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**REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED
PERSONS IN AFRICA**

10 – 11 NOVEMBER 2008, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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BACKGROUND

1. The June 2006 Ouagadougou Conference of Ministers in-charge of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, recommended to hold an AU Council of Ministers on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons every two years, and to hold the 1st ever Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally displaced persons in Africa.

2. This was followed by the adoption by the Executive Council, in July 2006 in Banjul, the Gambia, of Decision, EX.CL.Dec.289 (IX) requesting “the Commission to initiate preparations for the holding of a Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in 2008 in consultation with key partners of the Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons”. This Decision was further strengthened by decision EX.CL.Dec.319 (X) adopted by the Executive Council in January 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where they requested “the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, and the Commission to work closely with the AU partners in the planning and preparations of the Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.”

INTRODUCTION

3. Against this background, a meeting of African Ministers in charge of Forced Displacement Issues in Africa took place from 10th-11th November 2008 at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia African Union in preparation of the Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. It was preceded by Member States Experts on forced displacement issues in Africa that took place from 5 – 7 November 2008 and a meeting of Member States Legal Experts that took place on 9 November 2008 to finalise the review of the AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. The meetings were attended by Ministers in-charge of forced displacement matters, Experts and other high-ranking officials from 43 Members States. Present also were Representatives from ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, the United Nations Agencies, International Organizations, and various African NGOs as well as a group of independent AU Experts as Discussants.

4. The meeting reviewed and considered the following matters:

- Outcomes of the 2006 Ouagadougou Declaration on Refugees, Returnees, and Displaced Persons;

- Conference paper covering the following themes:
 - Preventing forced displacement,
 - Effective protection of victims of forced displacement,
 - Meeting the specific needs of displaced women and children,
 - Meeting the specific needs of displaced victims of natural disasters,
 - Rebuilding affected communities emerging out of conflicts and natural disasters, and
 - Forging partnerships in addressing forced displacement in Africa.

ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

5. During the Ministers Meeting the following Bureau Members were elected:

Chairperson:	Uganda
1 st Vice Chairperson:	Gabon
2 nd Vice Chairperson:	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
3 rd Vice Chairperson:	Nigeria
Rapporteur:	Namibia

OUTCOME OF THE MEETING

On Review of the Outcome of the 2006 Ouagadougou Declaration

6. The meeting highlighted the importance of the Declaration, but emphasised the need to update on the status of implementation as well as in identifying challenges that remained to be resolved.

On Preventing Forced Displacement

7. The meeting specifically raised the issue of governance, pointing out that bad governance and non-adherence to democracy may jeopardise efforts aimed at addressing other causes of forced displacement. In this regard, it was noted that Member States need to ratify the African Charter on Democracy and to comply with relevant international human rights and international humanitarian law instruments. The meeting also noted the importance of addressing the immediate causes of forced displacement, such as natural disasters and climate change, highlighting the needed strategies for disaster preparedness as well as early warning systems.

On effective protection for victims of forced displacement

8. The importance of establishing the refugee settlements and camps at internationally agreed distances from the common borders of the host country and of origin was emphasized. Further, the meeting noted that the host country must ensure that refugees do not involve themselves in any kind of subversive activities that may affect interstate relations. It was further emphasised that appropriate steps be taken to

maintain the humanitarian and civilian character of camps for refugees and displaced persons. The importance of the existence of an effective legal framework for the protection of victims of forced displacement was emphasised. In this regard, access by the displaced populations to basic social services, such as education, health, water, employment and shelter was underlined as crucial for effective protection.

9. On durable solutions, the meeting reiterated voluntary repatriation as the preferred durable solution. Local integration was highlighted as another solution, including granting citizenship to protracted refugee caseloads where possible as well as consideration of intra-Africa resettlement of refugees.

On Meeting the Specific Needs of Displaced Women and Children,

10. The meeting noted with concern the conditions of women and children particularly in situations of conflict and stated that it requires urgent response. Women and children are vulnerable to degrading and dehumanising sexual violence and exploitation. The meeting noted that the abuse of women and children was a clear case of impunity. It was also noted with concern that in some situations, humanitarian workers and those who should protect the vulnerable have themselves abused them. Regarding the forced conscription of children as child soldiers, the meeting particularly called for compliance with the relevant International Instruments as well as political will to deal with impunity. In addressing the plight of women and children, the meeting called for programmes that empower and enhance the welfare and self-reliance of women.

On Meeting the Specific Needs of Displaced Victims of Natural Disasters,

11. The meeting underscored the need for institutional development and identification of potential risks. They emphasized effective policy, legal and institutional structures for managing risks and for the protection of the victims of natural disasters at national and continental level. The need for a comprehensive environmental assessment on the impact of hosting refugees and IDPs was emphasised. The meeting noted the importance of early warning, contingency planning and mitigation as well as the need to develop capacity for intervention at regional and continental levels including budgeting allocations at the national level and establishment of an AU emergency fund

On Rebuilding Affected Communities Emerging Out Of Conflicts and Natural Disasters:

12. The meeting acknowledged the AU policy framework on PCRDR adopted in June 2006 in Banjul the Gambia and indicated that it needed implementation. The meeting also highlighted the need to create structures at national level to oversee reconstruction and coordinate with various stakeholders from within the country as well as regional and international partners.

On Forging Partnerships in Addressing Forced Displacement in Africa:

13. The meeting called for further international support in the implementation of programmes for assistance of displaced persons as well as recovery and reconstruction of areas formerly impacted by large numbers of displaced populations. The meeting emphasised that no party would be able to carry out reconstruction alone, hence the need for coordination among local and international partners. The importance of humanitarian reform was highlighted, with attention being given to early recovery in order to deal with the transition from the emergency to the reconstruction phase.

Presentation by the Representative of the African Group on Humanitarian Matters in Geneva:

14. H.E Mr. Guy Alain Emmanuel Ganze the Ambassador of Cote d'Ivoire and Coordinator of the Africa Group on Humanitarian matters in Geneva addressed the meeting on behalf of the African Group in Geneva and gave a brief on the outcome of the 6th Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee meeting. He informed the meeting that the Africa Group in Geneva remains involved in the issue of forced displacement on the Continent and that they adopted Resolution A/Res/63 of the UN General Assembly on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and IDPs in Africa which accompanies the annual report of the UN Secretary General on Refugees and IDPs. The resolution Appreciates the Decision of the African Union to convene a Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs in Africa, and congratulates the process of elaborating a draft AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally displaced Persons in Africa. He stated that during the 59th sessions of Executive Committee, which took place in October 2008, the Group highlighted the gravity of the problem of forced displacement in Africa. The Ambassador concluded by congratulating the AU/UNHCR, the Government of the Republic of Uganda and other partners for the side-event on the Special Summit, and added that the African Group will continue to mobilize support for its success.

15. In the reflections on the presentation of the proceedings of the 49th Session of EXCOM, the distinguished delegations appreciated the comprehensive report and emphasized the need for future synergy between what happens at Geneva and at the AU to have impact. The meeting noted the appeal by AU and Uganda and the collective resolve by the Africa Group in Geneva to mobilise resources to convene a successful Summit and in the implementation of its outcomes. To this end the meeting appreciated the moral and direct financial support UNHCR had extended to AU in the preparation of the Summit.

CONCLUSION

16. The Ministers adopted with amendments, their Report and Recommendations as well as the Draft AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. They also reviewed and endorsed with amendments the draft Declaration for the Special Summit on refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

2009

Report of the Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees And Internally Displaced Persons in Africa 10 – 11 November 2008, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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