

92nd Standing Committee | 11 March 2023

**Mamadou Dian Balde, Director
Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes
Region**

*Mister Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I come here today with a somber acknowledgement that the challenges of the past year in the East Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region have been a test for the refugees and internally displaced persons we serve, for hosting governments and partners and for my own colleagues.

The numbers tell a story, and unfortunately the trend is not positive. There are currently 5.6 million refugees, 21.7 million internally displaced persons and 98,000 stateless persons in the region, an increase of nearly 9 percent since I addressed this Standing Committee last year. 1 in every 16 persons living in the region has been forcibly displaced, and 25% of all refugees in the region are born in exile.

The biggest driver of displacement remains the ongoing conflict in Sudan, as mentioned a few minutes ago by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations. After two years of war, it seems we are no closer to peace. The recent military and political developments point towards more division and potentially more violence, leading to further displacement. Inside Sudan, there are over 8.8 million people who have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of this brutal conflict. Over 3.7 million have crossed into mostly neighboring countries, with some moving even further away.

As the Regional Refugee Coordinator for the Sudan Situation, I have met displaced persons in six of the eight countries of asylum the past year. I heard devastating stories of loss and lives torn apart. I continue to be inspired by their courage and resilience. I have also witnessed the generosity of neighboring countries, continuing to keep their borders open, sharing the limited resources they have; and of colleagues doing all they can to provide life-saving assistance and protection under extreme security, logistics and funding challenges.

The urgency to meet the needs of the over 12 million forcibly displaced Sudanese, and to support lasting peace is as relevant today as it was two years ago.

Distinguished Delegates,

Sudan is unfortunately no longer the only major emergency impacting the region. Right now, thousands of Congolese are making treacherous journeys in search of safety in neighbouring countries. Burundi, one of most densely populated countries on the continent, has generously received more than 65,000 new arrivals from DRC in the last 4 weeks. People who have lost everything are arriving in overcrowded sites, where resources to provide basic needs are extremely limited. Uganda, which is already hosting 1.8 million refugees, is continuing to receive DRC refugees, with over 18,000 arriving only last month.

Adding to regional instability are continued climate shocks and extreme weather events. 2024 saw historic flooding across the region, including in South Sudan and Sudan, which caused further misery and displacement for countries already impacted by conflict. Flooding in Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, and Burundi threatened development progress and stability.

Distinguished Delegates,

We are running out of time:

- When 1 out of every 3 Sudanese is displaced,
- When 1 out of every 5 forcibly displaced around the world, are in my region,
- When 4 out of every 5 refugees in the region flee to neighboring countries,
- And when 52% of those displaced are young people, who see little hope for their future.

We know well that the absence of peace at home, and lack of opportunity in asylum is a losing equation, resulting in regional instability and more refugees attempting to take desperate onward journeys in search of safety and a dignified life.

It is clear, now more than ever, our collective, shared global security, and humanity, are at stake.

Distinguished Delegates

These challenges, and more possible ahead, are not insurmountable. Within them are opportunities to deliver protection and solutions in a more efficient, collaborative and agile way. One that reflects the realities of today's world. This is exactly what we are pursuing in the region.

First, our commitment to transformative partnerships is as strong as ever, working closely with host governments, development actors such as the World Bank and IFC, the African Development Bank, EU INTPA, and private sector partners like the Mastercard Foundation.. We are already seeing important investments that will improve the lives of those displaced and the communities hosting them.

Second, we are leveraging the pledges made at the 2 Global Refugee *fora*, to mobilize additional support for refugees and hosts, in areas such as education, jobs and energy. We need more pledge matching, to make these commitments a reality, ahead of the Senior Official meetings of the second GRF.

Third, we are supporting governments who are taking courageous steps to transform protracted refugee camps into settlements. In the next few weeks, the Government of Kenya will launch its *Shirika* Plan, which will translate into more rights for refugees and transform refugee camps into municipalities, that will benefit the entire community. The Government of Ethiopia will also launch its Makatet strategy aimed at moving away from refugee camps into integrated settlements. The Government of Rwanda is committed to a similar approach, building on its inclusive policies.

Fourth, we are working with authorities to pursue sustainable solutions from the beginning of an emergency; taking a “solutions from the start” approach, while continuing to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs. An example is Ethiopia, where thanks to the flexibility and collaboration with Ethiopian authorities, as well as development and humanitarian partners, the country has at least two integrated settlements. These settlements host new arrivals, who now live side by side with community members, accessing services, and are included in national systems, such as health, education, and water.

There are more examples in the region of “sustainable responses in action”, and we will continue these efforts.

We know that the journey towards inclusion results in better protection and more self-reliance for the forcibly displaced, and is also more efficient; ending expensive parallel systems and drawing on perhaps the greatest resource – human capital.

Recent evidence also shows that when refugees are allowed to move freely and work, their incomes rise – and their needs for assistance, fall. In Ethiopia, results from a recent World Bank and Ethiopian Statistical Service study show how greater mobility and work rights would reduce the cost of meeting refugee needs up to \$132 per year.

Distinguished delegates,

Our transformative partnerships extend to our close work with Regional Economic Communities, in a context where 84% of refugees are citizens of member states of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD); and 78% citizens of the East African Community (EAC) partner states.

Our relationship with IGAD continues to be instrumental in helping to foster a more conducive policy environment to support protection and solutions for the millions displaced, and in the important push for political solutions to conflicts.

We welcome the recent admission of Somalia, and other major refugee producing countries', into the East African Community (EAC), and will work with EAC partners to leverage existing frameworks to expand protection and solutions opportunities.

Finally, we're encouraged by the continued dialogue through the Tripartite framework with Tanzania, rooted in our shared belief that thousands of Burundian refugees deserve to be supported in their decision to voluntarily return home and to re-integrate- the most sustainable solution of all.

Chairperson and Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to end my address with two points:

First, the consequences of the uncertainty and reduced funding for UNHCR, UN sister agencies and our NGO partners. If this situation were to continue, women, children, and the elderly will suffer more. In addition to the violence we have started seeing in Kakuma, Kenya, as provided by the Deputy High Commissioner, fewer female survivors of violence, and as many as 258,000, will not receive the vital support we and partners provide them. Fewer children, and as many as 709,000, will not access education, and we know the consequences of this. Organized crimes, including human trafficking and terrorism, will be their recourse. We will witness more desperate journeys towards Europe, Gulf countries and Southern Africa. All this will result in less stability and less political goodwill to receive sisters and brothers in search of safety.

We certainly hope and pray that this will not continue, and we appeal to everyone: to support us, for the benefit of the people we serve. But ultimately, it is for the benefit of all: saving lives, improving lives and bringing greater stability to those forcibly displaced, the communities hosting them, to the region and beyond.

My last point before ending is about enhancing efficiency in the way that we deliver services. We are increasing the use of cash, reviewing our procurement processes, and making savings in the way we manage fuel and fleet. We are reviewing how we work with partners to enhance complementarity, avoid duplication and maximize impact. This is allowing for savings for refugees: in Uganda, for example, we have saved the past 2 years USD 10 million thanks to streamlined registration, integrated protection services, and community led desks.

UNHCR and partners cannot do this alone. Host governments cannot do it alone. Financial contributors and donors cannot do it alone – but we know and have seen that through working together, we can.

I thank you.