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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE  
PROBLEM OF REFUGEES IN AFRICA



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The number of African refugees has risen sharply in the last few years and has exceeded four million. This increase could be attributed to many causes - one of them is the intensification of struggle of the oppressed African people in Southern Africa against racist minority regimes in the three countries of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. Other causes are the frequent inter and intra African conflicts which have added large numbers to the African refugees population. As a matter of fact it could be estimated that about three quarters of Africa refugee population has been originating from independent African countries !

2. The African Heads of State and Governments and the Council of Ministers have passed since the establishment of the OAU nearly 30 resolutions on the refugee matters and problems in Africa. The ratification of 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problem by 41 Member States and the establishment of the Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees are among many examples demonstrating the concern of Africa about its refugee problem.

3. Despite commendable efforts made by the African people and Governments towards their brothers and sisters in distress, a lot has yet to be done with regards to the sharing of refugee burden among African countries. The large African refugee population is at present distributed unevenly over about only 20 Member States. Infact only 8 Member States are bearing the heaviest burden, each giving refuge to about one hundred thousand refugees or more.

4. Many of the resolutions and decisions made by the Council of Ministers in favor of African refugees have regrettably remained unimplemented despite the repeated appeals by the responsible services of the OAU Secretariat dealing with refugee problem. For example resolution CM/346(XXIII) adopted in Mogadishu in 1974 called upon Member States to give the BPEAR their moral, material and financial support and to take the necessary measures for the success of its activities in the fields of Education and Placement. Yet over the years and despite repeated appeals and requests made by the OAU/BPEAR to Member States to help in the education and placement of African refugees, the results have been disappointing.

5. Following the Soweto uprisings and subsequent influxes of young refugees from South Africa in particular and also from other countries under racist regimes like Zimbabwe and Namibia, the Council of Ministers had adopted resolution CM/536(XXVIII) in Lome, Togo in February 1977 and later CM/Res.547(XXIX) in Libreville, Gabon in July 1977 setting up a special programme for the provision of education and training facilities in Africa in order to prepare these young people to serve their country better after the attainment of independence. To this end the Council of Ministers had also established Special Committee of Experts from nine OAU Member States - namely Angola, Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria and Swaziland to assess the requirements of these young refugees and the type of assistance needed in the immediate and distant future. Despite repeated calls by the OAU/BPEAR to convene meetings for the said Committee of Experts in 1977 and in late 1978 the response of Member States concerned was so poor and each time meetings had to be postponed due to lack of quorum.

6. Having this in mind and taken into consideration Resolution CM/Res.620(XXXI) by which the Council of Ministers had decided to make Member States contributions to the Special Fund compulsory, the OAU General Secretariat (BPEAR) took the initiative to propose a sum of about US\$5 million to be contributed by OAU Member States, friendly countries and international and voluntary agencies. This amount is to be used for financing a special training and education programme for young refugees from Southern Africa and for providing assistance to Frontline States and other African countries which are ready to provide education and training for African refugees. The programme is to be implemented over a six years period. The first year will be used for preparations and for collection of the first instalments from OAU Member States and donations from other sources.

7. The OAU/BPEAR activities have been severely curtailed by lack of funds. In spite of repeated appeals to OAU Member States for contributions the response has been disappointing, the continued reliance of OAU/BPEAR which is an integral part of the OAU on outside financial assistance, is, to say the least unsatisfactory and gives a bad image to all Africa.

8. Thus the traditional sources of finance of the OAU-BPEAR have remained for years as extra-African. The unfortunate incident of embezzlement of some funds from the BPEAR accounts by the Accountant has drastically affected the attitude of these traditional donors who for the last one and half years have shied away from contributing to the BPEAR budget except for a small sum from the UNHCR. Fees for sixteen BPEAR sponsored students were paid against this UNHCR contribution for the year 1977/78. The 1978/79 fees and allowances for these students had to be paid from funds remaining in the BPEAR accounts after the latter were defrozen in late 1978.

9. Apart from financial difficulties the BPEAR is faced with the problem of shortage of staff. Despite this, the BPEAR continued to address itself to its responsibilities and has exerted all efforts to render its services in the field of education and placement to African refugees. Hundreds of applications for scholarships as well as for employment and placement have been received, processed and replied to. Agencies involved in refugee work in Africa were approached to sponsor qualified refugees to help the latter to further their education. Member States were constantly approached to help in the employment and placement of African refugees.

10. The OAU/BPEAR has taken the initiative to find new sources of funds and assistance for its operations and activities. An appeal was made to 16 Kings, Emirs, Sultans and Heads of rich Arab and African States as well as to Directors of Prominent Arab and African financial institutions requesting for financial and material assistance. This assistance is intended for African refugees as well as for African countries which are giving refuge to refugees like the Front-line States. Only few weeks after the appeal was launched positive responses started to come. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has indicated through its Embassy in Addis Ababa that it has decided to donate relief and other commodities equivalent to US\$250,000 to African refugees. The Arab Fund for Technical Aid to African and Arab Countries expressed its desire to sponsor qualified African refugees to study in Arab and African countries and has asked the OAU/BPEAR to urgently send a list of such refugees for consideration.

11. In the field of protection the BPEAR worked closely with the UNHCR and excellent cooperation in this and other fields existed between the two organs.

12. In this connection, the OAU/BPEAR had sent an appeal to all Member States of the OAU urging those Member States that had not already done so to accede and adhere to the UN 1951 convention and the 1967 Protocole and to ratify in particular the OAU 1969 convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa since only 18 Member States have so far ratified the latter.

13. The OAU/BPEAR actively participated in a series of meetings of the Planning Committee responsible for preparations for the Pan African Refugee Conference which was held in Arusha, Tanzania, from 7 to 17 May, 1979.

14. As in past years OAU/BPEAR observed the 20 June as a refugee day. In collaboration with the Ethiopian Government and the UNHCR it distributed posters to OAU Member States and showed films on refugees at African Hall in Addis Ababa.

15. Following the Secretary General's Report on the on-going Preparations for the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa (Arusha 7 May to 17, 1979), to the 32nd Ordinary Session in Nairobi in February 1979, the Council of Ministers adopted resolution CM/Res.694(XXXII) calling upon Member States to participate at the said Conference effectively and at Ministerial level. The Council of Ministers has also decided vide the same resolution that the remaining balance for organizing the Conference (US\$200,000) be met from savings of the OAU regular budget.



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