

**DECISION ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION
OF THE 1951 CONVENTION ON THE STATUS OF REFUGEES**

WE, the Heads of State and Government of Member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), meeting in our 37th Ordinary Session in Lusaka, Zambia from 9 to 11 July, 2001:

RECALLING previous resolutions of the Heads of State and Government Declarations and/or OAU Council of Ministers Decisions/resolutions, on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

DEEPLY CONCERNED by the recurrent cycles of armed conflicts and persecution which generate displacement often on a massive scale, as well as by the absence of safe and timely solutions for millions of refugees in Africa who require international protection,

NOTING that 2001 will mark the 50th anniversary of the 1951 *United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, which together with its 1967 Protocol, as complemented by the 1969 *OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, remain the foundation of the international refugee protection regime,

RECOGNISING with appreciation that the fundamental principles and rights embodied in these Conventions have provided a resilient protection regime within which millions of refugees have been able to find safety from armed conflicts and persecution,

REFERRING to the Comprehensive Implementation Plan (CIP) by the Special OAU/UNHCR Meeting of Government and Non-Government Technical Experts on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1969 OAU Convention on 29 March 2000 in Conakry which was endorsed by the 72nd session of the OAU Council of Ministers meeting in Lome, Togo,

ALARMED at the growing number of refugees throughout Africa and their terrible plight as well as the many challenges faced by States, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The latter being the key institution mandated to secure respect for the 1951 Convention by ensuring both legal protection and humanitarian assistance particularly in emergency situations,

AWARE that the problem of refugees is social and humanitarian in nature, and therefore should not become a cause of tension between States, and that as the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on host countries, a satisfactory solution of the problem of refugees can only be achieved through international co-operation and responsibility sharing.

WELCOMING the process of Global Consultations on International protection initiated by UNHCR to revitalize the international protection of refugees,

CONVINCED that the first-ever meeting of States Parties, jointly organized by the Swiss Government and UNHCR, will serve both to reinforce a truly global and meaningful commitment to the foundation principles, and contribute to the search for complementary and compatible new approaches to strengthen the protection of refugees and solutions to refugee problems:

1. **SOLEMNLY REAFFIRM** that the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the 1967 Protocol, as complemented by the OAU 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, constitute the foundation of international refugee law and as such are pivotal in securing refugee protection;
2. **URGE** States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and the Protocol to join the 140 States including 49 OAU Member States who are currently party to these instruments, in order that, as soon as possible, all African states will have acceded to the international instruments on refugees;
3. **REAFFIRM** our commitment to the full implementation and follow-up of the Comprehensive Implementation Plan which will lead to strengthened and more effective implementation of the OAU 1969 Convention as well as of the 1951 Convention, including considering withdrawing reservations made at time of accession to the regional and universal instruments;
4. **AFFIRM** our determination to contribute to the Global Consultations on International Protection undertaken by UNHCR and their subsequent follow-up, with a view to consolidating the international refugee protection regime;

5. **REAFFIRM** the fundamental importance of the Office of the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees as the multilateral institution with the mandate to serve the protection of refugees and calls on Governments to further examine the mechanisms, resources and modalities available to UNHCR to enable it to fulfill its supervisory role.
6. **COMMIT** ourselves to finding durable solutions to refugee problems most importantly by facilitating voluntary repatriation, while endeavouring to create conducive conditions to that effect, and concomitantly to taking preventive measures, to peacefully resolve conflicts, to avoid forced displacement of populations.