

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
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BACKGROUND PAPER

Africa Regional Session
Protracted Refugee Situations

Wednesday 4 July 2012, 09h00 - 13h00 – Room 2

Outline:

Moderator:

Mr. Justus Lugala, Sudan Health Association, Republic of South Sudan

Speaker:

Mr. George Okoth-Obbo, Director Regional Bureau for Africa

Panel:

Ms. Liz Ahua, Deputy Director for West Africa and Great Lakes

Mr. Raouf Mazou, Deputy Director for the East and Horn of Africa

Ms. Noriko Yoshida, Deputy Director for Southern Africa and Resource Management

Rapporteur:

Mr. Charles Mutabazi (Agency for Refugee Education, Skills Training and Advocacy – ARESTA) Republic of South Africa

Themes

- UNHCR's 2013 programme
- Update on emergencies in the region: the Mali, South Sudan and Somalia situation
- Comprehensive durable solutions strategies for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees

Format:

9:00 -10:45 Welcome by the Moderator and presentation of:

- UNHCR's 2013 programme in Africa (by Director)
- Update on current emergencies (the Mali, Somalia and Sudan situations) by Deputy Directors
- General debate
- Summing up of the debate and conclusions by the Moderator

10:45- 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 13:00 Comprehensive durable solutions strategies for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees

- Presentation of the three situations (by the Director)
- General debate
- Summing up by the Moderator
- Conclusions and wrap by the Moderator

The discussion:

In 2011, UNHCR worked with 325 NGOs in Africa, including 160 national NGOs, and partnership with NGOs remains at the heart of its interventions in the region. The Africa Regional Session aims at providing a platform for an open discussion between NGO participants and the Africa Bureau's management team on programme and policy issues in sub-Saharan Africa.

UNHCR's 2013 Programme:

The first part of the session will look at the 2013 programme for the region and the impact of the expected reduced level of funding for the organization as a result of the financial and economic crises in many of UNHCR's traditional donor countries.

The 2013 Plans cover a total planning figure of more than 13 million people of concern in Africa, including: 2.7 million refugees, 6.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs), as well as returnees and others of concern.

The Office's Global Strategic priorities feature prominently in operation's plans, including: responding to the protection and assistance of women and children; combatting SGBV; addressing statelessness; promoting and facilitating durable solutions; ensuring refugee protection in urban areas; strengthening existing and building new partnerships; enhancing UNHCR's operational effectiveness with special emphasis on emergency preparedness and response; as well as improving management performance, accountability, financial due diligence, staff safety and ethical compliance.

Currently the financial requirements to cover the assessed needs in Africa in 2013 stand at USD 1.82 million, although they may increase further as the Mali and Sudan refugee emergencies show no sign of abating.

The expected reduction in income and the widening gap between identified needs and available resources may require significant adjustments, in particular in an operational environment that is characterized by multiple emergencies. The new and on-going emergencies mean that immediate life-saving activities need to prevail to the detriment of investing in longer term activities such as promoting solutions.

Update on emergencies:

The Bureau will give an update on the main emergency situations on the African continent namely the Mali, Somalia and Sudan situations. The implications for the other programmes on the continent of UNHCR and its partners having to respond almost simultaneously to different emergencies causing large numbers of refugees and internally displaced people will also be discussed.

Mali

By mid-June, more than 320,000 people had fled their homes in Mali since fighting erupted in the northern part of the country in January between a Tuareg rebel movement and Malian government forces. Some 148,000 people are estimated to be internally

displaced and some 175,000, mostly women and children have found refuge in neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger.

UNHCR has deployed emergency teams to Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger and has undertaken rapid needs assessments to identify the needs of the displaced populations. Refugees are being registered and have been moved to refugee sites away from the volatile border areas. Life-saving assistance is being provided at these locations, including shelter, food, water and health care. The refugee agency has airlifted thousands of family tents to all three countries as well as tonnes of non-food items.

In Mali, the situation remains unstable and general insecurity has restricted access to affected populations in the north.

UNHCR is calling for urgent financial support towards its revised appeal, which amounts to USD 153.7 million for 2012, so that the refugee agency can provide immediate protection and assistance to the Malian refugees in coordination with its partners and other UN agencies.

Somalia

Somalia remains at the heart of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Some 300,000 people fled Somalia last year alone and in the first five months of 2012, nearly 50,000 Somalis have sought refuge in neighbouring Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. The majority, close to 25,000 moved to Ethiopia and Yemen, with others going as far as Uganda. Today, more than 991,000 Somalis live as refugees in neighbouring countries and some 1.36 million are internally displaced. It is estimated that more than a quarter of Somalia's population of 7.5 million is either internally displaced or living outside the country as refugees.

Continuing conflict and general lawlessness characterized by human rights abuses, informal and arbitrary "taxes" by local militias and erratic seasonal rains are still forcing people to leave Somalia, although at lower levels than seen last summer. In countries of asylum, UNHCR's interventions focus on addressing refugees' urgent need for medical aid and high-protein, high-energy food, as well as for clean water, shelter and basic services in the camps. In Somalia, UNHCR leads protection and emergency relief interventions targeting almost 1.36 million IDPs, in addition to delivering protection and assistance to over 2,100 refugees in Puntland and Somaliland.

At the beginning of the year, there were reports that about 7,600 Somali refugees had returned to Somalia from Ethiopia and Kenya. However this did not constitute an initial repatriation movement, as most returned for a combination of reasons, including assessing the situation back home, looking for work and social obligations such as weddings and funerals.

A number of efforts continue aimed at dealing with the root causes of the Somali displacement and looking for longer term solutions. These initiatives have been supported by governments, multilateral organizations and UN agencies such as UNHCR.

Sudan

Since June 2011, fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states has driven hundreds of thousands of refugees into Ethiopia and the newly independent South Sudan.

Most have been arriving in remote areas of Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz state (36,500) and in South Sudan's Unity State (55,400) and Upper Nile State (107,100). In particular in South Sudan, the number of arrivals has exceeded UNHCR's planning figures, with the Office now scaling up its activities in both states. Relocating refugees away from the volatile border regions has been a priority in Ethiopia and South Sudan. In Ethiopia, UNHCR established a transit centre Ad-Damazin to relocate refugees away from the border areas, at first to the existing camp of Sherkole and later to the two additional refugee camps of Tongo and Bambassi.

In South Sudan there are currently five refugee camps: Doro, Jammam and the recently-opened Yusuf Batil in Upper Nile State and Nyeel and Pariang in Unity State, as well as one settlement in Yida in Unity State. In addition, there is one temporary site close to the border, Hofra and a transit centre, Kilo18, in Upper Nile state.

UNHCR anticipates continuing arrivals over the coming months with clashes continuing and humanitarian conditions deteriorating in the conflict zones.

Comprehensive durable solutions strategies for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees:

During the second part of the session the discussion will focus on the set of comprehensive durable solutions strategies to bring closure to three of Africa's longstanding refugee situations, namely those involving Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees. These strategies aim at finding solutions for as many Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees as possible, be it in their countries of origin or asylum, to be undertaken in the context of invoking cessation of refugee status at the end of June 2012 for Angolan and Liberian refugees and on 30 June 2013 for Rwandan refugees.

Solutions include voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and, to the extent, assistance to help former refugees reintegrate, or finding an alternative legal status that would allow them to remain in the country of asylum. After decades in exile, a number of Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees have established strong ties with their host communities, including through marriage.

The cessation clauses, embodied in the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, provide for refugee status to end once fundamental and durable changes have taken place in the country of origin and the circumstances that led to refugee flight no longer exist. This is the case for all three countries of origin. UNHCR has recommended that cessation apply for Angolan refugees who fled the country as a result of the conflicts between 1961 and 2002; for Liberian refugees who fled the civil wars from 1989 and 2003; and for Rwandan refugees who fled between 1959 and 1998. Cessation would not apply to any Angolan, Liberian or Rwandan refugees with pending asylum claims. Cessation will also not apply to refugees who still have well-founded fear of persecution, nor to refugees who have compelling reasons for not wanting to go back home due to the severity of past persecution.

Angola

In Angola, 40 years of conflict that displaced millions of Angolans, finally ended in a lasting peace agreement in 2002. While the majority of Angolan refugees have since returned to their country of origin, more than 100,000 currently remain in exile, mainly in

the DRC and Zambia. Some 31,000 of them have indicated their wish to return to Angola.

A regional Workplan with clear actions and timelines has been adopted by governments, UNHCR and IOM to address remaining obstacles to the full implementation of the strategy enabling Angolan refugees to attain, or to be in the process of attaining, durable solutions before 30 June 2012.

States are addressing potential obstacles to local integration or to the provision of an alternative legal status (e.g long-term or permanent residence) as a viable option for Angolan refugees. Zambia and DRC have pledged to locally integrate a significant number of Angolan refugees and are resolutely moving forward with implementation.

Liberia

The greatest part of the Liberian refugee population has, since the end of the conflict in 2003, returned home. The vast majority of the remaining 66,000 Liberian refugees reside in the West Africa region.

UNHCR and the Liberian authorities have fielded roving multifunctional missions to countries of asylum to sensitize refugees to return home. These missions include returnees who can provide first hand information to refugees considering to go home. By mid June, some 8,000 of the 23,000 Liberian refugees who opted for voluntary repatriation had returned home.

Sustained efforts for the local integration of up to 12,000 Liberian refugees who choose the option in countries of asylum have also continued. Mass information campaigns in the concerned West Africa countries, as well as trainings with UNHCR and government officials aiming at strengthening capacity towards the establishment and implementation of exemption procedures, have been carried out.

Rwanda

In Rwanda, peace and stability have essentially prevailed since 1999. The vast majority of Rwandan refugees fled as a result of the 1994 genocide and its aftermath. Over the past years, many of them have returned to Rwanda, but close to 100,000 still remain in exile in some forty countries, mainly in Africa.

In December 2011, fifty-three government officials from 21 African countries hosting Rwandan refugees validated UNHCR's Comprehensive Strategy at a Ministerial meeting organized in Geneva. UNHCR issued its formal recommendation to States on how to move forward with the comprehensive strategy including on the applicability of the 'ceased circumstances' cessation clauses. Since then the Office has been working closely with Government counterparts and other stakeholders to implement all aspects of the strategy based on joint work plans, before cessation is due to take effect by 30 June 2013.

The NGO consultations provide a forum for UNHCR to explain in more details its current activities for the three concerned caseloads, and to engage in a dialogue with NGO partners on elements to be considered in this process.