



65th session of the UNHCR Executive Committee

HLS Statement of Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
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High Commissioner Guterres,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Multiple humanitarian crises in the world are currently affecting millions of people, the majority of whom are women, young people and children, including in Africa.

Hundreds of thousands of pregnant women are fleeing violence, hunger and human rights abuses, often without a clue to the conditions under which they will give birth. Around 25% of all displaced populations are women of reproductive age.

Some 20-30% of the displaced are young people, who lack access to good education, employment, adult mentorship, and health information and services, which may negatively affect their future lives. In parts of the Central African Republic and South Sudan, children have not attended school since the beginning of this year or even longer and have no access to health services.

In Northern Nigeria school girls were actually abducted by Boko Haram. Efforts continue to try to bring them back.

Forced displacement, family separation, lack of basic protection mechanisms and essential services put women and girls at particular risk of sexual violence, which is often one of their reasons for leaving in the first place.

In conflict situations, sexual violence soars. Lifesaving reproductive health services and service providers are often unavailable. Adolescent girls become commodities – their bodies offering the means for ensuring a family's survival. In addition to their increased risk of violence and exploitation, many women lose access to family planning services, exposing them to unwanted pregnancy in perilous conditions. In regions where HIV is prevalent, there is an additional risk of contracting the infection, and in some countries refugees are not covered by national HIV/AIDS programmes.

Since 1995, UNFPA and UNHCR have had a **Memorandum of Understanding** that includes joint efforts to address gender-based violence, improve sexual and reproductive health and strengthen emergency data management systems.

Every year, UNFPA reaches millions of women and girls in humanitarian settings with life-saving services. With a broad field presence that spans the development-humanitarian-recovery continuum, UNFPA is the operational leader in addressing gender-based violence in crises. But we still have much more to do to drastically improve the lives of the most vulnerable groups.

This year UNFPA has responded, in close collaboration with UNHCR, to a number of major refugee situations caused by conflict – from the Central African Republic and the Great Lakes Region to South Sudan, from Somalia to Mali.

In the relative safety of refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo, women find UNFPA supported safe spaces where they receive counselling and treatment following assault. And in host countries across the continent, UNFPA Country Offices are helping strengthen

healthcare systems for refugees and ensuring access to reproductive healthcare services for women, girls and young people.

In West Africa, UNFPA is supporting prevention efforts and service delivery in countries affected by Ebola, where refugees are also part of the population. With overstretched healthcare systems now at breaking point in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, UNFPA has been providing much needed technical assistance and resources to reinforce national efforts. We will continue to provide leadership as a key partner in the UN system-wide Ebola response.

CHALLENGES

I would like to speak now to the challenges that UNFPA faces in responding effectively to forced displacement in Africa.

Sexual violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence specialists and other skilled technical staff have been difficult to recruit and retain due to physical risks and burn-out, affecting our ability to provide services to displaced populations.

Ensuring that every pregnancy and delivery is safe. Knowing who and where pregnant women are during crises is critical to enable us to reach the estimated 15% of pregnant women at risk of severe complications with timely, lifesaving care.

Insufficient funding. Despite streamlining our internal funding frameworks and allocating \$10 million for kick-starting emergency response, inadequate funding remains our most difficult ongoing challenge. The unique skills and expertise that UNFPA can bring to refugee and IDP situations have often been overlooked by donors, costing many lives every year.

SOLUTIONS

To address these challenges, UNFPA continues to evolve and adapt.

Our ever-expanding roster of surge capacity specialists can be deployed immediately in situations of extreme humanitarian need. We also promote strengthening of local capacity to improve host communities' resilience to an influx of refugees. And longer-term, we advocate for durable solutions to conflict situations. We are currently working with the Peacebuilding Fund Gender Promotion Initiative to address the needs of women and girls in transitional stages, including voluntary repatriation.

Improved information on forcibly displaced and stateless groups in Africa is essential for designing responses. UNHCR and UNFPA are prepared to work with national statistical offices, in preparation for the next round of population censuses, to ensure questionnaires are appropriately designed and include questions about nationality.

CONCLUSION

UNFPA and its partners continue to scale up efforts to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning; promote reproductive rights; reduce maternal deaths; and improve the lives of women and young people. We continue to advocate for human rights and gender equality, respond to gender-based violence and promote the use of population data to drive targeted assistance programmes.

We are mainstreaming our humanitarian programs to enable us to better respond to disasters and are expanding our implementing partners across the region. But the needs are significant and far exceed UNFPA's current capacity and resources. I call on the international community to help us ease this burden by making robust commitments.

Finally, I want to thank the host governments and communities around the world who shoulder the majority of the response and who have generously opened their borders and doors to those fleeing violence, hunger and death.

Thank you.