

MARCH STANDING COMMITTEE 2021

RBSA Director's Remarks (7 mins)

Tuesday 23 March 2021, 10:00 – 13:00

Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to virtually join you today, and to provide an update on UNHCR's operations in Southern Africa.

The Regional Bureau for Southern Africa covers 16 countries, which together host **about 7.4 million persons of concern as of February 2021**. This includes 6.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. Three types of contexts characterize the region's displacement landscape. Firstly, there are **emergencies** resulting from violence in eastern DRC, northern Mozambique as well as influx into DRC and Republic of Congo from Central African Republic following election violence. Secondly, there are **protracted situations** where most refugees have lived in camps or settlements for many decades in Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Thirdly, there are **displaced persons in the urban areas** in countries where freedom of movement of refugees is guaranteed.

Chairperson,

The region faced complex challenges over the past year, many of which are expected to persist into 2021 and beyond. Allow me to just highlight a few as below.

Firstly, **COVID-19 global pandemic impacted severely refugees, other displaced communities and stateless persons.**

Secondly, the **deteriorating security situation** in the region, particularly in the DRC and Mozambique poses life-and-death risks to humanitarian workers in their everyday work.

Thirdly, **overstretched asylum systems** are and remain a major concern across the region, linked to mixed flows and ill-equipped national migration systems.

Fourthly, even before the pandemic, **food assistance shortages** already seriously affected persons of concern, particularly in Angola, the DRC, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. In addition, **climate change and consequent displacement** is a recurring concern with devastating impacts in the region. Extreme weather events such as Tropical Cyclones and floods cause loss of life, destruction of property and internal displacement, most notably in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Madagascar.

Chairperson,

It is with great pride that I note my colleagues rose to the challenges and achieved impactful results. In the interest of time, I will just focus on key achievements in responding to COVID-19 in the region: 2.7 million people were reached through COVID-19 awareness-raising campaigns; over 466,000 people received additional soap to promote handwashing; 24 isolation and 20 quarantine facilities were established and supported. This was in addition to training over 1,800 community health workers and over 1,200 health facilities staff for COVID response.

Chairperson,

Moving forward, in 2021, UNHCR in the Southern Africa region has prioritized the following aspects guided by our Regional Directions (2020-2022) which aligns with the UNHCR's Strategic Directions as well as the complementary Protection and Solutions Strategy (2020-2024):

Firstly, we will carry on **responding to COVID-19 through our “stay and deliver” approach, while fulfilling our duty of care.** We will work on promoting inclusion of Persons of Concern in vaccine campaigns, and engaging communities. Meanwhile, noting staff is the most

valuable asset to the organization, we will continue to honour our responsibility to enhance mental health and well-being of our staff, particularly in the time of pandemic.

Secondly, we will further step up **Emergency Preparedness and Response** to address the growing humanitarian assistance and protection needs.

Thirdly, we will **place utmost attention on preventing and responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Gender Based Violence (GBV)**. We have developed a Regional Protection Strategy and strengthened relevant networks and will work with multi-stakeholders to implement the “Zero Tolerance” policy.

Fourthly, we will seek to **ensure our operational responses are innovative to protect and find solutions, and address the multiple challenges in the region, such as food insecurity, backlog issues, climate change and risk management to ensure compliance**.

Supported by the joint UNHCR-WFP targeting and monitoring Hub, we are working jointly to support refugee self-reliance in the DRC, Mozambique and Zambia. With the establishment of the Poverty Alleviation Coalitions in the DRC, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, UNHCR will continue to support the implementation of the graduation approach targeting persons of concern and host communities. In addition, our region is actively participating in the “Green the Blue” initiative whereby each UNHCR office is taking a baseline of energy usage following the receipt and installation of the green box.

Fifthly, we will **reinforce regional collaboration and initiatives**, to follow-up on the implementation of Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness pledges; as well as maximize protection and assistance for persons of concern. Building on the UNHCR and Southern African Development Community (SADC) Five Year Joint Action Plan (2020-2024), our Bureau and SADC are planning a regional ministerial conference in May 2021 to take stock of implementation of GRF pledges and to elaborate a regional action plan to strengthen asylum and eradicate statelessness. We will expand our collaboration with the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges to establish two regional training centres in English and Portuguese. We will also strengthen our collaboration with the African

Development Bank in Zimbabwe promoting innovative solutions to support livelihoods and explore ways to scale up this partnership in the region. We also greatly appreciate the work of the NGO partners and look forward to deepening the valuable partnerships with the same, which are key to our joint success.

Last but not least, suffering from chronically underfunding, while we are most grateful for the generosity from traditional donors, we will also strive to **explore new avenues for further broadening of donor base and diversification of funding sources**, so that we could mobilize the much-needed resources to reduce human suffering and provide essential assistance to our persons of concern.

Chairperson,

To conclude, as the UN Secretary-General António Guterres proposed, “2021 must be the year to change gear and put the world on track. We need to move from death to health; from disaster to reconstruction; from despair to hope; from business as usual to transformation”. The Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, together with operations covering 16 countries in our region, seek the invaluable support of all member states to jointly rebuild the life and hope of our persons of concern in 2021 and beyond.

Thank you.
