somalia** which made it possible to elect the President of Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in October 2004, will create conducive conditions for the return of about 300,000 refugees and thousands of IDPs to Southern part of the country.

18. In the case of **Sudan**, the most disturbing situation is the Darfur crisis which is regarded by UN as one of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The conflict in Darfur could affect the prospects opened by the on-going peace talks between the government of Sudan and SPLM/A for the safe return of over 600,000 Sudanese refugees. The Darfur crisis has produced displacement of

1.8 million people according to UN estimates. This is in addition to the already 300,000 refugees living in the country from the neighboring countries. The AU in its effort to solve the problem has been involved in peace talks and it assessed the humanitarian situation, and thereafter provided some financial assistance. However, the humanitarian situation remains in dire need of funds to carry out the huge humanitarian operations.

19. While the international community is focusing on the crisis in Darfur, the UN agencies are still reporting that **Uganda's** IDP situation is the most devastating situation in the world and should not be forgotten. That is why the situation is still of great concern to the African Union. Two missions were dispatched during the period under review. The missions assessed the humanitarian situation, in particular the ever-increasing number of IDPs from 1.6 million to the recent figure of 1.8 million within a period of 8 months. The IDPs are located in 218 camps. At the same time Uganda hosts approximately 215,000 refugees, a majority of them Sudanese living in various camps, according to government authorities.

20. During the period under review, **Tanzania** has a total population of 417,000 refugees, 259,000 of whom originated from Burundi, 153,000 from DRC, 3,000 from Somalia and 2,000 from other mixed origins as well as the 200,000 old caseload of Burundian refugees who have been in the country since 1972 and are hosted in settlements without any assistance from the UNHCR or the international community.

21. The tripartite agreements signed between the Governments of Tanzania and Rwanda and the UNHCR, on one hand and the Governments of Tanzania and Burundi and with UNHCR on the other, in 2001 has considerably facilitated the return of thousands of Rwandan and Burundian refugees. Few Rwandan refugees are waiting resettlement to a third country while out of 259,000 Burundi refugees 158,000 have so far been repatriated. The repatriation of Burundian refugees continues under UNHCR organized conveys.

E) SOUTHERN REGION

22. The Southern region is concentrating on the return of thousands of Angolans and the world is already witnessing a remarkable transformation in Angola and in the region as a whole. This resulted with the beginning of the voluntary repatriation process in June 2003 of approximately half a million Angolan refugees in the neighboring countries including Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Africa.

23. In **Angola** according to UNHCR, approximately 239,154 Angolans have returned home since the signing of the peace agreement while 3,419,626 IDPs had returned to their villages since April 2002. The government of Angola, the UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations has been preoccupied with

reconstruction of the country, repatriation of refugees from the neighboring countries as well as resettlement, rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons back to their communities. The operation calls for massive aid support.

24. Concerning **Zambia**, the burden of hosting large numbers of refugees estimated at 210,105 is expected to ease with the repatriation of Angolans as they are the majority. On the other hand, they were new refugee caseload from the DRC and were faced with food shortages and as a result, have strained the economic and humanitarian relief system.

25. In the development refugee activities, the country is committed to implement the **Zambia initiative** which integrates refugees in local communities and contributes to the development of the country. The initiative changes the perception that refugees are a burden to their host community and are passive members of society as well as being passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. The approach therefore is to build capacity and strengthen community structures in the villages around the refugee camps used as community participation exercise at the community level.

26. The initiative further contributes in avoiding the dependency syndrome that most refugees develop after receiving support from the International community for a longtime, as well as utilize the refugees' skills and potential, thus a good link between relief and development.

IV - IMPLEMENTATION

27. In line with various Recommendations, Resolutions and Decisions and especially the last Executive Council Decision, EX/CL/108(V), the Commission of African Union together with the Commission on Refugees took concrete steps with its partners to carry out some programmes and activities. They included assessment field visits which were undertaken with the Commission on Refugees and in consultation with Member States concerned as well as in close collaboration with AU partners. These countries included Angola, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, Zambia, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

28. Furthermore, within the framework of cooperation involved in humanitarian assistance operations and agreements with various organizations, the Commission pursued various programmes with the relevant organizations. It organized conferences, meetings, and workshops/seminars, especially with its partners. The meetings, workshops/seminars, further sensitized the international community, and also strengthened the cooperation with AU partners and other organizations involved in humanitarian issues while at the same time the Commission continued to implement the Plan of Action of the Commission on Refugees. In order to build African NGO's capacities, the AU granted financial assistance of US\$ 130,000 to African

Humanitarian Action (AHA). The Chairperson also appointed a Special Representative to advocate for and promote, at the highest levels, the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations, in particular with specific emphasis on problems affecting women and children. The Special Representative visited Darfur during the reporting period.

V – CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSION

29. Indeed there is some headway which has been made but there are still so many challenges and difficulties to overcome. Africa's millions of refugees, returnees and IDPs including victims of disasters are often left at the mercy of the international community for their survival. Unfortunately, since early 1990's the donor fatigue continues to affect humanitarian programmes and activities. While in many cases the international community is focusing on refugees, the question of IDPs is a thorny issue and needs to be addressed.

30. Specifically, the Commission continues to be hampered by major constraints related to its operationalization such as human resources and financial constraints as well as enhancement of AU's partnership. As a result, it has affected the Commission from effectively following up and implementing the numerous Resolutions, Recommendations; Decisions and Plan of Action that have been adopted during various meetings, conferences, and seminars/workshops, in particular at the Executive Council and the Assembly of Heads of States and Government and also during joint meetings with AU partners. Additionally, the Commission continues to be incapacitated in providing leadership in the disaster management to Member States.

31. Since the Commission of African Union is still faced with the problem of operationalization in various programmes and activities, a clear concise and focused policy and humanitarian programme should be drawn up in close collaboration with its partners, in particular UNHCR, ICRC and IOM in accordance with the African Union Mandate as stipulated in the African Union Constitutive Act and the related agreements as well as Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The programmes should concentrate on monitoring the situation of refugees, returnees and IDPs and also show solidarity by visiting more affected countries and, thereafter extend substantial financial support. The Commission will keep the momentum of repatriation operations and also become part of the exercise. It will also put in place a strategic framework response to the post-conflict reconstruction and its associated challenges facing Africa with clear achievable objectives and implementation plans through building and strengthening relationships and networking with developmental partners.

32. In recognition of its inadequacies of dealing with disasters on the Continent, the Commission will establish clear policies, structures and

operational frameworks for the preparedness, response and management of natural and man-made disasters in Africa.

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