

Brussels, 21 October 2015

International community resolves to address Somali refugee situation

The international community today confirmed its support to create a stable and prosperous Somalia in line with the New Deal Compact and committed resources towards an action plan designed to improve conditions in Somalia to enable Somali refugees in the region to return home voluntarily, safely, and in dignity. The action plan aims to support host communities and refugees in Kenya as well as activities for their sustainable integration in Somalia. This initiative will pave the way for other hosting countries in the region to plan and contribute to ending one of the most protracted displacement situations in existence today.

The conference, which comprised of over 100 Ministers and senior representatives from donor States, affected States, and UN agencies and international NGOs, acknowledged the significance of spontaneous returns taking place from Kenyan refugee camps to Somalia. Thus far, some 5,300 Somali refugees have been supported to return from Kenya since December 2014. The Prime Minister of Somalia underlined the Government's strong willingness to welcome back increasing numbers of its citizens from their countries of asylum. He expressed hope that well-planned development initiatives would make returns more secure and sustainable, and that this would lead to increased confidence amongst refugees to return home.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres emphasized the importance of the support of the international community. Skilled and talented people are needed to help rebuild Somalia, but doing so is difficult when a quarter of its population is in exile. Enabling Somali refugees to return home safely will ensure their active contribution to the rebuilding of their homeland.

The conference commended countries in the region - most particularly Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Yemen - for their continuing generosity in hosting Somali refugees, and accepted that the international community must now play a larger part in finding solutions. More than a million Somalis remain refugees around the world, the vast majority in the five neighbouring countries. The Republic of Kenya hosts more than 420,000 Somalis, and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Republic of Yemen host almost a quarter of a million each. In addition, the Republic of Djibouti and the Republic of Uganda host tens of thousands. Many of them are either second or third generation refugees who have never set foot in Somalia.

High Commissioner Guterres and EU High Representative Mogherini lauded the generosity of host countries in the region, acknowledging the opportunities provided to Somali refugees to acquire the skills and education that enabled them to make positive contributions to society while in exile, and for preparing them for a more successful eventual return to Somalia or indeed for other solutions such as integration or resettlement.

The conference acknowledged that this is an opportunity and the momentum started by supported voluntary returns and sustainable reintegration must be acted upon. The international community must continue to share responsibility for supporting the Federal Government of Somalia to build a strong nation with opportunities for all its citizens to live safely and productively within its borders. The action plan is a coordinated way to achieve this, addressing as it does both humanitarian and development needs, and being aligned with existing national plans in Kenya and Somalia including, importantly, the New Deal Compact. It is based on an initial plan of 215,000 refugees returning from Kenya to Somalia, and addresses the needs of returning refugees and host communities in the areas of education, environment, food and agriculture, health, infrastructure, livelihoods, protection, shelter, security, and water and sanitation.

There was unanimous agreement that the time is right for a regional approach to find solutions for Somali refugees. Towards this goal, it was proposed that a regional solutions plan for Somali refugees should be drafted with the active participation of all hosting governments and Government of Somalia.

The Conference noted with appreciation the pledges made by various institutions and appealed for immediate release of the resources to facilitate timely development of infrastructure, return and reintegration of refugees in Somalia.

The leader of the Kenya delegation emphasized the need for the International Community to support Kenya in all ways to address this problem which it has shouldered for over 25 years.

The conference concluded that immediate and concrete action was imperative to bring stability to Somalia and the wider region. Increased international solidarity and burden sharing are essential to offer hope and opportunities for Somali refugees. Refugees must be supported to be productive and become skilled while in exile so that returning home will be real, meaningful, and achievable.

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