

Statement at the 83rd Standing Committee

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**Clementine Nkweta-Salami, Director
Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the
Great Lakes Region**

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Mme Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Eritrean teenager trying to get his elderly parents to safety as they hear the clashes getting closer and closer to their refugee camp in Afar, Ethiopia.

IDP families in South Sudan displaced due to recurrent flooding ---who lose everything ---all over again.

The Congolese refugee woman and her host community neighbour -working side by side on an agricultural project.

The Burundian refugee living in asylum in Tanzania taking a leap of faith to return home - despite the uncertainties.

These snapshots capture the complexities of displacement in this region. We have countries that are peaceful, countries in the process of trying to cement peace and rebuild, ----as well as countries facing major conflict and political unrest.

In Ethiopia, the situation is still extremely challenging as we try to get aid to the communities that so desperately need it. Some of the refugee camps have been caught up in the conflict, causing further displacement. In Darfur and South Sudan, intercommunal violence has also resulted in new displacements. Without an end to these conflicts, refugees and IDPs, will continue to suffer --most particularly the women and children.

We also are concerned about political developments in Sudan. While our humanitarian operations continue, the ongoing uncertainty will delay our efforts to find lasting solutions for displaced Sudanese.

We continue to witness the ever-increasing impact of climate change, in some cases, causing people to move from their homes or even across borders. This year's severe drought in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia puts hundreds of thousands at risk. Sudan and South Sudan face cyclical flooding at unprecedented levels.

UNHCR is doing what we can to implement mitigation measures, analyse flooding trends while introducing improved shelter models in refugee and IDP camps. We will continue to seek opportunities and build partnerships with others to work on anticipatory actions to reduce climate shocks.

Food ration cuts due to limited funding continue. As a result, negative coping mechanisms among women and girls are growing. To make the best use of scarce resources, we are working together with the World Food Programme on joint targeting in Rwanda and Uganda to prioritize food distribution to those most in need. In a region where we continue to have protracted refugee situations, ultimately, the best way to ensure food security is by investing more in livelihood opportunities.

I am sure you will agree with me that it is unacceptable for one more refugee or IDP girl to have to drop out of school or be married off ---because families are unable to cope.

Mr Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

Despite all these challenges, it is with satisfaction that I can inform you that nearly all countries in the region have safeguarded asylum, allowing for people fleeing persecution to be able to seek international protection.

In the past year, Uganda, which already hosts more than one and half million refugees, was one of a handful of countries to welcome Afghan evacuees in the wake of upheaval in that country, **even** as it addressed continued arrivals of Congolese refugees. Rwanda renewed its commitment to host vulnerable evacuees from Libya in an Emergency Transit Centre that remains one of the only facilities of its kind. We commend Kenya for their new Refugee Act, which expands protection and opportunities for refugees in that country.

Additionally, countries in the region have made progress on their commitments in relation to regional agreements, such as the Nairobi Declaration.

Last December, we joined together with the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to convene the first joint Regional Protection and Solutions Dialogue with member states as part of our efforts to strengthen access to asylum and support states to meet their international obligations. Participants representing ten countries engaged in discussions around good practices in refugee protection and solutions, which will contribute to the development of harmonized regional approaches.

We are investing in strengthening the response to IDPs in close collaboration with UN partners. Our teams in the region continue to provide support in the areas of shelter, protection, camp coordination and camp management for IDPs in South Sudan, Somalia and Sudan. In northern Ethiopia, we joined the UN wide scale up in Afar, Amhara and Tigray, where we significantly increased our operational footprint and established over 65 protection desks to give counselling and refer IDPs with specific needs to specialized services.

UNHCR offices in the region remain attuned to the critical importance of addressing gender based violence and sexual

exploitation and abuse, with recent refugee emergencies underscoring the need to ensure strong leadership and maintain vigilance with the appropriate prevention, coordination and response measures in place. We will continue to focus and reinforce our efforts to ensure a robust and comprehensive response to these issues.

Together with key stakeholders, we are managing the health risks of COVID-19, with many countries now including refugees in their national vaccination plans. The social and economic impacts, however, **-persist,** -and for many refugees may be insurmountable.

Despite lost momentum due to COVID, - significant progress was made on the GRF pledges. At the High-Level Officials Meeting last December, countries like Rwanda, Djibouti and Uganda moved forward with refugee inclusion efforts. We were also pleased that Burundi joined other countries in the region, announcing eight new pledges. We look forward to working with more partners and stakeholders to support pledge matching and the implementation of GRF commitments.

In a complex region, we remain motivated to find solutions. Last year, over 65,000 Burundian refugees were assisted to voluntarily return home. This is one of the highest facilitated returns of refugees globally in 2021. We must do our utmost to invest in areas to which refugees return so that the entire community are able to access essential services and rebuild their livelihoods.

UNHCR remains equally committed - to the IGAD-led Sudan - South Sudan Solutions Initiative. Despite a complex situation in both countries, opportunities to pursue solutions exist. For example, South Sudanese refugees and IDPs are returning to what we call “pockets of hope,”. Together with our partners,

including development actors, we are working to develop an area-based approach to facilitate their reintegration.

Throughout the region, we are seizing opportunities to develop and strengthen strategic partnerships for solutions, including with our donors, IGAD, the World Bank, the IFC, the African Development Bank and the private sector.

We are working closely with countries in finding and strengthening ways to address and reduce the risk of statelessness. We continue to see progress. In Kenya for example, 51 individuals were granted citizenship last year, -a small - but significant achievement for each life impacted.

I would like to assure you of our attention to the integrity of the management of programmes and resources. We will continue to draw on audit recommendations to strengthen our controls, ensure accountability for donor provided resources, and ultimately accountability to affected communities.

While we continue to be concerned about the safety and wellbeing of our staff, particularly in conflict areas, as we uphold our duty of care, **I am proud to say that our staff in the region continue to stay and deliver – despite Covid, ---despite insecurity.**

Mr Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

It would be remiss of me not to thank you for your commitment in supporting our work in this region. I must nevertheless underline the need for additional resources to address some of the very critical gaps within our operations. Gaps that only increase the vulnerability of the already vulnerable populations. While we recognise the need to address emerging refugee crises, we count on your continued financial support and invaluable political advocacy to help us address the myriad challenges as well as seize the emerging opportunities that the East, the Horn and Great Lakes region of Africa presents.

Thank you.