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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PREPARATIONS IN PROGRESS
FOR THE CONFERENCE ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN AFRICA



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1. At the time of the creation of OAU fifteen years ago, the number of African refugees was estimated at less than one million. Today that number is estimated at more than 4 million and it is on the increase. Accordingly the number of the problems faced by African refugees and host countries have also increased and diversified.
2. In 1967 a Pan-African Conference was convened in Addis Ababa to look into the Legal Social and Economic Aspects of refugees' problems in Africa. **Twenty two** of the OAU Member States participated in that Conference with many other International and voluntary agencies including the UNHCR and ECA.
3. Despite the commendable efforts made by African countries and other international and voluntary agencies, there was general feeling that something should be done to take stock of past efforts and programmes and their impact on refugees situation in Africa with the view to considering ways and means to alleviate the sufferings of the up-rooted and to find durable solutions to their problems.
4. The idea of convening a conference on the situation of refugees in Africa was initiated by the All Africa Conference of Churches which is based in Nairobi. Later on many Governmental and non-Governmental Organizations joined hands and established from among themselves a Planning Committee to be responsible for all preparations for the Conference and ensure its convening in time and its success. This Committee was formed from the three Co-sponsors namely, OAU, UNHCR and ECA as well as from other five co-operating agencies involved in refugees work in Africa.
5. The Planning Committee has held till early February 1979 five sessions and had organized seminars, workshops and technical expert meetings on the different subjects to be discussed by the Conference. Among other things, it set out long and short term objectives for the Conference and a theme taken from the OAU 1969 Convention which is, "Granting asylums to refugees in peaceful and humanitarian act ...".

6. The main subjects and topics that will be discussed by the Conference will be:-

- (a) The Institutional and Administrative aspects of refugee problems in Africa;
- (b) The Legal and Protection aspects of refugees in Africa; and
- (c) The Social, Economic and Financial aspects of refugee problems in Africa.

7. In July 1978 in Khartoum the Council of Ministers adopted Resolution CM/Res.621 (XXXI) calling upon all OAU Member States to actively participate in the Conference and to extend to it all possible political, moral and financial support to ensure that all substantive and organizational arrangements for the Conference are properly made. During the UNECR Executive Committee (29th Session), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and many participants and observers pledged support for the Conference.

8. The Planning Committee in its earlier Session estimated the Conference budget at US\$612,716. For many reasons it was decided that this amount was to be contributed by only OAU Member States, Scandinavian Countries and voluntary agencies and Church Organizations involved in refugee work in Africa. The three Scandinavian Countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark) as well as IUEF and Church Organizations (AACC, WCC and LWF) were approached in due course and their responses were generally positive. OAU General Secretariat (BFEAR) had sent since August 1978, three notes verbale appealing to OAU Member States to support the Conference and to contribute in particular financially to it so as to assure its success. It has to be observed with regret that no response has so far been received from OAU Member States.

9. During its fifth Session the Planning Committee took many decisions and recommendations concerning the following matters:-

- (a) That efforts should be intensified to collect contributions and funds from OAU Member States and from other sources if possible;

- b) That a request be made through the competent Tanzanian authorities to H.E. the President of the Republic of Tanzania to kindly open the Conference.
- c) Invitation letters to all O.A.U. Member States and all other participants would be signed by the Chairman of the Planning Committee on behalf of the three co-sponsors (OAU, UNHCR and ECA).



- d) That OAU Member States participation in the Conference will be at Ministerial level and that the Conference budget will meet the costs of return tickets and per diem for one delegate from each O.A.U. Member State. This step was taken to ensure the participation of all Member States and the success of the Conference.
- e) The dates and venue of the Conference were fixed finally at 7 to 17 May 1979, Arusha, Tanzania, respectively.
- f) That the Executives of the three Co-sponsoring organizations, - namely:- OAU, UNHCR and ECA would be requested by the Planning Committee to agree among themselves on who will chair the Conference on the opening day. The Permanent Conference Chairman is expected to be from the host country, Tanzania.

10. The report and the recommendations of the Conference will be raised to the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers which will be held in Monrovia, Liberia in June/July 1979.

11. Following the planning Committee 5th Session, a workshop on the Social, Economic, Institutional and Administrative aspects of refugee problems in Africa as well as a Seminar on the Legal and Protection aspects were convened in Arusha, Tanzania from late January to early February 1979. Many papers were presented and experts on these matters had the chance of thrashing out the different subjects and making many useful and action oriented recommendations. An expert meeting on the possibility of establishing in Africa a mechanism (a clearing House) to be responsible for collecting, collating, and disseminating information on refugee matters will be held in the first half of March, 1979. The Planning Committee and the Conference Organizing Secretariat should make sure that the Conference documents reach OAU Member States by late March or early April 1979.

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Progress Report on the Preparations in Progress for the Conference on the Situation of Refugees in Africa

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