

NGO Statement on Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

As we proceed to highlight the achievements and challenges facing some specific countries in humanitarian settings, NGOs take cognizance and continue to welcome the progressive refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs) policies put in place by some African countries. Such good practices need to be encouraged and supported by the international community. Countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia being the top three countries hosting a large number of refugees in Africa. For instance, Kenya has continued to integrate refugees and host communities in Kitengela in livelihood projects and peri-urban livelihood projects targeting the resilience of asylum seekers and refugees in urban areas; Uganda has most progressive refugee laws and has continued to integrate refugees and host communities in its national plans; and Ethiopia grants the right of free movement and work to refugees and has an out-of-camps approach. The region has also seen greatest progress in adopting regional declarations to combat statelessness, including through the elimination of gender-discriminatory nationality laws. UNHCR is urged to continue supporting the efforts to build on this progress including through civil society efforts to combat statelessness and advance gender-equal nationality rights, while engaging governments to realize their commitments in this area.

African States demonstrate that it is not only an obligation but also ultimately beneficial for humanity to grant refugees their rights to asylum in a dignified manner. They take the lead while wealthy countries seem to plead back on their international obligations. We, therefore, urge Member States to:

- consider adopting these best practices particularly decamping practice to grant free movement of refugees and access to livelihood opportunities to minimize complete refugee aid dependence.
- support efforts shown by some of the countries in the region that implement best practices through increased humanitarian and development support.
- redouble their efforts to eradicate statelessness in Africa, including by amending discriminatory nationality laws, like those enacted on the basis of sex, race, religion, ethnicity or disability, implementing safeguards against statelessness and finding durable solutions for stateless, and forcibly displaced populations.
- improve the protection of refugees on the continent and extend these protection efforts to IDPs and progress on the adoption or domestication of the Kampala Convention.

- ensure that laws and policies prevent the double marginalization and exclusion of girls, and prohibit all forms of violence and exploitation against girls in all contexts, especially in conflict situations.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The emergence of the pandemic has further increased operation costs, not only in the African region but also globally. African countries had to ensure that prevention, preparedness, and timely response are in place in all locations. The pandemic has increased the protection expenses in form of acquisition of personal protective equipment for people of concern, UNHCR, and partner workers. We have witnessed skyrocketing costs in the health and WASH sectors. The outbreak has also negatively affected the academic development of children due to school closure, hence their protection.

A serious negative impact of the spread of COVID-19 on forcibly displaced populations is the increase in sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation, early forced marriages, and unwanted pregnancy, and lack of access to essential services, including psycho-social support and sexual and reproductive health services in the Africa region. Under the circumstances, women and girls became more vulnerable.

The NGO community is now concerned with the quantity of vaccines expected to be supplied to Sub-Saharan Africa and how the vaccine will be allocated in vaccine roll-out national plans equally to displaced persons and host communities, without discrimination. While the United Kingdom for example, is projecting to provide vaccines to 50% of its population, only 3% is projected for Africa. We, therefore, recommend:

- UNHCR and Member States should consider entering into serious engagement with the donor community to mobilize resources to support the availability of enough vaccines to their citizens. Their vaccination rollout should include IDPs and refugees.
- Regional blocks such as the East African Community, Economic Community of West Africa, South African Development Community, and Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) under the auspice of the African Union (AU), should take the lead in negotiating the price for vaccine and ensure timely supply and distribution to African Member States.
- Allow NGOs, civil society, governments and communities access to information, scrutiny on COVAX deployment plans and activities.
- Ensure affordable and timely availability of vaccines for all, leaving no one behind or discriminated due to their status during the vaccine allocation and distribution on the continent. Displaced persons with special needs such as the elderly and sick people should be among the first set to be vaccinated.

East and Horn of Africa

Somalia

The issue of internal and cross-border displacement to and from Somalia shows no signs of stopping in the near future. With the war still going on, alongside natural disasters, the coronavirus pandemic, Somalia is not expected to make immediate progress in addressing poverty, civil unrest, inequality and healthcare. Subsequently, these factors are most likely to increase the push for more

Somali citizens out of Somalia. Displacement combined with gender discrimination in the nationality law increases the risk that children born to Somali women will be rendered stateless.

With the current number of 2.6 million IDPs in Somalia, there is a need for the international community and IGAD Member States to jointly continue to find the solution to stop the war in Somalia. Sadly, the Somali government shows less concern for improvement or willingness to solve the problems facing its country. NGOs, therefore, call upon:

- the UN, AU, IGAD, and Member States to continue supporting the little efforts of the Somali Government and the people to stabilize Somalia as well as implement the provision of the Djibouti Protocol.
- the donor community to continue supporting the Somalia government not only in the humanitarian area but also in development projects.

South Sudan

The South Sudan refugee crisis remains the largest situation on the African continent. The protracted emergency persists with 2.2 million refugees hosted by neighboring States (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central Africa Republic) and 1.8 million IDPs. Some parts of the country experience floods due to climate change and increased intercommunal violence, resulting from delayed formation of the local and state governments. South Sudan remains to be considered a security issue in the region. The country is also hosting more than 300,000 refugees from neighboring countries. The call for UNHCR, Member States and the international community is to:

- renew efforts to support within the country and the refugee-hosting countries through increased funding to meet lifesaving priorities and host communities' needs.
- influence the South Sudan's government to address the root causes of the conflict in the country.
- urge IGAD, AU and the UN to pressure the South Sudan government to implement the provisions in the peace agreement and ensure humanitarian assistance to all parts of the country is not interrupted by road blocks, security threats and attacks on humanitarian workers.
- ask UNHCR to continue seeking resettlement placements as one of the durable solutions and to continue supporting resilience and durable solutions within South Sudan, to create better conditions for the reintegration of IDPs and spontaneous refugee returnees.

Ethiopia

The ongoing conflict in Tigray is resulting in a steadily deteriorating humanitarian context defined by widespread displacement, food insecurity, protection concerns, and severe limitations on humanitarian access. Lack of access means for independent comprehensive assessment and monitoring of internal displacement is critical. In this context, a rough estimate of 2.3 million people in need of assistance has been projected. The fate of 20,000 Eritrean refugees unaccounted for after the camps in which they were housed were attacked and destroyed is a further concern. People fleeing war in the region should not be included in the border conflict with Sudan but be granted safe and orderly entry into the Sudanese territory where they can be settled. The call for UNHCR, Member States and the international community is to:

- engage with the government of Ethiopia to achieve unrestricted and unconditional humanitarian access to all regions of Tigray. Including blanket approvals for aid supplies and personnel, as well as independent needs assessments and IDP monitoring.
- call for accountability from the government for the destruction of refugee camps, and the fate of the refugees who lived there.
- call for aid agencies to be granted permissions to access northern camps and assess damage to infrastructure and assets.

West and Central Africa

Sahel Region

The deteriorating humanitarian situation and large displacement in the Sahel region is considered a protection crisis. It is marked by spiraling violence at the border of Mali, Burkina and Niger, the presence of Non-State Armed Groups conducting attacks against armed forces, state officials and civilians, frequent human rights violations including on children¹, and a significant restriction of access to basic services resulting in massive population displacements of more than 2 million IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

The expansion of the conflict has led to a dramatic increase of protection needs, which require large-scale protection responses. UNHCR should continue supporting those responses in order to provide emergency, specialized and holistic care to survivors of violence (including but not limited to gender-based violence survivors); legally and physically protect survivors of violence and abuses; and build up community-based protection and prevention strategies. It should also engage with armed actors to push for the respect of International Humanitarian Laws and Human Rights through continued monitoring and reporting of protection incidents; advocate for effective and swift justice and safe and unhindered access to aid and essential services for all population in need.

NGOs call on UNHCR to politically support advocacy for the respect of the principle of “last resort” for the use of armed escorts, as defined within the humanitarian principles and in particular neutrality and independence. The use of military escorts and infrastructure must be limited by a very strict framework guidelines or standard of operations jointly established within UN-Civil-Military Coordination’s national platform.

Nigeria

In Northeast Nigeria, deadly attacks on civilians in and around major cities and roads are scarring a region that is relapsing back into a terrible humanitarian crisis. Northeast Nigeria enters 2021 with emergency levels of hunger, worsened access to livelihood and continued displacement caused by conflicts. While displaced populations consider returning home, conditions in areas of return remain highly unstable, undermining chances for durable solutions. It is paramount that the protection of civilians is re-prioritized, and that Nigerian returns process realigns with key protection safeguards. The mass abduction of school children which is growing should be brought to an end. This practice interrupts the concentration of children contributing to increased mental illness, poor school enrollment, and low retention in schools. The Nigerian government should strive to ensure children safety at schools in the North, especially in Zamfara and neighboring

¹ See: Save the Children report, *Stop the war on children, the West and Central Africa brief*, 2020: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/16809/pdf/swoc_iii_wca_brief_final.pdf & the UN Security Council, Monthly Forecast, *Children and armed conflict*, September 2020: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-09/children-and-armed-conflict-4.php>

states. Nigeria is among the 10 countries facing the worst food crises globally, particularly leading to adolescent girls being at risk of malnutrition, especially pregnant and lactating girls.

Lake Chad Basin

In the Lake Chad basin region, insecurity is limiting or preventing humanitarian access to some vulnerable communities and population displacement is increasing, raising the number of IDPs to 2.8 million people in the region. Abductions and attacks on children and schools have been prominent, demonstrating deliberate and grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, interlinked with other violations such as recruitment and sexual violence. Adolescent girls are facing challenges and barriers in accessing or continuing their education in the region.

NGOs call on the international community, the UN and Member States to:

- increase prevention measures to halt the wave of attacks against school children and ensure the right to education of all children is guaranteed.
- ensure the implementation, resourcing and promotion of gender-responsive education policies, including education in emergencies in the region to guarantee access to safe, quality and inclusive education to children, particularly adolescent girls who are impacted in a disproportionate way.

Central African Republic (CAR)

The tension surrounding recent elections in the CAR led to a major surge in violence, leading the country into a spiraling crisis that has engulfed its population in a new humanitarian emergency. As a result, more than 200,000 Central Africans are currently displaced either within the country or beyond its borders. Even before the recent wave of violence, more than half of its 4.9 million citizens required humanitarian assistance. As fighting continues and the presence of armed groups interrupts the flow of goods into and throughout the small country, that number rises daily.

The movement of humanitarian staff and supplies, including food and medicine, is being drastically limited and protection violations against Central African citizens are rapidly increasing. NGOs call on the international community, the UN and Member States to:

- scale up the protection response through additional capacity and funding to address mounting protection needs and develop a national strategy to prevent six grave violations against children, while urging parties to end the conflict and abide by human rights law.
- immediately mobilize funding for the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan for CAR and bolster financial support for efforts to address the needs of new arrivals in CAR and neighboring countries, especially Cameroon, Chad, and the Republic of the Congo.
- advocate for the safety and free movement of humanitarian staff especially national staff and supplies.

Southern Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a complex and long-standing humanitarian crisis. In 2020, the countries in the Southern and Great Lakes regions in Africa were hosting 912,069 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers. The on-going armed conflicts across much of the eastern DRC, as well as inter-communal violence, continue to cause internal and cross-border

displacement, tragic loss of human life and destruction of communities and subsequently, a sizeable number of refugees and IDPs. The NGO community is concerned with the continual deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC. This situation increases the risk of a rise in sexual and gender-based violence cases amongst the forcibly displaced population as well as a high-security risks in the neighboring countries of Tanzania, Rwanda, Angola, the Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Zambia. We therefore recommend:

- UN Member States should continue monitoring closely the situation in DRC and provide necessary humanitarian support as well as support to the current government with an emphasis on addressing the root causes of conflicts.
- UNHCR must continue to prioritize protection in the country, with guided response to minimize risks for conflict-affected communities.
- Scaling up the protection response to be translated into meaningful enhancements of funding and protection capacity on the ground.
- UNHCR should seize the opportunity from the US new government Executive Orders to lift the number of refugee resettlements, which should push for more Congolese Refugees to access one of the durable solutions.

Thank you, Chair.