



UNHCR ExCom68

Statement on behalf of the African Group

High Commissioner,
Madam Chair / Mister Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group to the United Nations.

The African Group deeply regrets and strongly condemns attacks against humanitarian aid workers and UNHCR staff and pays tribute to those who lost their lives while carrying out their duties.

The African Group reiterates its gratitude to the Office for its relentless efforts to alleviate the suffering of displaced people and congratulates the High Commissioner for his ongoing efforts on the matter.

Madam Chair

By the end of twenty sixteen (2016) more than sixty-five (65) million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict or other situations of violence and natural disaster. On September twenty sixteen (2016) the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (New York Declaration). At the core of the New York Declaration lie the concepts of solidarity, responsibility and burden-sharing, a multi stakeholders and whole-of-a-society approach by the international community aiming at easing pressure on host countries and enhancing refugee self-reliance.

The consequences of refugee outflows falls disproportionately on the developing world as low and middle-income countries host eighty-four per cent (84%) of the overall refugees. In spite of this heavy burden the

African countries continue to keep their borders open to provide protection and a safe haven for almost twenty (20) million of people on the move throughout the continent.

In his report, the High Commissioner expresses his concerns about Africa that sees unfolding “the world’s fastest growing refugee situation.” Due to the deterioration of some conflict situations UNHCR had to declare internal emergency situations in some areas on the African continent while the threat of famine is looming in many African countries.

The relief efforts to fight food insecurity must be praised, they need to be sustained and enhanced as of now. Indeed the African region faces alarming cuts to food assistance that leads to disease and nutrition issues in refugee camps.

International support and predictable funding are key to the finding of appropriate and durable solution in Africa. In this regard the African Group takes note of the World Bank’s International Development Association allocation of US\$ two (2) billion for refugee host countries. More details on how the fund will be allocated, in which region and on which programme are desirable as well as information on the assistance to be provided by the World Bank on whether it would be by loans or grants.

African host communities and governments, on their national territory, need to be supported in an equitable manner in order to offer more economic to the refugees. In line with the Grand Bargain commitment made by UNHCR the use of cash-based assistance programme (CBIs) must be further extended to Africa.

Despite these laudable commitments of donors, the fact remains that the UNHCR regional African budget is critically underfunded. In 2016 the available funds only represented forty-nine per cent (49%) of the 2016 total African budget. With a funding gap over fifty per cent (50%) the needs of hosting communities and forcibly displaced people were severely unmet last year.

As of thirty-first (31) of July twenty seventeen (2017) the budget for Africa is currently of twenty-seven point five per cent (27.5%) funded and this is a matter of great concern for the African Group that calls for a clear

prioritization and plan on the programmes implemented in Africa. The need to increase the rate of unearmark fund is crucial.

This is all the more disturbing for the African Group as there will be a decrease in the budget for Africa in twenty eighteen (2018) while there is no substantial decrease of refugees planned. The African Group calls for more consultations between UNHCR and hosting countries for the setting of prioritized actions to use the fund for the essential needs of people in need.

In this was the African group welcomes the Office's multi-year financing plans and its strategy to further engage with private donors.

Madam Chair

Five (5) African countries¹ have started applying the CRRF to respond to large-scale refugee situation.

Well aware of the importance to take action and to contribute to alleviate the suffering, some African governments are on the process to strengthen national asylum laws and refugee protection frameworks. These measures are taken in order to facilitate the social and economic inclusion of refugees, to increase their access to social services, livelihoods and legal employment. Significant progresses are being made by African States to include refugee children in national education systems. Other countries are collaborating with the Office to register refugees for them to get status determination. More and more people on the move are getting access to national health insurance schemes. Work permits for foreign workers have been issued, irrigable land has been made available for refugees, IDPs and host communities to engage in crop production. Cooperation with bodies like ILO is being implemented for an increased access to the labour market for all.

The African regional economic communities (RECs) are involved as well, on order to find regional durable solutions and reintegration of refugees when feasible.

Different summits and conferences on the refugee situation in Africa have been organised both on the continent and throughout the world. The

¹ Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania

Nairobi Special Summit of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for a durable solution for Somali Refugees in March 2017, the London Conference on the future of Somalia on May 2017 (co chaired by the African Union), the Uganda Solidarity Summit on Refugees in June 2017 to name only a few. This has led to very encouraging outcomes and has shown the readiness of the international community to redouble efforts in the search for durable solutions. In order to keep up this momentum pledges need to be urgently turned into concrete. These efforts will only be successful if the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility are equally implemented by the whole international community and with support for regional approach.

We recall the importance of this process to be State-led. Indeed national security is paramount and must be understood as the prerequisite for refugee protection.

While recognizing the importance of security for every State the African Group condemns in the strongest terms the rise of xenophobia, discriminations, hate speeches and other forms of intolerance against forcibly displaced people. We call on UNHCR to further strengthen its efforts to point out the positive impact of migrants and diasporas from Africa and from elsewhere throughout the world.

We regret that the United Nations Report of the High Commissioner for Refugees, on paragraph seven (7), omits to cite Uganda among the countries hosting the largest refugee population in the world as it is currently hosting more than 1.3 million displaced people.

The African Group commends UNHCR's determination to tackle smuggling, abuse, exploitation and human rights violations committed on people on the move seeking protection. It salutes its engagement to reinforce child protection through collaboration with UNICEF and the ICRC to name only a few partners.

Madam Chair,

The UNHCR Global Programme highlights the importance of inclusive development planning as a part of the humanitarian action as a durable solution for the self-reliance of refugees alongside hosting communities. Africa is willing to meet this challenge. For this purpose many actions are underway by addressing voluntary repatriation, local

integration, statelessness, the promotion of a conducive environment for peace and protection.

Despite challenging socio-economic situation and high levels of violence in some areas resulting in large movements of people, Africa is entirely committed to cooperate with UNHCR and its partner agencies.

This is a critical point in history. Partnerships with actors from the private sectors, international financial institutions, regional organisations, civil society, academia, media and refugees and host communities themselves are needed. There is a need to focus on the lessons learned and the good practices for the mutual benefit of forcibly displaced people and host communities.

The interventions of the panellists on this morning are uplifting and we can only commend the efforts underway towards the Global Compact on refugees.

It is possible to address international mobility. Migration is inevitable and is actually a driver reducing inequalities. Despite the many challenges, people on the move are agents of change. This is the reason why refugees, IDPs and migrants are stakeholders in the implementation of the SDGs too² in order to leave no one behind.

The cooperation between humanitarian actors and development partners can contribute to improving the response to the need of refugees and host communities in Africa where needs remain acute.

In our globalised world no country, or even region, can address all the aspects of this refugee crisis alone. Only a holistic perspective and political solutions based on more equitable international protection regime will bring lasting peace on our continent and elsewhere. Thus the African Group fully supports a humanitarian action where development actors are engaged at the onset of displacements and the development of a strong Global Compact for Refugees in 2018.

I thank you.

Statement delivered on 2 October 2017 during the UNHCR 68th Meeting of the Executive Committee in Geneva, Switzerland.

² See paragraph 23 of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

