

**STATEMENT BY THE UNHCR DIRECTOR OF THE REGIONAL BUREAU FOR WEST AND CENTRAL  
AFRICA (RBWCA) TO THE 86<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE**

**The Chairperson of the Executive Committee,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is International Women's Day. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute, in particular, to the displaced women and girls that we serve and laud their remarkable resilience and tenacity in the face of very difficult circumstances.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to update you on key developments in the West and central Africa region since our Regional Update which you will have reviewed.

We spoke to our growing concerns about the situation in the Central Sahel and in particular about the spread of the crisis into coastal countries namely Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin.

Since our update, thousands more people have arrived in the northern areas of the coastal countries bringing total numbers in these countries to more than 23,000. Together with refugees from Burkina Faso hosted in Mali and Niger, we now have more than 90,000 refugees from Burkina Faso in six neighbouring countries.

These numbers are likely to rise as many more people in the coastal countries are yet to be reached and yet to be registered. Attacks in the North of Togo have also generated internal displacement of some 50,000 persons, according to government estimates.

In view of this unfolding situation, last week, we declared an internal Level 1 emergency to reinforce our response and better prepare in the likely event of more arrivals into the coastal countries.

We commend the governments for keeping their borders open to asylum seekers from Burkina Faso and take this opportunity to appeal for particular attention to the coastal countries and for added support.

In particular, we would like to request that funding to the Central Sahel be increased and expanded to include the needs of new arrivals into Coastal countries.

**Madam Chairperson,**

At this time last year we had declared an internal level 2 emergency due to the sudden influx of refugees from Cameroon across the Chari River into neighbouring Chad. You will recall that several thousand people were also displaced internally from that inter-ethnic conflict that erupted between fishing communities and herders.

Today, more than 10,000 of the 45,000 refugees that had crossed into Chad have returned in self-organised return movements. I am happy to report that with support from the Peace-building Fund and in partnership with other UN organisations, notably IOM, UNDP and FAO we are mounting a vital peace building project.

A simplified voluntary return agreement between the Governments of Chad, the Government of Cameroon and UNHCR is also expected shortly to pave the way for assisted returns in the coming weeks. We are counting on every support we can obtain to realise this particular solution.

**Madam Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen**

As we noted in the update, by the end of 2022 only 34 percent of refugees of school going age in the WCA region were enrolled in school. While these numbers remained low, it was particularly encouraging that 49 percent of those enrolled were girls. We want to increase the overall numbers enrolled in school. We want to ensure their retention. We want to see more girls finishing school.

In this regard, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate once again the Government of Germany on the 30th anniversary of the DAFI scholarship that was marked last year and crucially on the hope that this programme has provided to thousands of refugees in this region.

We call on more actors to engage to institute more pathways to solutions and offer alternatives to the perilous journeys that far too many youths undertake in their desperate search for opportunities.

In this regard, we have agreed a framework of engagement with IOM to jointly address mixed movements along the Chad-Niger route.

As we mark the International women's day, let me confirm our commitment to ensure the inclusion, meaningful participation and leadership of women and adolescent girls. In this regard we are enhancing our direct engagement with women led organizations.

In preparation for the Global Refugee Forum, we are working with Governments to further progress on the implementation of pledges and commitments and identify new opportunities. We are particularly encouraged by the steps taken by many countries to put in place the necessary legal frameworks. We are keen to ensure a stronger link between the law and policy on the one hand and a protective environment on the other.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the extremely challenging times, the monumental humanitarian needs, competing priorities and the need to sustain attention on the multiple fronts.

**Madam Chairperson**, we have proven before that we are all up to the task.  
With your support, we can deliver.

I thank you.