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Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 517 700 Fax: 517844

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**REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES,**  
**RETURNEES, DISPLACED PERSONS IN AFRICA**  
**TO THE 7<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY SESSION**

**REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES, DISPLACED  
PERSONS IN AFRICA TO THE 7<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY SESSION**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Since the Executive Council met in January 2005, the African Union Commission, together with the Permanent Representative Committee's Sub-Committee on Refugees and its partners continued monitoring closely the problem of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa including efforts in finding durable solutions to these problems. The current report covers implementation of the Commission's Programme of Activities based mainly on Decisions of the Executive Council (EX/CL/Dec.179(VI) adopted in Abuja, Nigeria in 2005 and EX/CL/Dec.127(V) adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The report articulates the achievements and challenges faced in the search for durable solutions to the grave situation of forced population displacement in Africa.

**II. REVIEW OF THE GENERAL SITUATION OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES  
AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS**

2. During the period under review, many positive developments took place including repatriation movements to Angola, Liberia, Somalia and Burundi. However, some incidents of civil strife and persistent conflict in some Member States continued to undermine efforts aimed at addressing the challenges related to the humanitarian and security situation in those countries and the sub-regions concerned.

3. Due to the recent outflow of new cases of refugees, most notably from the Darfur region of Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Togo, the number of refugees in the Continent increased from 3.5 million to almost 4 million. According to the latest available figures, during the same period, the number of internally displaced persons decreased from 15 million to about 13 million. The magnitude of forced displacement is still so high that it continues to place heavy burdens on refugee-hosting countries and threaten peace, security and stability in the Continent as a whole.

4. The continent is also suffering from natural and man-made disasters that have continued to trigger forced population displacements within and outside the continent. Some of these movements are seasonal while others are more permanent. The fragility of the environment, the unpredictable weather phenomena together with the continent's limited capacity for early warning, prevention, preparedness and response continue to subject a large number of peoples in Africa to the vagaries of nature and man-made disasters.

5. On a more positive note, during the reporting period, on-going voluntary repatriation exercises continued for refugees from Somalia, Liberia, Burundi and a small case of remaining Sierra Leonians. Additionally, hundreds of Sudanese from Southern Sudan returned home after more than two decades of life in exile. UNHCR is also planning to repatriate approximately 203,000 refugees in 2005.

6. In spite of these developments, the asylum countries are still hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees and they deserve due recognition for their continuing commitment to the letter and spirit of the 1969 Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa and the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as well as its 1967 Protocol. Member States of the African Union have been steadfast in extending African hospitality to refugees. Unfortunately, the Continent is increasingly faced with difficulties to cater for the needs of refugees as donor fatigue continues to erode the resource base available to humanitarian actors. For instance, in May 2005, the World Food Programme and UNHCR reported that almost a quarter of the refugee population, particularly in Africa, would go hungry because the organization did not receive enough resources to feed the refugees who were already surviving on highly reduced food rations.

7. It is, therefore, important for the international community to redouble its efforts in assisting the host countries by providing the necessary resources. It is critical that this assistance and commitment continues after the return of refugees, in particular with regard to rehabilitation of the communities that hosted thousands of refugees both as an expression of solidarity and burden sharing with countries that have incurred huge socio-economic costs in hosting large numbers of refugees and enable these communities refocus on their own problems including poverty and underdevelopment. It is also crucial that the international community and development partners focus attention on the need in bridging the gap between humanitarian relief and development especially in post-conflict situations.

### **III. REGIONAL ANALYSIS:**

#### **A. NORTHERN REGION**

8. The Northern Region is still gripped with the problem of the Saharawi refugees estimated at almost 165,000 living in Tindouf refugee camps in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, and a small number in other countries in the region. The parties concerned have not overcome the political deadlock that has been an obstacle for the Saharawi people in fully exercising their right to self-determination. In the meantime, the refugees continue to live in deplorable conditions relying entirely on external aid for their survival. UNHCR and WFP provide much needed protection and assistance in crucial areas such as food, water, health, sanitation and transportation. In 2004 UNHCR organized 'go-and-see' visits and established a telephone link to allow families who had not seen or talked to each other for periods as long as 25 years to communicate with each other.

9. The funding situation for Saharawi refugees is so dire that in March 2005, AU officials in Western Sahara needed to attend a joint UNHCR/WFP Donors' conference on Humanitarian Assistance to Saharawi Refugees in Tindouf in order to further strengthen the effort to raise badly needed resources. The visit by AU officials is believed to have further increased interest among donor countries concerning the plight

of the people caught in this protracted refugee situation including the acute shortage of food, problems in information-sharing and coordination among humanitarian actors.

## **B. WESTERN REGION**

**10.** The situation in Western Region has improved considerably as some countries continued to abide by the various agreements signed by conflicting parties and factions, and efforts are currently focusing on post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. On the other hand, Benin and Ghana received thousands of new Togolese refugees who fled their country following the succession crisis since February 2005 and the elections held in April 2005.

**11.** Following Togo's elections on 24 April 2005, more than 35,000 Togolese have fled to neighbouring **Benin** and **Ghana**. At the end of May 2005 approximately 20,000 refugees have sought refuge in Benin and over 15,000 in Ghana. During the last week of May, 70 to 200 new arrivals were being registered on a daily basis at the border crossing point of Hilakondji. UNHCR is currently strengthening its field presence in the two countries including opening a new office in Ho, the chief town of the Volta region in Ghana. The majority of refugees originate from Lome, the capital of Togo and Aneho, which is close to the border with Benin.

**12.** The situation in **Cote d'Ivoire** has shown improvement following the signature of several agreements by the Government and Rebel groups such as the Pretoria Agreement of April 2005. In the meantime, hundreds of Ivorians are still living among local communities across the common border with Liberia. It is the second time that many of these people had to flee following the violence that broke out again in November 2004. The refugees expressed their desire to return to Cote d'Ivoire when the situation stabilizes. The country also provides asylum to about 70,000 refugees from Liberia.

**13.** **Guinea** has been host to more than half a million refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone for the past 16 years. With the repatriation of Sierra Leonians and the start of the return of Liberian refugees, the country is currently home to some 120,000 refugees, the majority of whom are Liberians. Since January 2005, the authorities have been informing UNHCR about the need to rehabilitate the environment and infrastructure in the refugee-affected areas, particularly Gueckedou that received the bulk of the refugee influx. UNHCR is currently working with its partners, donors and development actors to address these issues.

**14.** At the time of reporting, the humanitarian situation in **Liberia** had improved considerably, in part due to implementation of the peace agreement and accomplishment of major tasks in the transition from conflict to peace including arrangements for free and fair elections planned to take place later this year and, a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programme for former combatants. These developments have facilitated the mass repatriation of refugees and return of IDPs to their villages, many spontaneously since August 2003, and under the auspices of UNHCR since October 2004.

15. Since October 2004, about 8,500 Liberian refugees from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria have been repatriated and 62,000 IDPs returned to their habitual places of residence under the auspices of UNHCR. On another positive note, about 13 out of Liberia's 15 counties have been declared safe for the return of refugees and IDPs. While this development is likely to increase the number of returnees dramatically, considering that UNHCR is planning to repatriate approximately 150,000 people, the rate of return is also expected to increase pressure on the ability of the local communities to survive alongside refugees and returnees. It is critical, therefore, that the international community scales up its support and urgently provide the resources required for the effective completion of the DDDR Programme and support for the reintegration and rehabilitation of returning populations as well as the communities that receive them.

16. In **Sierra Leone** numerous reintegration and rehabilitation programmes are being implemented for returned Sierra Leonians by the Government and its humanitarian and development partners including UNHCR, other UN agencies, NGOs and donors. These programmes include training, facilitation and support of community empowerment projects as well as water systems development and construction. Sierra Leone also hosts refugees from other countries, mainly Liberia, who benefit from protection and, care and maintenance programmes provided by UNHCR, the government and other local and international partners. Over 5,000 Liberian refugees have returned from Sierra Leone since the start of repatriation activities in October 2004.

### C. CENTRAL REGION

17. The Central Region is also experiencing forced population displacement within and outside the region. While repatriation and return movements are taking place in some areas, people are also leaving their homes in search of refuge elsewhere for various reasons.

18. In **Burundi**, thousands of refugees continue to return to the country, mainly from Tanzania, under the auspices of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme. Since March 2002, UNHCR has repatriated over 158,000 Burundian refugees from Tanzania and by the end of 2005 it plans to repatriate a further 150,000 people, 85,000 of which are expected to be from Tanzania and the rest from other neighbouring countries. Burundi also provides asylum to 9,000 Rwandan refugees more than half of which are settled along the common border of the two countries.

19. Due to the civil war that is raging in the Darfur region of Sudan since early 2003, **Chad** has become host to about 230,000 Sudanese refugees settled in 12 camps in the Eastern part of the country. The number of refugees has almost doubled within a period of one year and about 200,000 of these refugees were transferred by UNHCR and its partners from the volatile border area further inland in order to ensure their protection and the provision of assistance.

20. The humanitarian organizations operating in the field reported that the main problem of refugees in Chad was acute scarcity of water. The majority of refugees had access to less than half of the minimum standard of 15 liters per person per day. Other difficulties include shortage of food, firewood and educational opportunities. By April 2005 some 20,000 people were reported to have returned back from Chad as well as towns and villages within Darfur itself.

21. The war in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC) officially ended in 2003. However, people continue to flee to seek refuge abroad, thousands are displaced internally and many more are dying on a daily basis due to the consequences of war. The situation is particularly grave in Ituri district in the eastern part of the country where, despite the presence of more than 4,000 UN peacekeepers, more than 100,000 people fled their homes within a period of three months. Humanitarian agencies reported that they were finding it increasingly difficult to carry out their humanitarian activities primarily because of harassment by militias active in the area.

22. On the other hand, refugees also continue to return to the Equator province which is experiencing relative calm. During the reporting period UNHCR repatriated about 2,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) and hundreds of others returned on their own from the Republic of Congo where the number of refugees from DRC is estimated to be approximately 60,000. UNHCR plans to assist approximately 24,000 of these refugees to return this year. The agency also reports that this operation will be logistically the most challenging voluntary repatriation programme it has undertaken so far as the return route would involve crossing dense rain forests, numerous waterways and extremely rough roads. The returnees would also need substantial assistance in order to effectively reintegrate into their communities.

#### **D. EASTERN REGION**

23. Positive developments were noted in Eastern Region during the reporting period. In spite of these developments, however, more efforts have to be made in order to bring about peace and stability in the region and pave the way for the return of millions of refugees and the internally displaced.

24. The number of refugees in **Ethiopia** continues to decline considerably following the repatriation of most of the Somali refugees back to 'Somaliland' and 'Puntland'. The last-but-one of the eight Somali refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia, is closed recently leaving only one camp accommodating some 10,500 refugees. It is recalled that more than 600,000 Somali refugees sought asylum in these eight camps, including Hartishek (which at one point hosted over 260,000 refugees) for more than 16 years. A smaller number of Sudanese refugees also went back to Sudan spontaneously. However, the country is still to host more than 110,000 refugees accommodated in seven camps. Some parts of the country were affected by drought and floods that killed a large number of people, left thousands more homeless, destroyed large agricultural and pastoral lands and disrupted transportation routes especially in the Eastern and southern parts of the country.

**25. Kenya**, host to more than 200,000 refugees most of whom are from neighbouring Somalia, also experienced heavy rains and flooding in the north-eastern part of the country including the large Somali refugee camp of Dadaab. Approximately 25,000 Somali refugees were affected by the floods and displaced from their homes. During the same period the country also received more than 3,000 newly arriving refugees from Sudan at the Kakuma camp located in the north-west of the country.

**26.** During the reporting period **Rwanda** hosted approximately 50,000 refugees about 43,000 of whom are from DRC, some 6,000 from Burundi and the balance from other countries. During the reporting period the country was receiving refugees from DRC at an average rate of 50 persons on a daily basis at the transit centers in Gisenyi and Cyangugu provinces. UNHCR has started relocating these refugees away from the border to locations further inland. More than 2,000 Rwandan refugees have also returned from DRC and the Government has continued to express its readiness to receive its nationals including former combatants and assist in their reintegration into the society.

**27.** In **Somalia** the positive developments in the peace process resulted in the election of the President of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in October 2004. These developments may lead to peace and stability and eventually result in the return of more than 400,000 refugees scattered in the region mainly to the central and southern parts of the country. An estimated 370,000 IDPs are also expected to return to their communities once the situation stabilized. Mogadishu, the capital of the country alone has an estimated IDP population of about 250,000. The balance of some 120,000 are scattered in 'Somaliland' and 'Puntland'. It is recalled that more than one million refugees and IDPs have gone back to Somalia during the past several years – mostly to 'Somaliland' and 'Puntland'.

**28.** The international community is called upon to assist the returned refugees and IDPs in order to ensure the sustainability of their return through socio-economic recovery and reconstruction especially in areas that currently enjoy relative peace and stability.

**29.** The humanitarian situation in **Sudan** has two distinct features. The conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A in January 2005 on the one hand and the continued crisis in the Darfur region of the country on the other. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement brought about an end to more than 2 decades of civil war. The people of Southern Sudan are poised to rebuild their shattered lives and the overall security situation if the south remains calm. These developments will pave the way for the return, resettlement, reintegration and rehabilitation of approximately 550,000 refugees in neighbouring countries and the more than 4 million internally displaced persons. Significant returns have already started to many parts of South Sudan. UN agencies, for instance, have reported that about 82,000 returnees and IDPs arrived in the seven Payamas of Yambio County in addition to the regular population movements in and out of the Juba area including a number of refugees returning from Ethiopia.

**30.** The reintegration and sustainability of return of refugees in Sudan will depend heavily on increased and sustained donor support. Funding of critical programmes has so far been very slow. It is extremely important that donors honour their pledges of some 4.5 billion US Dollars for the 2005-2007 period made during the Oslo conference in April 2005. The full and timely release of these resources would be critical in ensuring the effective implementation of the peace agreement including programmes that cover the repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation of refugees and IDPs as well as the reconstruction of Southern Sudan.

**31.** The conflict in Darfur has affected nearly 2.45 million people. According to UN agencies more than 2.2 million of these people are internally displaced while some 230,000 have fled to eastern Chad to seek refuge. The population affected by the conflict is expected to increase further despite some returns. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has estimated that the number of people directly impacted by the combined effects of the conflict and poor rains in 2004 could exceed 3 million people.

**32.** A large number of humanitarian organizations are involved in providing much needed assistance such as the protection of human rights, food, water, sanitation, shelter, non-food items and basic health services. Although the overall situation of the population affected by the conflict remains very fragile, a dramatic increase was noted in the effort to deliver humanitarian assistance. It is worth noting here, for instance, that the number of humanitarian aid workers has jumped from a pitiable 200 in March 2004 to a more robust 10,000 in April 2005 according to reports from OCHA. Furthermore, increased access to affected populations by aid workers and the presence of African Union monitors has helped significantly in improving the overall situation including reductions in the violation of human rights and the delivery of assistance. In spite of these positive developments, however, violence and insecurity continue to dominate the international humanitarian agenda as the majority of refugees and IDPs still live largely in fear and are unable to return to their places or origin. The insecurity that prevails in the area also continues to impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance and endanger the safety of humanitarian workers.

**33.** The number of refugees in **Tanzania** continues to decline as thousands of Burundian refugees opt to return to their country under the UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme. As a result, some of the refugee camps (with less than 10,000 persons) will be closed and the remaining refugees will be transferred to larger camps according to the Tripartite Agreement signed between Tanzania, Burundi and UNHCR. In addition to the 240,000 living in camps, Tanzania also hosts some 200,000 Burundian refugees in settlements, cities and villages. The country is also host to more than 150,000 refugees from DRC and close to 3,000 Somali refugees.

**34.** The humanitarian situation in northern **Uganda** is still cause for great concern to the African Union and the international community as a whole. The population of internally Displaced Persons living in over 200 camps is estimated at over 1.8 million. The LRA is still carrying out atrocities against innocent civilians of whom the majority are women and children. UN agencies continue to appeal to the world to pay more attention



to this problem and expedite efforts to bring about a return to peace and normalcy in this part of the country. In addition to the IDP problems of its own, the country has also given refuge to more than 223,000 refugees the majority of whom are from Sudan. During the period under review, UNHCR reported that the country received some 4,200 newly arriving refugees from Sudan and DRC as well as a smaller number from Rwanda. The AU Commission also made a financial contribution of US\$150,000 to the Uganda Red Cross Society to support the latter's programmes for IDPs including the provision of water, sanitation, health, prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence.

#### **E. SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**35.** One of the major developments witnessed in the Southern region is the return of Angolan refugees and the closure of camps that hosted them. The Angolan repatriation will be the second major return of refugees following the successful returns of Mozambican refugees in 1992. Currently the repatriation of Angolan refugees is taking place from DRC, Zambia and Namibia. These operations are expected to be largely completed by October 2005.

**36.** **Angola** is expected to welcome back its nationals living in exile in the region by the end of the year. UNHCR is planning to repatriate about 53,000 refugees while many others are expected to return spontaneously. Only some 3,000 refugees residing in the Republic of Congo and some in Zambia have yet to express a desire to return. The subsequent challenge will then be on the effective reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the returned populations as well as the local communities in this vast country ravaged by three decades of war and finding durable solutions for those who will remain in their countries of asylum.

**37.** The refugee population in **Zambia**, currently estimated to be about 300,000, is expected to decrease dramatically as the majority of Angolan refugees return to their country this year. In March 2004, the Ukwimi refugee camp in the east of the country was closed after the return of the majority of its Angolan refugee population. The remaining smaller number of refugees were relocated to camps located in the west and north-west parts of the country. In the meantime the country is also spearheading a programme known as the **Zambia Initiative** which fosters investment in refugee-hosting areas and self-sufficiency of refugees and local populations through multi-sectoral programmes that involve refugees, the local community, government departments, NGOs and other local and international partners.

#### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION**

**38.** In conformity with Executive Council Decisions Ex/CL/Dec.179(VI) of January 2005 and Ex/CL/Dec.127(V), the Commission of the African Union, together with the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees and in close collaboration with AU partners carried out its programme of work in the following areas:

- Assessment missions which helped to sensitize Member States and the international community on the plight of uprooted populations- especially refugees and IDPs. Donors were urged to share the burden of African countries hosting refugees by providing increased assistance to cover the basic needs of displaced populations. Member States were also urged to create conditions conducive for the return of their nationals in exile. The countries visited during the reporting period include: Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana. As part of AU's expression of solidarity with their efforts to help refugees, Benin and Ghana were each given a financial contribution of US\$30,000 to assist them to cope with the influx of refugees. Field missions were also planned to Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.
- The AU Chairperson's Special Representative in armed conflict situations, H.E. Mrs. Madior Boye undertook a mission to Cote d'Ivoire and discussed at length with high-level officials in the country the need for protection of civilians caught in the conflict between the Government and Rebel movements.
- The 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the AU Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons was held on 27 May 2005. Revitalization of the Committee's work was the main purpose of this meeting. At the end of its deliberations the CCAR made several recommendations aimed at revitalizing the Committee.
- A Meeting on Education and Skills Development was held in June 2005. A concept paper on proposals and an action plan for awarding scholarship to refugee students was discussed in detail. The Scholarship Awarding Committee will therefore resume granting scholarships according to the newly adopted policies.
- The Fifth World Refugee Day was commemorated in Ethiopia under this year's theme, **Courage**, with an extensive programme that included a visit to Sherkole refugee camp in Western Ethiopia by the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees and the AU Commission. Other activities, jointly organized by AU and UNHCR, were attended by Ambassadors accredited to Ethiopia and dignitaries from various institutions. The Commission also requested Member States to commemorate the occasion in their respective countries with activities based on the above-mentioned theme.
- The Bureau of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees held one meeting during the reporting period. The PRC Sub-Committee also met to map out its work programme for 2005 and review its implementation.
- Within the framework of cooperation with institutions involved in humanitarian assistance operations and agreements with various organizations, the Commission participated in conferences, meetings and

seminars on several issues including post-conflict reconstruction in countries of refugee and IDP return.

## **V. CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD**

**39.** Although the Commission has implemented a number of programmes, it is still faced with massive challenges in the humanitarian field. Africa has the largest number of refugees and IDPs. In addition the serious situation regarding forced population displacement, natural disasters, hunger, poverty and deadly diseases continue to wreak havoc to a large number of the continent's population. These problems, coupled with still weak international support and shortage of funding, continue to complicate the Commission's mission. The human resources and financial support available to the Commission are meager and implementation of its plans would continue to be frustrated unless action is taken to reverse the situation. Inadequate capacity in human resources and extremely limited financial support are a few of the main impediments to the Commission's work in several areas:

- Resource mobilization efforts, including missions to potential donor countries
- Provision of leadership in early warning, prevention, preparedness, response to and management of natural and man-made disasters to Member States
- Fulfilling the mandate of the AU Special Representative in armed conflicts for the 2005-2007 period (a shortfall of US\$1,000,000)

**40.** Despite these difficulties, the Commission will continue to further strengthen its collaboration with its partners, in particular the UNHCR, ICRC, WFP and IOM based on their respective agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the AU. Close cooperation and coordination is key to AU's effort to forge and further develop strong partnership with its partners and other organizations.

**41.** In order to achieve these goals, the assistance of the international community is crucial. Partners and donors should honour the pledges they often make at conferences and meetings such as the recent conference on Sudan that took place in Oslo, Norway. The AU also appeals to Member States to make contributions to the AU Special Refugee Contingency Fund. To-date only South Africa has been making contributions to the Fund which was set up to advance AU's objectives in assisting programmes and operations that ensure the protection of, assistance to and, return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs thereby contributing to improved peace and security in the continent. Even when peace agreements are honoured and implemented successfully, the AU is expected to continue assisting uprooted populations until they are effectively reintegrated in their communities and are able to participate in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of their countries.

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