

Ministerial Pledging Conference on Somali Refugees: Conditions for voluntary return

Management Centre Europe (MCE) Conference Centre in Brussels, 21 October 2015

Context

Over two million Somalis remain in what is one of the world's most protracted displacement situations, which has lasted 25 years and affected three generations. Approximately 1.1 million Somalis are displaced within Somalia and nearly one million are refugees in the sub-region: 420,711 in Kenya, 249,350 in Ethiopia, 32,447 in Uganda and 12,044 in Djibouti; in addition to the approximately 240,000 who are in Yemen. Recent developments in Somalia have opened up opportunities to renew efforts to find durable solutions for Somali refugees, especially those in the Horn of Africa and those Somalis in Yemen who are affected by the current crisis in that country. At the height of the famine-induced humanitarian crisis in Somalia in 2011, over 500,000 Somali refugees were given asylum in Kenya. At the end of August 2015, the number of registered Somali refugees in the country had decreased to some 420,711. Although not fully confirmed and verified by humanitarian actors in Somalia, due to limited access, it is suggested that a significant number of the 97,785 Somali refugees who are no longer active in UNHCR's population database may have spontaneously returned to Somalia.

Under the "Tripartite Agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya," over 4,000 refugees have been supported to voluntarily and spontaneously return to safer parts of Somalia. The support provided remains grounded in acknowledgement of their right to return and does not in any way suggest that the conditions are in place for the promotion of large-scale returns to all parts of Somalia. UNHCR's non-return advisory to Southern and Central Somalia remains in place due to the fragile conditions in the country. Refugee outflows from Somalia continue in significant numbers and the preservation of asylum space remains a priority.

Seeking international support towards finding durable solutions for Somali refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Union will co-host a Ministerial Pledging Conference on Somali Refugees in Brussels on 21 October 2015. This conference is being held in the framework of a number of regional mechanisms, including the Tripartite Commission, composed of the Republic of Kenya, the Federal Republic of Somalia and UNHCR. It also follows up on the 2014 Addis Ababa Commitment towards Somali Refugees,¹ which articulates a regional approach to preserving asylum and finding innovative solutions. The Commitment was adopted by the Governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Yemen, along with the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), UNHCR, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), organized under UNHCR's Global Initiative on Somali Refugees (GISR).

The event contributes to the objectives of the Valletta Conference of 11-12 November 2015, where the leaders of the most concerned countries of origin, transit and destination will meet to identify, agree and launch actions to jointly address immediate and long term migration challenges as well to reinforce the current mechanisms to implement and follow up high level political decisions on migration.

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/GISR>

Aims

- Against this background, the pledging conference aims to mobilize the support and resources needed to achieve sustainable solutions for Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa and to enhance the conditions necessary for the safe and dignified voluntary return to nine identified areas of return in Somalia.
- It will provide an opportunity to present a portfolio of identified development and humanitarian projects drafted under the “Tripartite Agreement on the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya.” The projects aim to put in place the architecture to support reintegration in Somalia. An improvement of conditions in Somalia would lead to further voluntary returns, from Kenya and from other countries in the sub-region and Yemen. It would also open up opportunities for the return of internally displaced persons in Somalia. In addition, a number of projects are also designed to address host community needs in Kenya.
- The conference will bring together a wide range of actors, including United Nations agencies, inter- and non-governmental organizations as well national authorities involved in implementing the Humanitarian Response Plan and working with the Solutions Alliance Somalia
- The event will allow international and national partners to take stock of the Somali refugee return challenges from Kenya and to define a path towards making concrete results.
- While the conference is primarily focused on preserving asylum space and creating the conditions for voluntary return from Kenya, it also offers an opportunity to explore solutions to the protracted Somali refugee situation from a migration angle.

Participation

Donor and regional governments at the ministerial level will participate together with United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

Format

The conference will be opened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Her Excellency Ms. Federica Mogherini. The European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Mr. Neven Mimica, will co-chair various parts of the conference.

Participants will have the opportunity to deliver statements and to announce financial pledges against the portfolio of projects.

Following the conference, a communiqué will be issued to the press, along with a summary of pledges received.