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**REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES,
RETURNEES AND IDPS**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC) Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons carried out activities in 2019 according to the work plan approved at the beginning of the year. These were mainly assessment missions to Member States that experienced population displacements as a result of natural and/or man-made disasters. The PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees also participated in other activities within its remit, notably the Seventieth Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, an annual event organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as in the Global Refugee Forum and in other activities organized by the African Union as part of the theme of the year 2019.

2. Humanitarian assessment missions were undertaken in the following African Union member countries in 2019:

- Republic of Mozambique, from 31 March to 7 April 2019;
- Republic of Zimbabwe, from 31 March to 4 April 2019;
- Republic of Malawi, from 4 to 7 April 2019;
- Republic of Mali, from 18 to 23 July 2019; and
- Burkina Faso, 24 July to 1 August 2019.

3. This report presents activities of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons for the period from January to December 2019.

HUMANITARIAN ASSESSMENT MISSIONS OF THE PRC SUB-COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES

REPUBLIC OF MOZAMBIQUE

4. The African Union Commission (AUC) conducted humanitarian assessment missions during the period from 31 March to 7 April 2019 to provide emergency support and express the solidarity of the African Union (AU) to the three countries affected by Tropical Cyclone Idai in the southern Africa region, notably Mozambique, which was the country most affected.

5. The delegation of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons to Mozambique was led by H.E. Mr. Crisantos Ondo Obama, Ambassador of Equatorial Guinea to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union and by H.E. Mr. Gaoussou Touré, Ambassador of Guinea (Conakry) to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union. The two ambassadors were assisted by officials from the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union.

6. The African Union mission was received by government authorities in the capital city of Maputo by senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, as well as from the National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC). Ministers were unavoidably absent due to the crisis. In fact, the government had moved from the capital to the area affected by the cyclone and all its members were involved in the crisis response effort. The mission also held meetings with staff of international organisations based in the capital city, notably the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The delegation then travelled to Beira to assess the impact of the cyclone.

7. The delegation visited Beira and its environs, including Buzi, located 70 kilometres away and which had been submerged during the cyclone as the water had risen to the level of the palm trees. On arrival in Beira, the mission was briefed on the situation by humanitarian aid workers on the field and, subsequently, they met with the mayor of the city, Mr. Daviz Simango, who explained to the delegation the extent of the damage caused by the cyclone and the challenges facing the city of Beira.

8. The March 2019 Cyclone Idai was one of the worst weather-related disasters to hit the southern hemisphere. It made landfall in Beira, in central Mozambique, on 14 March, with sustained winds of up to 185 km/h and torrential rains in Sofala, Zambezia, Tete and Manica provinces that caused widespread destruction in these parts of the country.

9. The cyclone caused catastrophic damage over a large swath of central and western Mozambique. Destructive winds devastated coastal communities and flash floods destroyed communities inland. In Beira, airborne debris caused numerous injuries. In some cases, roofing sheets decapitated people and cattle.

10. About 3 million people were affected by the cyclone in the four affected countries, notably in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi and, to a lesser extent, Madagascar, with an estimated 1.85 million persons affected by the cyclone in Mozambique. At least 602 persons were killed as a result of the combined effects of floods and wind, while 1,641 others were injured. The cyclone damaged or demolished 111,163 houses.

11. 90% of the area around the cyclone's epicentre which was near the city of Beira was damaged. Roads, electricity supply and communication links were cut. Buildings were submerged and severely damaged. Many people were forced to seek shelter in transit centres because their homes were rundown. Health care infrastructure was damaged, including hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

12. The city's water supply system had been severely damaged, forcing many people to drink contaminated water from wells or even standing water, resulting in the cholera epidemic that was declared by the government on 27 March 2019. Health needs had also increased, with reported cases of diarrhoea and respiratory diseases.

13. The cyclone also destroyed 711,000 ha of crops, thereby exposing the country to the risk of a food shortage. The impact on food security and livelihoods will affect people over a long time, due to the significant damage to crops that should have been harvested between March and April 2019, as well as the market goods and seedlings that had been lost. Livestock was also affected, as residents of the affected towns had seen the cyclone decimate their lost animals. The material cost of Cyclone Idai in Mozambique is estimated at US \$ 800 million.

14. In addressing the disaster, government response mechanisms were instantly set in motion. National, provincial and district emergency committees started to act and operate at maximum capacity. In addition, the early warning system was fully

operational, and information and warnings were disseminated to affected communities and districts. The National Institute for Disaster Management (in Portuguese, *Instituto Nacional de Gestao de Calamidade*, INGC) and other humanitarian partners supported the evacuation processes and provided temporary shelters for the displaced populations. The government deployed teams to districts to help local authorities implement the recommendations made after its assessment and to take response measures.

15. It is worth noting that Mozambique is used to the passage of cyclones through the country, but Cyclone Idai's passage was of a severe and unusual violence which exceeded the country's capacity to respond.

16. The scale of the humanitarian crisis in Mozambique has generated global solidarity. Several countries around the world and international organizations sent personnel and materials to Beira and its environs in a bid to save lives. African countries, such as Angola and South Africa, also deployed equipment and personnel to help people in Beira and its environs. The country also benefited from international support during the International Donors' Conference in Beira on 1 June 2019, but much remains to be done and the country still needs support.

17. The African Union, on its part, convened an urgent meeting to raise awareness among its Member States and partners on the humanitarian crisis in the southern African sub region and decided to dispatch an urgent mission to the three main countries affected to express solidarity with the governments and peoples of these countries. In solidarity with the Government of Mozambique and the affected population, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons gave, as an act of solidarity from the African Union, the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand US dollars (US \$150,000) to the Government of Mozambique.

Recommendations

- a. The case of Cyclone Idai, which affected Mozambique and other countries in the southern African region, illustrates a situation that is becoming widespread in Africa. Natural disasters, such as floods, droughts and landslides are increasingly frequent and intense, and have an increasingly significant impact on populations and communities. This is exacerbated by poor planning, poverty, and a range of other underlying factors that create conditions of vulnerability which, in turn, translate into inadequate capacity to cope with natural hazards and disasters. African States should invest in city planning, urbanization and environmental protection to mitigate the risks that natural disasters can cause.
- b. African States should speak out in unison at international forums on the need to address the issue of population displacement caused by the effects of climate change.
- c. Additional resources should be allocated to support the humanitarian emergency caused by disasters in vulnerable countries like Mozambique, in order to address and reduce disaster risks.

REPUBLIQUE OF ZIMBABWE

18. The African Union dispatched to Zimbabwe, from 31 March to 4 April 2019, a humanitarian assessment mission comprising members of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons, which was supported by the Department of Political Affairs. The mission was led by H.E. Mr Lamine Yayaoui, Ambassador of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union and seconded by H.E. Mrs. Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the Union African.

19. The main objective of the mission was to express the solidarity of the African Union with the government and the people of this country which was affected by Cyclone Idai. The mission was also to conduct a rapid needs assessment in collaboration with country officials and partners, particularly with United Nations agencies working in the country.

20. The delegation paid courtesy visits to three ministers, namely the Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, who is also Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ambassador Cain Mathemi, as well as to the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, whose mandate includes civil protection and consequently is responsible for coordinating the disaster response effort, and to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.

21. The African Union delegation was received, first, by the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, who warmly thanked the African Union for the empathy shown towards the countries affected by the Cyclone Idai.

22. The Head of the African Union delegation, Ambassador Lamine Yayaoui, expressed the sympathy and concern of other African Union Member States over the destruction that Cyclone Idai has caused on its passage. He stated that the purpose of the visit was to show solidarity with the government and people of Zimbabwe, and to also explore other possibilities for assistance in post-disaster recovery efforts. Ambassador Lamine said the delegation also intended to advocate for support and assistance from Member States that have not yet responded to the call for help. It was observed that the needs arising from the destruction had exceeded the capacity of the affected countries to respond effectively. However, the delegation noted with satisfaction that the humanitarian partners, in an inter-agency manner, had deployed an emergency response, in terms of personnel and immediate aid following the natural disaster caused by Cyclone Idai. There were also plans to deploy additional humanitarian personnel, emergency responders and development actors to the affected countries to assist the national authorities in immediate medium- to long-term actions that will ensure the resilience of affected communities.

23. The two sides subsequently discussed the establishment process of the African humanitarian agency which, if it had existed, would have played a central role in responding to the disaster and would be involved in recovery efforts.

24. The two sides also discussed the theme of the year 2019 within the African Union, which is "*The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons: Towards Lasting Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa*". Lastly, the head of delegation

encouraged the government of Zimbabwe to subscribe to the African Risk Capacity (ARC) in order to benefit from risk mitigation facilities offered by the insurance scheme.

25. The honourable minister thanked once again the African Union for its solidarity with the government and the affected population. He disclosed that the situation was still dire, and that search and rescue efforts were underway with technical assistance provided by the Government of South Africa. He noted that this was the first time that Zimbabwe had experienced a natural disaster of this scale/magnitude. He also pointed out that three provinces had been affected, including Moshonalaw, Mamicalaw and Maslingo. The cyclone disrupted communication and social life by destroying infrastructure such as roads and bridges, as well as schools and health facilities. In addition, homes and agricultural land had been damaged, with fatalities ensuing from land and heavy rock dislocations, and devastation of communities.

26. It was noted that there was a need to restore basic infrastructures so as to connect communities that had been isolated, while emergency intervention by provision of non-food items was necessary in the meantime to sustain the affected population.

27. Furthermore, to limit and decrease the incidence of associated diseases, it was necessary to provide potable water and sanitation facilities, including shelter to the large number of displaced persons. Lastly, the Minister welcomed the establishment of the Humanitarian Agency which, he said, would have played a vital role in supporting emergency response efforts and in helping to strengthen the resilience of the affected communities.

28. The delegation was later received by the Minister responsible for disaster management, who also briefed the delegation on the magnitude of the damage caused by Cyclone Idai in the country. However, he pointed out that the early warning system had provided vital information on the cyclone before it made landfall, although its intensity and severity had been far beyond the adaptation capacity of the government. The epicentre of the cyclone in the country was at Mamicalw, followed by Machingo, where five districts had been affected, and lastly in Moshonalaw, where the district of chikowsa had been the most affected.

29. The passage of Cyclone Idai through Zimbabwe had caused the displacement of approximately 17,000 persons, while a total of 50,000 persons were deemed to have been affected.

30. The affected population will need food aid for at least one year. The damage caused by the cyclone can be seen both in the degradation of the environment and in the demolition of infrastructure. Many of the affected areas have been isolated as bridges and roads had been washed away. The government now relies on airlifts to provide much needed humanitarian relief, including live-saving medical supplies.

31. In Chimanimani district, Moshonalaw, which is the locality most affected and which is closest to the Mozambican border, there is neither water nor electricity, coupled with a severe food shortage. Other seriously affected towns in the district include Rusito and Machongwe, which were reported to have been destroyed.

- 32.** However, the government is at the centre of the response effort, as it had been coordinating humanitarian action and directing humanitarian aid delivery. The armed forces play an essential role alongside other partners. The latter were among the first responders and helped to open routes and set up distribution points.
- 33.** Recovery efforts were already underway, with the deployment of civil protection services which had restored basic services, such as reopening schools, where feasible, and deploying health personnel in affected communities.
- 34.** Lastly, the mission was received by the United Nations Resident Coordinator who presented a general overview of the current situation in Zimbabwe. It was observed that Zimbabwe had experienced severe drought up until then which caused approximately 5 million persons to become food insecure. This is an El Nino effect, exacerbated by the economic crises fuelled by the continuation of sanctions against the country.
- 35.** Cyclone Idai further aggravated the situation by the destruction and destabilization it caused. The United Nations Resident Coordinator and his team called on the African Union to help lift Zimbabwe out of sanctions, which would be a first step towards long-term development and economic reform.
- 36.** The delegation also visited the affected area, in the province of Mamichalaw, and was received by the provincial commissioner, in Matare, the provincial capital. The delegation later visited Chikukwa village in Chimanimani district, about 6 km from the border with Mozambique. The village was isolated from the rest of the district owing to the destruction of the connecting bridge and had lost a family of five due to a landslide and falling rocks.
- 37.** About 99 water sources had been destroyed or damaged, leaving the village without a source of fresh water. 378 households had been destroyed or damaged and a local NGO called *Perma Culture* had addressed the community's urgent needs. District civil protection units also manage disasters. 139 hectares of maize plants had been destroyed, foreshadowing a severe food shortage in the months ahead, if no aid is received.
- 38.** It is instructive, however, to note that the World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) had been airlifting humanitarian assistance.
- 39.** In conclusion, the Government had shown immediate concern to stabilize the situation in the short-term with an emergency response. It had also stressed the need to start recovery efforts by tackling medium- and long-term needs, notably through the provision of psychosocial support to affected persons. There is also a need to build the capacity of affected communities and strengthen their resilience.
- 40.** In support of the government's efforts to deal with the damage caused by Cyclone Idai in the country, the sum of one hundred thousand US dollars (US \$100,000) from the African Union was donated by the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons to the Government of Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

- a. In accordance with the request made by humanitarian aid workers in the country, the African Union should strive to have the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe lifted to enable the country's economic recovery.
- b. The other recommendations concerning Mozambique and Malawi also apply to Zimbabwe.

REPUBLIC OF MALAWI

41. As was the case for Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the African Union dispatched a humanitarian assessment mission to Malawi, from 4 to 7 April 2019. The delegation comprised the same members of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons who had visited Zimbabwe, notably H.E. Mr Lamine Yayiaoui, Ambassador of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union, who was seconded by H.E. Mrs. Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union.

42. Like in the earlier missions, the purpose of the mission to Malawi was to express the solidarity of the African Union with the government and the people of this country that had been affected by Cyclone Idai.

43. The delegation had an audience with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malawi to inform him of the purpose of the assessment mission. The Minister of Foreign Affairs thanked the delegation for the visit and disclosed that the government had shown immediate concern over the plight of populations affected by the passage of Cyclone Idai in the country and this had been materialized by the visit of the President to all affected areas. He also said that Malawi was the second hardest hit country with over 800,000 victims.

44. He went on to inform the delegation that the Government of Malawi has a budget line dedicated to disaster management. This had facilitated a response to address the sudden nature of the disaster which required quick action. It was noted that the government had been receiving a lot of support from the international community as foodstuff prices, especially of staple foods (like maize), had been rising.

45. The Minister added that, with the phenomenon of climate change, severe meteorological phenomena such as Cyclone Idai would be recurrent. On the basis of this observation, he suggested that, as the continent hopes to silence the guns by 2020, a portion of the Peace Fund could be used for disaster response and conflict prevention. Lastly, he acknowledged the urgent need to strengthen the resilience of affected communities and develop their coping mechanism by establishing the link between emergency response and development.

46. The delegation was subsequently received by the Minister responsible for disaster management who explained the government's efforts to deal with the disaster. He noted that the government was coordinating relief efforts in collaboration with partners, but most importantly with the commendable collaboration of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

47. Lastly, the delegation was received by the Humanitarian Country Team for Malawi, which is co-chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA). The delegation was informed that the south of the country had been flooded as a result of heavy rains. Twenty-three deaths had been recorded in the aftermath of the cyclone and 22,000 households had been directly affected.

48. In addition, an interagency assessment team was set up on 28 March and a response plan developed. A response was needed in the areas of food security, water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as in child protection, in general. Other areas of need were nutrition, education, health and agriculture. Most importantly, it was necessary to also initiate recovery actions in order to go beyond an emergency response.

49. In terms of food security, a target of 163,000 households had been set in the implementation strategy for the first three months. Food distribution was underway by the government, World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners. Due to the damage and destruction of water sources, the response of humanitarian actors targeted the districts of Nsanje and Chikwakwa and included provision of clean water to camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and distribution of non-food items (NFIs), such as water treatment chemicals, water buckets and soap.

50. The mission visited districts in the south of the country hit by the cyclone. The situation in the southern districts had improved slightly, but in the camps it had remained the same, as the affected population had not been relocated to their places of residence. It was also very difficult for relief and humanitarian aid to reach some of the most affected areas. The camps had challenges in ensuring water supply and sanitation. Standing water constituted a breeding ground for mosquitoes. This could lead to an increase in the incidence of malaria and, subsequently, to water-borne illnesses, such as cholera and bilharzia.

51. The AU mission found out on the ground that the government of Malawi had been leading the response effort through the Department of Disaster Management Affairs, with support from the South African National Defence Forces (SANDF). Indeed, the SANDF had provided air transport to the delegation to enable them reach affected areas, notably Chikakwa and Mulanje.

52. The delegation lauded the efforts made by the Government to respond to the natural disaster caused by the cyclone. In solidarity with the government and the people of the country, a donation of one hundred thousand US dollars (US \$ 100,000) was made as a contribution to the current efforts by the government.

Recommendations

- a) The assessment team acknowledged that the challenges facing the two affected countries were similar and that the situation was even more real and poignant in Mozambique, which was hit hardest by Cyclone Idai. Therefore, the strategies recommended to address and build the resilience of affected communities will be the same and could only be contextualized to suit the objective in each country.

- b) First, the governments concerned should undertake short- and medium-term recovery measures that integrate disaster risk reduction by relocating affected populations to safe and non-flood-prone areas. This should also involve providing land for both housing and agriculture.
- c) Second, concerning medium- and long-term interventions, the affected government should strive to build infrastructure with equipment, such as stadiums, military barracks and other such facilities that can immediately shelter people during cyclones. In fact, cyclones are no longer infrequent, but a constant phenomenon to deal with in the face of climate change and consequences of environmental degradation.
- d) Third, the scale and seriousness of the disaster were such that it had not been possible for each State to deal with the crisis on its own. Therefore, African Union Member States should be called upon to provide financial and technical assistance as well as other resources to the affected countries.

REPUBLIC OF MALI

53. The PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons and the African Union Commission conducted a humanitarian assessment mission to the Republic of Mali, from 18 to 23 July 2019, to assess the situation in that country.

54. The African Union mission was headed by H.E Mrs. Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission and by H.E. Fernand Poukré Kone, the Ambassador of the Republic Central African Republic and Permanent Representative to the African Union. His Excellency Pierre Buyoya, the African Union High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, was also part of the mission.

55. The objective of this mission was to assess the humanitarian situation in that country which was facing an increase in forced population displacement mainly due to the crisis in northern Mali, inter-community conflicts and food insecurity compounded by recurrent drought and climate change, and to also express the solidarity of the African Union with the Government, refugees and displaced populations of Mali.

56. The African Union mission met with government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mr. Tiébile Drané, the Minister of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty, Mr. Hamadoun Konaté, as well as humanitarian actors and diplomats, to discuss ways to strengthen the humanitarian response and resolve the conflicts in Mali and the Sahel.

57. The meetings between the African Union mission and the various stakeholders have shown that Mali's worsening humanitarian situation mainly stems from insecurity, which continues to decline as violence spreads from the north to the central regions which are the most populated regions in the country. The presence and activities of armed groups continue to affect the security situation, as well as the clashes between the Dogon communities (pastoral farmers) and Fulani (nomadic herders) in their quest for access to land, water points and to resources.

58. Insecurity in the country has, in fact, disrupted economic and commercial activities, causing unreliable food availability on the markets and consequently placing

affected populations in a condition of food insecurity. Food prices have soared, particularly in Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao regions, as risks of robbery and attacks along trade routes deter traders. Limited access to agricultural land and disruption of normal transhumance patterns due to insecurity have affected livelihoods.

59. Booby-trapped devices are frequently used by armed groups in northern and central Mali to target Malian military convoys or those of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and an increasing number of civilians have been victims. Humanitarian access has been limited by conflicts and insecurity, mainly in central Mali.

60. As a direct result there has been a rapid increase in population movements. As of June 2019, a total of 147,861 internally displaced persons (IDPs) had been registered. In addition, access to persons in need of protection and assistance though still possible is increasingly becoming limited in areas that have been isolated. This is compounded by structural problems related to food and nutrition security in the country as well as to the population's lack of access to basic social services.

61. With the spread of complex conflicts in the centre of the country, around 8.7 million people, more than 45% of the country's population, are now living in the regions affected by the crisis (Mopti, Timbuktu, Taoudénit, Gao, Ménaka, Kidal and Ségou), hence the need to take the Malian crisis seriously.

62. As a result of these various types of violence, a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been recorded, particularly in Mopti and Ségou regions. Of the 147,861 individuals registered by the Ministry of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty (MSLP) in late June 2019, a total of 50,643 IDPs had been registered in Mopti region, 21,589 in Ségou, 28,271 in Timbuktu and 26,660 in Gao.

63. The African Union mission visited Mopti town, located 600 kilometres north of the capital city of Bamako, on 22 July 2019, to get a feel of the situation of displaced populations in the country. The mission visited the temporary camp in Sokoura, which hosted several people who fled community conflicts during the first months of 2019. Those who were displaced as a result of community conflicts explained to the African Union mission that they left their homes to seek refuge and protection in the camp and requested the authorities to find a solution to these conflicts, so they would be able to return to their homes.

64. The mission also visited a shelter site for internally displaced persons in Madilé, near Bamako, where it observed government efforts to deal with the problem of displacement of populations affecting the country. In fact, the Ministry of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty hosts many persons who had fled conflicts in the centre of the country and others who are victims of natural disasters on this site.

65. The mission ended with a press conference on Tuesday, 23 July, at the Ministry of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty, during which the African Union presented the Government of Mali with a cheque for one hundred thousand US dollars (US \$ 100,000) to express the solidarity of the organization with the refugees and internally displaced persons in Mali.

Recommendation

- a) The African Union should be actively involved in ending the complex conflicts facing the civilian population in Mali.

REPUBLIC OF BURKINA FASO

66. Following the mission to Mali, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons and the African Union Commission continued to Burkina Faso, a country which was also witnessing an increase in the number of displaced persons fuelled by insecurity and conflicts.

67. The African Union mission was in Burkina Faso from 24 to 30 July 2019. The delegation was headed by H.E Mrs Minata Samate Cessouma, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission and H.E. Mr Dieudonné Ndabarushimana, Ambassador of the Republic of Burundi to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union. The purpose of the mission was to assess the humanitarian situation in the country and to express the solidarity of the African Union with the Government and the displaced persons of the country.

68. The mission met with government officials, including Mr. Seydou Sinka, Secretary General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Ms. Hélène Marie Laurence Ilboudo, Minister of Social Action, National Solidarity, Family and Humanitarian Affairs, as well as with humanitarian and civil society actors to discuss the humanitarian and security situation in Burkina Faso.

69. The humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso is blighted by security challenges such as organized and cross-border crime, with armed bandits operating across borders and exacerbating the security and humanitarian situation over the years. Up to the end of 2015, the regional impact of the fall of the Libyan regime had not been felt in Burkina Faso. But in January 2016, the regional impact spread to Burkina Faso, with attacks on hotels and restaurants in the capital city of Ouagadougou. The attacks showed that Islamist groups, pushed further south by the military action in Mali, had started to open new fronts in the region, taking advantage of the porous borders.

70. Since 2017, the activities of armed groups in Burkina Faso have increased in intensity and frequency, fuelling displacement and creating humanitarian needs. The attacks by armed groups have laid bare the limits of the response of the Government of Burkina Faso to the expansion of armed groups and to curb the violence. Initially active in the North and Mouhoun regions, armed groups then spread to the East, where combatants started launching frequent attacks and developing links with existing criminal networks and to occupy the gold mines there.

71. The year 2018 ended with the declaration of a state of emergency in seven of the thirteen regions of Burkina Faso (*Hauts-Bassins, Boucle du Mouhoun, Cascades, Centre-Est, Nord* and *Sahel*) following an attack in the *Boucle du Mouhoun* region on 27 December 2018 which resulted in the deaths of 10 gendarmes.

72. The year 2019 witnessed a continuous deterioration in the security situation in Burkina Faso, with violence spreading to the *Centre-Nord* and *Sahel* regions. While

most of the attacks are attributed to Islamist groups, self-defence militia groups known as *Koglweogo*, have also started to gain prominence.

73. The growing insecurity has led to increase in forced displacement from the affected provinces to other safer provinces or outside the country. The insecurity has also been exacerbated by inter-communal tensions involving the Fulani community, accused of sympathizing with Islamist combatants, and the Mossi and Foulsé communities, disproportionately targeted by armed groups and perceived as supporters of the State.

74. Against the backdrop of various forms of insecurity, the number of displaced persons in Burkina Faso has been rising as the security situation became critical. In January 2019, the number of IDPs stood at 87,000, but six months later, in June 2019, that number had increased to 220,000. According to recent assessments by humanitarian workers on the ground, the number doubled between July and September 2019, bringing the total number of IDPs to 486,000 in October 2019. The majority of the IDPs are in the Centre and the Sahel regions.

75. Not only are opportunities rare for IDPs in places where they go to, but their very presence there has worsened the food insecurity situation and extends the provision of services to the host populations.

76. The affected persons face food and nutritional insecurity exacerbated by poverty, high levels of economic inequality, effects of climate change and deficit in agricultural output. With the deterioration of the security situation and the sharp rise in the number of displaced persons, it is possible that the levels of food insecurity could worsen in Burkina Faso in 2020, fuelled by the high demand for resources in the communities hosting IDPs and limited access to markets and to farmlands due to insecurity.

77. In reality, the majority of the population of Burkina Faso depends on agriculture and livestock production for their livelihood. Due to insecurity, access to markets and fields is hampered. Not only do people face the risk of attack, but their movement is limited by the current state of emergency. In the violence affected areas, agricultural activities have decreased by about 55% compared to the previous two years.

78. The African Union mission, protected by a military convoy, travelled by road to Kaya, a town located about 140 kilometres from the capital city of Ouagadougou, where displaced persons live in various types of housing, including community centres and schools.

79. The IDPs in Kaya, who are mainly made up of people from the Mossi and Foulsé communities, live in extreme poverty, sometimes in open bare land and under extremely difficult weather conditions. They fled inter communal conflicts to seek refuge in the camps and are in urgent need of shelter, health services and food.

80. In solidarity with the government of Burkina Faso and the displaced persons in this country, a donation of USD 100 000 (one hundred thousand dollars) was made to the Burkina Faso Ministry of International Solidarity and Humanitarian Action.

PARTICIPATION IN OTHER ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE MANDATE OF THE PRC SUB-COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES

81. In addition to the humanitarian assessment missions, the members of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees also participated in other activities within their mandates, especially the 70th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme which is organized annually by the UNHCR, as well as the first Global Refugee Forum, and in activities organized by the African Union as part of the theme of the year 2019.

82. At the 70th Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, which took place in Geneva from 7 to 11 October 2019, the Sub-Committee was represented by H.E. Brima Kapuwa, Ambassador of Sierra Leone to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union. This session provided an opportunity for the African Union to have its voice heard in international bodies and advocate for the consideration of African concerns on the issue of forced displacement of persons.

83. At the first Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva, from 16 to 18 December 2019, the Sub-Committee was represented by H.E. Mrs. Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Ambassador of the Republic of Uganda to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union. The occasion provided an opportunity for the African Union to voice its concerns in the five thematic sessions of the forum, particularly on burden and responsibility sharing, energy and infrastructure, protection capacity, employment, livelihood and education.

84. Participation in activities organized by the African Union in connection with the Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons was open to all Member States of the African Union. A separate report on these activities has been prepared by the African Union Commission.

85. Members of the Sub-Committee also participated in activities of the Champion of the Theme for 2019, particularly regarding the humanitarian visits to Ethiopia and Uganda, as well as the commemorative events of the OAU Refugee Convention.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

86. Having as its theme, the Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to the Problems of Forced Displacement in Africa, 2019 was a year of intense activity for the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, which successfully carried out its 2019 activities in accordance with the work plan approved at the beginning of the year. The Sub-Committee expresses its gratitude to the Governments of the Member States visited in 2019, and to the humanitarian partners and other stakeholders working in the countries visited for their frank collaboration with the delegations of the African Union.

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