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

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

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This gives an account of the current situation of forced population displacement on the African continent since the last report to Council in July 2008. It offers a trends analysis on the general situation of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the Continent, and details region by region, the latest developments in forced migration movements, as well as the steps taken by the African Union (AU) Commission in implementing the various decisions and instruments of the AU, the challenges and the way forward.

2. It shall be recalled that Decision EX.CL/Dec. 423(XIII) of Sharm el Sheik, Egypt requested “the Commission, in consultation with Member States to update statistics and present to the Executive Council the latest figures on forced displacement in the Report on the Situation of Refugees, Returnees and IDPs in Africa.” Accordingly, the Commission wrote to all Member States recalling the Decision and urging them to provide the relevant statistics, however, the responses were minimal and the Commission had to rely mostly on data provided by AU regional and field offices, the AU Conflict Management Centre, and UN agencies, especially UNHCR.

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

3. Since the last report to Council, the general situation of refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa has continued to improve in some areas, while others have deteriorated due to renewed or intensified conflicts, natural disasters, the global food and financial crises, climate change and poverty.

4. The central and eastern parts of the Continent continue to be areas of grave concern as fighting in some of the countries within these regions continue to escalate, causing thousands of their citizens to flee to neighboring countries. The deteriorating security and humanitarian situation has not only affected their citizens, but also, aid agencies working on the ground. During the 59th Session of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee in October 2008, NGOs working in the field of humanitarian assistance issued a statement decrying the loss of humanitarian space and the respect and recognition required by humanitarian organizations to assist populations in need.

5. The recent global food and financial crises have also affected the delivery of aid to certain vulnerable populations. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), high food prices are pushing over 130 million people globally, deeper into poverty and hunger. Africa is one of the continents most affected by these crises, and with the largest number of victims of forced displacement in the world - close to 3 million refugees and over 15 million internally displaced persons, the situation is indeed grave. Donor fatigue and the struggle for developed countries to manage their own economic

crises have led to dwindling funds towards humanitarian aid agencies working in the Continent. AU Member States hosting refugees are more and more taking on much of the burden of providing for those refugees and asylum seekers within their countries as humanitarian aid agencies fall short of receiving the necessary funding to implement their programmes and meet the needs of the displaced populations.

III. REGIONAL ANALYSIS

A. NORTHERN REGION

6. In the northern region, the situation of forced displacement continues to be constant with primary challenges focusing on the protracted refugee caseloads in some countries. During the reporting period as well, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya continued to take care of some 10,000 persons from the Middle East and Africa.

7. In the Tindouf refugee camps in northern Algeria, the **Algerian** government, UNHCR and other partner organizations continue to seek out durable solutions for 165,000 Sahrawi refugees who have endured one of the world's most protracted refugee cases. UNHCR has been implementing Confidence Building Measures Programme (CBMs) during the 2008 calendar year, which aims at providing a link between the Sahrawis living in Tindouf and their relatives in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic through organized visits, establishing telephone centers and seminars.

8. In **Egypt**, official government statistics show that an estimated 42,844 registered refugees and asylum seekers continue to seek refuge in the urban areas of Cairo and Alexandria. The largest group are Sudanese of about 23,342, with others fleeing from Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and other countries. Between January and August 2008, the Government of Egypt and UNHCR assisted in the voluntary repatriation of 793 Sudanese refugees to Southern Sudan. Meanwhile, Egypt continues to be a strong advocate for better targeting and coordination of policies to provide durable solutions to resolve refugee situations, particularly those protracted refugee situations.

B. WESTERN REGION

9. In the western region, the general situation of forced population displacement has continued to improve with the sustained peace and stability of the countries in the region. Voluntary repatriation exercises for Liberia and Sierra Leone ended in 2007, and the UNHCR is currently running post-voluntary repatriation verification exercises. There still remains hundreds of thousands of refugees around the region who have opted not to return home, and in such cases, the countries of origin and of asylum in collaboration with UNHCR, have been facilitating their integration within the host countries.

10. Voluntary repatriation of refugees from Liberia has continued according to Government sources. Some 7,976 Liberian refugees from Ghana are reported to have returned to their areas of origin, as at September 2008. Meanwhile about 3,500 Sierra

Leonean refugees who have opted to remain in Liberia following the end of voluntary repatriation in 2007 are being integrated locally.

11. In June 2008, the UNHCR announced its decision to invoke the Ceased Circumstances Cessation Clause in Sierra Leone, recommending that states end refugee status for Sierra Leoneans who fled the country during the decade-long civil war, which started in 1991, since the root causes of the refugee problem have ceased to exist. The cessation will enter into effect on 31st December 2008 following consultations with the governments of the main countries of asylum and Sierra Leone.

12. In Côte d'Ivoire, despite the improved security situation in the country thousands of refugees and IDPs have not returned home. Ivorian refugees continue to seek refuge in neighbouring countries such as Guinea, which is hosting some 4,416 refugees, and the number of IDPs is still estimated at around 709,000 as at September 2008. Côte d'Ivoire is at the same time host to about 24,800 refugees.

13. With regard to the situation in Togo, heavy rainfalls at the end of July 2008 led to a significant loss of human life, mass displacement of the population in the affected areas, and destruction of crops and infrastructure, including communications systems and eleven bridges blocking access to some of the victims. In response to the crisis, the African Union Commission made a financial contribution of US \$100,000 to the Government of Togo towards meeting the needs of the affected communities.

C. CENTRAL REGION

14. On-going crises and renewed violence in the Central Region has resulted into thousands of mass movements, especially in Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. The refugees fled to neighbouring countries and beyond the region. The prevailing situation has had a negative impact on the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. International organizations are warning of the risks of a genocide in the Great Lakes region as well as human catastrophe if quick solutions are not found at the highest diplomatic levels as displacement continued unabated throughout the year of 2008.

15. In the case of **Burundi** progress is being made towards achieving peace as the peace agreements have been respected. Between July and August 2008, more than 27,000 refugees returned, thus tallying up the number of returnees mainly from DRC, Rwanda and Tanzania since 2002 to 448,326. Meanwhile the country is home to almost 30,000 refugees, of who the majority are from the DRC.

16. In **Central African Republic (CAR)**, ongoing insecurity in the northwestern part of the country continues to be a challenge for humanitarian workers in the area, as well as a source of refugees fleeing their homes to neighboring countries. There are close to 200,000 IDPs in CAR, while at the same time, the country is host to about 7,200 refugees from Sudan and other nationalities. The AU PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons visited the areas hosting these refugees and IDPs in December 2008.

17. Meanwhile in **Cameroon**, refugees that fled their homes in Chad during the unrest in February 2008 have continued to return to their homes. According to UNHCR, however, the country is still hosting about 78,000 refugees most of whom are from Central African Republic, as well as some from DRC, Republic of Congo, and Rwanda.

18. The security situation in **Chad** is still fluid. There are 12 camps in the eastern part of the country which host about 285,000 refugees from Darfur region of Sudan and about 50,000 refugees are from the Central African Republic and are found in five camps in the southern region and 5,000 urban refugees from different nationalities living in N'djamena. The major problem in the refugee camps is insecurity caused by several cross-border attacks. The situation has also generated about 180,000 IDPs living in the camps in the eastern part of the country. Refugees and IDPs were living in terror because of gross violations of human rights in particular against the women and children. Another serious issue is the recruitment of child soldiers in camps of refugees and internally displaced persons, which jeopardizes the neutrality and civilian character of forced displaced settlements. Humanitarian aid workers have not been spared either as in 2008 alone more than 120 of them were attacked, including car-jackings, robberies and killings according to UNOCHA sources. In order to ensure the security in the camps, the Mission of the UN for Central African Republic and Chad, in cooperation with the Commission of the European Union, deployed some 3,700 peacekeeping troops in Chad. In November 2008, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for a doubling of international troops to be deployed in eastern Chad because of the deteriorating situation. In October 2008, the AU Commission undertook a mission to Chad to find ways of restoring peace and stability in the country.

19. During the reporting period, the Commission was very much concerned about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** in particular in the eastern part of the country in North Kivu, since the resumption of hostilities between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the National Congress for the Defense of the People. As part of the efforts being made by the Commission towards finding a lasting solution to the crisis in the region, the Chairperson of the Commission, undertook a visit in October 2008, where he met with President Joseph Kabila and other stakeholders. Furthermore, he pursued consultations with the countries of the Region and concerned international actors, in order to facilitate the resolution of the crisis in Eastern DRC, as well as to promote peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes Region. As a follow-up to his efforts, in November 2008, the Chairperson dispatched an emissary to the region in order to find ways and means of promoting a holistic approach to the current crisis, building on existing instruments and mechanisms, and to gain strong support from the international community. The Leaders of the Great Lakes Region also met in November 2008 in Nairobi, Kenya to find the best political and humanitarian solution to the crisis in DRC.

20. In addition to the visit of the Chairperson, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees also fielded a humanitarian assessment mission to the DRC in December 2008 and made recommendations on how the AU could assist in the efforts to alleviate the plight of the affected population in the country.

21. The displacement crisis in North Kivu was at a peak between October and November 2008 where thousands of nationals fled and over 250,000 others became internally displaced within a short period of time, thus bringing the number in North Kivu alone to over one million IDPs. The IDP camps were forcibly emptied, looted and burned. The women and children of whom 60 percent are children as reported by UNICEF are the ones who suffer the most; they face human rights abuses and the children were separated from their families. In this situation it was difficult to protect the IDPs. To make matters worse, several aid agencies left the region, which left thousands of IDPs without assistance such as food, water, and sanitation in the camps. However, at the same time IDPs in such conditions risked and returned to their villages reporting deplorable conditions in the camps. It has been reported in the media time and again that the 17, 000 UN peacekeeping troops are overwhelmed with the security situation. This new scenario affected the return of thousands of refugees mainly from Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. At the same time, the country is host to more than 150,000 refugees, mainly from the bordering countries in spite of the conflict.

D. EASTERN REGION

22. In line with the various peace agreements and protocols, the Eastern region has made tremendous efforts to create conducive conditions for the return of victims of forced displacement even though some crises including disasters have undermined the return of some refugees and internally displaced persons. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region for the Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons which was adopted in October 2008 by the countries of the Great Lakes Region will go a long way in preventing and eliminating the root causes of displacement. Additionally, the cooperation agreement that was signed between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will help among other activities, in the protection of civilians affected by armed conflict and other forms of violence, including refugees and internally displaced persons, post-conflict rebuilding as well as promoting International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

23. **Ethiopia** continued to host refugees but the number has decreased from about 83,000 in July 2008 to 80,479 in September 2008 according to the Government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA). The decrease in number is due to the continued return of Southern Sudanese, Eritreans and Kenyans.

24. Since the last reporting, the number of refugees and asylum seekers has gone up in **Djibouti** from about 30,000 to 50,000. This is mainly due to the continued crisis in Somalia.

25. With regard to **Kenya**, the country continues to receive several hundreds of Somalis in addition to the old cases. UNHCR reported that in 2008 alone, it registered

more than 45, 000 new cases of Somali asylum seekers at Dadaab refugee camp. On average close to 5,000 refugees arrived on a monthly basis. Dadaab refugee camp, one of the world's oldest, biggest and most congested has over 215,000 refugees with an increase of about 25 percent in 2008. The major problems for refugees are shelter, food and sanitation. The camp is full to its capacity as it holds twice the population it is intended to house. The country is host close to 300,000 refugees, more than what was reported in July 2008. Additionally, the country is trying to cope with the remaining IDPs who were a result of the 2007 December Presidential elections.

26. Since 1994, the Government of **Rwanda** has made steady recovery and development by creating a secure, stable and conducive socio-economic environment in the country which has helped the repatriation of almost 99 percent of refugees to return home and be part of the socio-economic development as was reported in October 2008 in Geneva by the Government of Rwanda during the 59th Session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The country is host to approximately 55,000 refugees who are mainly from the Great Lakes Region.

27. The African Union is concerned about **Somalia** as it continues to experience one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world with about 3.2 million people in need of assistance. The crisis is mainly a result of drought, rising food prices and continuing instability in the country, which is contributing to the massive population displacement. The most affected areas are central and southern Somalia. The figures of victims of forced displacement change on a regular basis, however, UN agencies reported that over one million people are internally displaced while some 700,000 fled Mogadishu two years ago and in 2008, almost 200,000 found refuge in neighboring countries, especially in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and as far as Yemen. Due to the security situation, aid agencies have found it difficult to access many areas to provide protection and assistance to the affected population.

28. The country's situation is a major challenge to the international community and needs a joint effort for all stakeholders. Decisive action must be taken to protect and assist the affected populations in Somalia, as the majority who suffer the most are women and children.

29. Concerning **Sudan**, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement and the Government of National Unity, in September 2005, almost 300,000 southern Sudanese returned home and last year the number increased due to the April census and the confidence in the CPA the momentum continued during the last part of last year. At the same time, the UNHCR launched an appeal for donations as the agency reported shortfalls for its repatriation and reintegration operations for Southern Sudanese returning home.

30. A hybrid UN/African Union Peacekeeping Force (UNAMID) that was set up in January 2008 to alleviate the plight of IDPs among other activities, continued its work even though at times it is finding it difficult to operate due to the volatile security situation in the Darfur region of Sudan. However, the Government's announcement of a ceasefire in the region offered some hope as President Omar el-Bashir announced an "immediate,

unconditional ceasefire” on November and called for an immediate campaign to disarm militias accused of committing some of the worst atrocities during the conflict. Consequently, as the security situation improves, over 200,000 refugees in Chad and almost 2 million people affected in Darfur will return to home or places of their habitual residence.

31. **Tanzania** was hailed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees at the EX-COM meeting of the UNHCR in October 2008 for having offered the prospect of naturalization to Burundian refugees who fled Burundi in 1972. The Representative of the Government at EX-COM reported that the country had undertaken to naturalize 79 percent of the 218,234 Burundian nationals of whom the majority are from the 1972 caseload, while at the same time facilitating the voluntary return of the remaining 21 percent to Burundi. Naturalization is one of the durable solutions to the problem of refugees. At the time of reporting, UNHCR gave the figures of 138, 671 refugees who are living in the four camps in northwestern part of the country while 200,040 Burundian refugees and 1,506 Somali refugees are in settlements. In the meantime, Burundian refugees continued to return home spontaneously.

32. In October 2008, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, undertook a field mission to **Uganda** to assess the humanitarian condition of the refugees and IDPs in northern Uganda. During the mission the AU delegation met with Government officials, AU partners and other humanitarian organizations working in the field, and exchange views on the humanitarian situation, and the needs of the refugees and IDPs in the country.

33. According to Government officials, Uganda is hosting about 200,000 refugees mostly from the Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and recently refugees who fled Kenya during the elections violence in December 2007. With the assistance of implementing partners such as UNHCR, the Government has been able to repatriate about half of the Sudanese population back to Southern Sudan, and is about to sign a tripartite agreement with the Government of DRC and UNHCR to find a durable solution for the Congolese refugees in the country, which will include repatriation back to their places of origin. However, the recent violence in DRC might delay this process as more refugees continue to arrive in Uganda.

34. With a history of hosting refugees since the 1950s, the country has also seen about 2 million of its own citizens internally displaced, 1.8 million as a result of the 20 year conflict in the northern part of Uganda, and about 200,000 in the north eastern part of the country as a result of on-going conflict in the Karamoja region. In the north, however, due to the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 2006, over 1.6 million of the country's previous 2 million IDPs have returned to their homes, with albeit inadequate facilities and infrastructure. Upon visiting these areas of displacement and return, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees made recommendations to help meet the basic needs of the displaced populations and the returnees.

E. SOUTHERN REGION

35. The Southern region continued to host close to 160,000 refugees who fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia. Within the region, however, the number of refugees mainly from the region has continued to decrease, as they have voluntarily repatriated to their countries of origin. The problem of mixed migration flows nevertheless remains a source of concern for many countries in the region, and for those organizations mandated to offer protection and assistance to victims of forced displacement, as it is usually difficult to separate them from other groups of migrants.

36. **Mozambique** is host to 7,207 refugees, according to the Government's National Institute for Refugee Support. The majority of the refugees in the country are from DRC (3,523), Burundi (820), and Rwanda (400), including smaller numbers from other countries. Most of the refugees are being hosted in Maratane refugee camp, while others have been settled in the surrounding provinces. In 2008 some 325 Congolese and 30 Burundians were repatriated to their countries of origin.

37. Over the years, **Namibia** has hosted more than 20,000 refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have been voluntarily repatriated back to their countries of origin. According to Government figures, Namibia currently is host to approximately 7,000 refugees and asylum seekers from 13 countries in Africa, of which the majority are Angolans. Other nationalities seeking refuge in the country include Congolese from DRC and Rwandans. The refugees are hosted in Osire refugee camp where they have access to education, health and agricultural facilities. The displaced community still relies on WFP for food rations, but the Government is working towards introducing more self-reliant options such as its Green Scheme Program to reduce this dependency. Namibia has incorporated into its Constitution, provisions for granting asylum status to "persons who reasonably fear persecution on the ground of political beliefs, race, religion or membership of a particular social group," and in 1999 passed the Refugees (Recognition and Control) Act.

38. The Government representative of **South Africa** at the UNHCR Ex-Com meeting in October 2008 reported that the situation had improved since the xenophobic attacks against foreigners and some nationals in the country. He stated that the Government and local NGOs were engaged in a campaign to sensitize its citizens and eradicate xenophobia and other related intolerances, particularly with regards to persons who have been forced to flee their homes and were seeking refuge in South Africa. It was reported that the Government acted urgently to improve its asylum systems and processes to increase its capacity so that it could better manage asylum applications and processing to develop a better refugee dispensation and regime. According to UNHCR, South Africa continues to be host to some 156,570 refugees and asylum seekers from Burundi, DRC, Somalia and various other nationalities.

39. During the 59th Session of the UNHCR Executive Committee, the Government Official from **Zimbabwe** stated that the country currently hosts over 5,084 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from the Great Lakes Region. Over 60 percent of the caseloads were reported to be settled in Tongogara Refugee camp, Chipinge District, while the remainders are in urban areas, especially Harare. He announced that the Government and UNHCR are currently undertaking a verification exercise to reassess the number of refugees in the country.

40. According the AU Regional Delegation to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), in **Malawi**, over 8,000 refugees from Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia and Rwanda are being hosted primarily in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, while about 1,000 more reside in urban areas. Limited resources by the Government and the humanitarian agencies working in the country have presented some challenges in meeting the adequate needs of the displaced populations.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

41. As a continuation of the implementation of the Workplan of the Commission and Programme of Activities of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, several activities were carried out in close cooperation with AU Partners and relevant aid agencies. They included:

Visits to Member States

42. The PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons visited the remaining countries for its 2008 Programme of Work namely; Angola, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. They assessed the developments in these countries from the humanitarian point of view by visiting camps of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as areas of return. The refugees, returnees and IDPs were accorded an audience and exchanged views with the delegations. Furthermore, the delegations also met with the relevant Government officials, AU Partners, AU Special Representatives, and various humanitarian organizations including civil society organizations.

43. In Chad, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda the security issues were priority while Angola's concentration was on the issue of sustainable reintegration. It was observed that the Governments needed the international support and assistance in order to cope with the great numbers of refugees, returnees and IDPs. The delegations came up with recommendations of which the African Union will consider to support the efforts of the Governments in caring for the thousands of victims of forced displacement.

Meetings

44. The following meetings were held on matters related to forced displacement:

- i. AU Member States Experts and Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa were held from 5 to 11 November 2008 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They were attended by Ministers in-charge of Forced displacement issues, Experts, AU Partners, UN agencies, Regional Economic Communities, Civil Society Organizations as well as other relevant humanitarian agencies. The meetings were held in preparation for the forthcoming African Union Special Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa to take place in April 2009, in Kampala, Uganda. The preparations included important documents such as recommendations, draft Declaration, and the draft AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons.
- ii. The Task Force on the Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons met in August 2008 and continued with the preparations for the Special Summit.
- iii. The Fifty-Ninth Ordinary Session of the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR EX-COM) was held in Geneva from 6 to 10 October 2008. As is customary, the African Union was invited to the meeting where it was represented by the African Union Commission. The main purpose of the African Union Delegation to the Fifty-Ninth Session of the EX-COM was to raise awareness of the participants to the first ever African Union Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa that will take place in Uganda in April 2009 and the meetings of Member States Experts and Ministers in-charge of forced displacement that were held in November 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Additionally, there was a Side Event for senior officials from the AU Member States to raise awareness and spread the word to their Heads of States and Government to participate in the AU Special Summit and also to the partners and other interested parties who might extend a helping hand financially to the Ugandan Government. Furthermore, the Dean of the Africa Group in Geneva also raised awareness concerning the importance of the preparatory Experts and Ministerial Meetings of November 2008 which would lead to the Special Summit.
- iv. Meetings were held with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director of Regional Bureau for Africa with a focus on the preparations of the Special Summit of April 2009 through the Experts and Ministerial Meetings in November 2008 whereby, in addition the draft AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa would be considered by the Legal Experts and the Ministers for its adoption in April 2009 in Uganda.

- v. The AU Commission participated in the Conference commemorating Ten years of UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in Oslo, Norway from 16-17 October 2008. The Conference was attended by over 100 high-level delegates from international and regional organizations, civil society organizations, national authorities as well as representatives of displaced communities. The main objective of the Conference was to review the achievements so far gained and the challenges ahead, ten years after the adoption of the Guiding principles on Internal Displacement by the United Nations.
- vi. The Commission held a meeting with the Regional Economic Communities (REC's) on Free Movement in December 2008 in accordance with the Decision of the Executive Council, EX.CL/Dec. 354(XI) of June 2007 in Accra, Ghana. The Representatives of REC's gave their views and the way forward for the realization of free movement of persons, which is very crucial to the Continent.

Cooperation with AU Partners

45. The AU partners in particular, UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, WFP and AHA, continued to cooperate and collaborate closely with the Commission especially during the various meetings such as the Task Force of the Special Summit and Experts and Ministerial Meetings of November 2008. The Division of Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees and Displaced Persons (HARDP) also convened its bi-annual consultative meetings with the partners in August 2008, to discuss areas of joint cooperation for the remainder of the 2008 calendar year.

46. Furthermore, the UNHCR demonstrated its cooperation by strengthening the capacity of the HARDP Division by providing additional human resource support to assist in the preparations for the April 2009 Special Summit.

V. CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

47. Since the Continent has the largest number of victims of forced displacement, Member States are once again taking bold initiatives to address the problem of forced displacement. Consequently, according to decision of Executive Council EX/CL/Dec.289 (IX), the Special Summit will address the issue of forced displacement on the Continent and will allow the Member States the opportunity to tackle the root causes in order to eliminate the problem. A Solemn Declaration is expected to be considered by the Heads of State and Government that will commit them to take concrete measures to address the root causes of forced displacement, strengthen protection and assistance for the refugees and IDPs and create conducive conditions for the long-term solutions.

48. Additionally, the endorsement and signing of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons will indeed lead to a historic legal instrument for the welfare of IDPs.

2009

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