

**AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
ZIMBABWE AT THE 70TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR
REFUGEES' PROGRAMME:
7 - 11 OCTOBER 2019**

Mr President

Hon Ministers

High Commissioner

Your Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Zimbabwe takes the floor to speak on behalf of the African Group, a group which continues to take a keen interest in the work of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. An interest that is on account of increasing incidences of forced displacement on

the continent. This makes it expedient for the group to approach the discussions on forced displacement with one voice and from a coordinated standpoint as all of us in Africa are affected variously by the phenomenon.

Mr President, before proceeding, allow me on behalf of the African Group, to thank you and the members of your bureau for the good work that you have been doing since your election in 2018. Our Group appreciates the sound leadership and focused guidance that you have provided to the organisation and its membership during the course of the year while preparing, not only for this meeting, but also for the first Global Forum of Refugees that will take place in December 2019.

Let me also, on behalf of the Group, thank the High Commissioner for his report which touched on a number of issues that are central to the organisation as it discharges its mandate. An important part of that mandate being to deliver on the Global Compact on Refugees.

Mr President, by adopting the Global Compact in 2018, we collectively agreed to a new approach to forced displacement. This approach prioritises burden and responsibility sharing as well as strengthened protection and adequate assistance to the victims. This is Africa's take and its ready to move in that direction.

Additionally, beyond the commitment to provide for people of concern to UNHCR, the Group remains committed and

determined to mitigate the forced displacement phenomenon. We are pursuing solutions to the conflicts and wars that account for a significant percentage of forced displacement. We are also working on solutions to combat climate change which is having far reaching effects on our countries. In that regard, our call beyond this room is for all of us to act to mitigate the impact of climate change.

Mr President, the provision of adequate resources to cater for the needs of people of concern to UNHCR remains a big challenge. We are informed that the current global funding level is around US\$3.8 billion or 45 per cent of the budget for 2019. We are further informed that the funding gap continues to widen with limited prospects of retreating in 2020. The funding gap for Africa is worrisome as it

remains at over 50%. This obviously paints a gloomy picture as we approach the 1st anniversary of the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees.

In that respect, the African Group welcomes the efforts being made by the organisation to attract new donors including the envisaged innovative funding mechanisms that are under consideration. However, the initiatives should not be burdensome to host countries as that inadvertently contradicts the spirit of burden and responsibility sharing. In any case, host countries are contributing a lot to victims of forced displacement.

Mr President, the African Group takes note of the UNHRC's reform agenda which is linked to the United Nations wide reforms adopted by the General Assembly in May 2018.

The group supports the creation of the 7 regional bureaux of which 3 are in Africa as a means of bringing the organisation closer to the people of concern. What is important in this devolution endeavour is that the decision-making authority is also devolved to the Directors of the Bureaux.

Mr President, the African Group welcomes the high-level segment on statelessness. It has provided an important platform for us to take stock, mid-way in our campaign to end statelessness by 2024. We remain committed to this campaign and are happy to note that “Pledges and Commitments” continue to be registered from African countries and from other parts of the world.

The campaign to end statelessness has found traction in Africa. To illustrate, in 2016, following the directive by President Uhuru Kenyatta, the people of the Makonde community, originally from Mozambique, were granted Kenyan citizenship.

Africa also has initiatives such as;

- The Banjul Plan of Action of the ECOWAS Region on the Eradication of Statelessness for the period 2017 to 2024
- The 2017 Brazzaville Declaration of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region's Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness

Indeed, the discourse on statelessness is alive in Africa and is taking place at different levels. The African Union at its

32nd Summit adopted the theme: “The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced displacement in Africa”. As Africa commemorates the 50th anniversary of the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969 OAU Refugee Convention) and the 10th anniversary of the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), the issue of statelessness has remained high on the African Agenda throughout the year. This demonstrates the unequivocal commitment of our Heads of State and Government to work towards finding durable solutions to forced displacement on the continent.

This year has seen a number of consultative meetings on topics within the purview of forced displacement with an

Extra-ordinary Summit of the African Union on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons scheduled to take place before the end of the year in Malabo; Equatorial Guinea. By the end of 2024 African countries hope to have covered adequate ground, collectively and individually towards ending statelessness.

Finally, Mr President, Africa calls for an environmental protection strategy, as it has become clear that the environment is becoming a key driver of refugees and IDPs, especially in Africa. As regards conflicts, the Group remains very active in conflict resolution, another driver of refugees and IDPs.

Africa is gearing itself to participate in the first Global Forum on Refugees in December 2019. Fittingly, it will

take place in a year that we have dedicated to refugees, returnees and IDPs. As always, Africa is ready to engage with others in the dialogue on forced displacement.

I Thank you