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## **Update on UNHCR's operations in Africa - 2011**

### **A. Major challenges and new developments**

In sub-Saharan Africa, the deterioration of the situation in the Horn of Africa coupled with the outbreak of new emergencies caused new displacement in 2011.

Fighting in southern and central Somalia, in addition to widespread famine and drought, have resulted in further large-scale displacement within the country and across its borders. While the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has now reached 1.4 million, more than a quarter of a million Somalis have sought refuge in neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year, straining services and facilities in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Considerable efforts were made to increase emergency response through the opening of new camps in Kenya and Ethiopia; however even this expanded capacity may soon be insufficient to cope with the continuing exodus of refugees from Somalia. Inside Somalia, UNHCR has scaled up its presence in the regions bordering Kenya and Ethiopia and in Mogadishu, in order to provide assistance and protection to IDPs and assist with the coordination of humanitarian activities.

In Sudan, hostilities in Blue Nile State triggered the displacement of an estimated 50,000 people inside the country and another 20,000 have crossed into western Ethiopia since the beginning of September 2011. The UNHCR office in Ethiopia has activated a detailed contingency plan and is working with partners to respond effectively to the needs of the new arrivals who will be accommodated in three sites allocated by the Government of Ethiopia.

The situation in southern Kordofan and Abyei, where military operations are ongoing, also remains a cause for concern. The expiry of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) on 9 July 2011 has affected the security of humanitarian personnel and access to displaced populations remains seriously restricted. The ongoing fighting in southern Kordofan continues to cause displacement, with some 37,000 displaced persons believed to have fled to Khartoum since fighting started in June.

In Darfur, while the signature of a peace agreement between the Sudanese Government and the Liberation and Justice Movement in July 2011 was seen as a positive development, inter-tribal fighting as well as clashes between the Government of Sudan and other rebel movements have caused further population displacements of some 20,000 persons.

Hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the Kivus and in Province Orientale, continued to cause displacement, bringing the total number of IDPs to 1.7 million. Presidential elections are scheduled to take place in November 2011. The extension of the mandate of the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) through 30 June 2012 is expected to help prevent a possible deterioration of the security situation in the pre- and post-election period.

The security of displaced persons and humanitarian personnel was also repeatedly at risk, and access to beneficiaries was impeded by violence and general lawlessness in several countries. Attacks against aid workers culminated in the killing of a World Food Programme (WFP) staff member in southern Sudan in May 2011. In Chad, the *Détachement Intégré de Sécurité* served an important role in assuring security for humanitarian operations.

## **B. Progress on strategic priorities**

### **(i) Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions**

#### *Comprehensive solutions*

While over the past two years, UNHCR has actively pursued separate comprehensive strategies to bring closure to the Angolan, Burundian, Liberian and Rwandan refugee situations in Africa, the challenges have been significant. Many refugees remain unwilling to repatriate based upon perceptions of conditions at home and because of the strong ties they have established with their countries of asylum. Countries of asylum, in some cases, remain unwilling to offer local solutions to refugees in the absence of clear progress on voluntary repatriation.

With cessation on the horizon for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees, UNHCR will intensify its search for durable solutions over the coming months, while also supporting Governments to establish procedures for identifying individuals who will have a continuing need for international protection following cessation. The Office will continue to monitor developments and conditions in Burundi, keeping the possible invocation of the cessation clauses under review at this time, while working closely with the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania to close the Mtabila refugee camp in an orderly and protection-sensitive manner.

#### *Voluntary repatriation*

The massive return of southern Sudanese which started in the run-up to the referendum on the independence of South Sudan, was due in part to uncertainty over citizenship status for southern Sudanese. By the end of July 2011, 327,000 people had returned since the end of October 2010. As part of an inter-agency strategy, UNHCR expanded its presence along the major return routes as well as in the Three Protocol Areas and South Sudan to increase assistance to IDPs and to monitor the movement, coordinate protection activities, and address critical needs of those returnees.

The Governments of Chad and Sudan and UNHCR met at the end of July 2011 to address the ongoing spontaneous returns from Chad. While this may be the first step towards reaching an agreement for the return of 264,000 Sudanese refugees, expectations for an immediate return are low, owing to the tense security situation in Darfur. Some 13,000 unregistered refugee returns from Chad have been verified along with 45,000 IDP returns, mostly into western Darfur. The returnees cite as reasons for returning: enhanced security due to the presence of mixed forces and other security arrangements; improved relationships with nomadic communities; and lack of access to land in their areas of displacement.

Despite an intensification of efforts between UNHCR, the Government of Angola and the the respective countries of asylum, repatriation of Angolan refugees has resumed slowly. UNHCR has urged the Executive of Angola to fulfil its commitment towards resources for the reintegration of Angolan returnees. The joint UNHCR-International Organization for Migration (IOM) appeal has received only limited response from donors, and the lack of funding has been a serious constraint, leaving a large number of refugees who have expressed their wish to go back home without a solution in their countries of asylum, as the effective date for cessation approaches.

Resolution of the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2011 brought prospects for the return of Ivorian refugees. Some 70,000 refugees have returned from Liberia during the past four months and in August 2011, the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary return of Ivorian refugees.

#### *Local integration*

The search for local integration opportunities remains a key priority. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has remained committed to pursuing the integration of the 162,000 newly naturalized citizens through the implementation of the National Strategy for Community Integration. In Gabon, where the Government declared cessation for Congolese refugees from the Republic of Congo, a significant number of refugees have or are expected to receive residency status in the country.

UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will soon start implementing a joint programme under the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) in support of self-reliance activities in the longstanding refugee camps in eastern Sudan. These interventions are expected to lead to the progressive closure of the remaining twelve camps.

#### *Resettlement*

Besides being a vital protection tool and a durable solution, resettlement is an important means of responsibility sharing. From January to July 2011, some 11,400 refugees were submitted for resettlement, the vast majority from the East and Horn of Africa. The top population groups in terms of submissions were Somalis, Congolese from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopians, followed by Eritreans and Sudanese.

The relatively low level of submissions during the reporting period is mostly due to the absence of an agreement on group submissions and difficulties for staff from resettlement countries to access certain asylum countries. UNHCR is working with resettlement countries to increase resettlement submissions from refugee operations in Africa. Resettlement continues to be prioritized in joint strategies to address protracted refugee situations across the region.

## **(ii) Promoting a favourable protection environment**

UNHCR has been working closely with the Commission of the African Union (AU) to promote the ratification of the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa*. In July 2011, the AU and UNHCR partnered with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold the first ECOWAS Regional Conference on IDPs, to promote the accession and eventual implementation of the Kampala Convention among ECOWAS member States. Thirty-two AU member States have now signed the Convention, while seven have deposited instruments of ratification with the AU, and six others have completed the ratification process at the national level. Fifteen ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force.

#### *Statelessness*

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has recently deposited instruments of accession to the Conventions on Statelessness. In Africa, there are now 14 State parties to the 1954 Convention and 8 to the 1961 Convention. In several States, domestic nationality laws are incompatible with these international treaties and relevant human rights standards, and UNHCR has urged Governments to address these issues in the context of legal reform efforts.

#### *Registration and documentation*

Registration and individual documentation are important protection tools. Since March 2010, the Kenyan Government has been assuming responsibility for the registration of newly arriving asylum-seekers, with UNHCR's technical support and training. However, a sharp increase in new arrivals from Somalia, as of June 2011, has led to large

registration backlogs, requiring partners to respond flexibly to refugees' protection and assistance needs during the waiting period.

During the reporting period, all Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad, with the exception of those in Oure Cassoni camp, were registered, and those aged over 18 received identity cards. In eastern Sudan, the verification of Eritrean refugees in urban centres was a step towards finding durable solutions for this protracted refugee situation.

In the context of the Côte d'Ivoire situation, UNHCR upgraded the *proGres* registration software in most of UNHCR's operations in West Africa. Individual registration was conducted in all refugee camps in the main asylum countries, and a similar exercise is underway for refugees living with host communities. Biometric registration was introduced in Liberia so as to prevent possible fraud in relation to food distribution and documentation.

UNHCR offices in Senegal and Mali embarked on a large verification exercise for Mauritanian refugees prior to the Office's upcoming tripartite discussions with the Governments of Mali and Mauritania on the return of Mauritanian refugees.

Individual registration also remained a vital component of the overall protection strategy in southern Africa, where UNHCR collected data from persons of concern in the context of the forthcoming invocation of cessation clauses and used individual registration data for the purpose of implementing durable solutions.

#### *Asylum space*

The asylum space for Somali refugees faces many restrictions. Increasing mixed migration movements from the Horn of Africa towards southern Africa have led to a tightening of asylum policies by Governments in southern Africa as well as *refoulement* incidents and loss of lives at sea. Rescue at sea, disembarkation, and processing of asylum-seekers, refugees and other persons on the move remain key challenges for Governments in the East and Horn of Africa region. UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government of Djibouti, will convene a Global Expert Meeting on the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in distress at sea in November 2011.

In 2011, UNHCR and IOM, with contributions from ECOWAS and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), published a document on *Protection of refugees and other persons on the move in the ECOWAS space* to promote a protection-sensitive response to mixed migratory movements and facilitate cooperation between the different actors involved in the protection of persons on the move in West Africa.

#### *Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)*

A comprehensive inter-agency SGBV study, released in May 2011, examined the complexities of cultural issues in situations of conflict and population displacement in South Sudan. A set of recommendations will serve as a basis for SGBV programming by all concerned actors, including the Government of South Sudan. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite some improvements in overall coordination mechanisms and increased involvement by the Government, major challenges remain, including restricted humanitarian access to areas of conflict; lack of reliable data; insufficient action by law enforcement actors to deal with perpetrators; and lack of capacity of the state apparatus in locations where sexual violence is perpetrated.

### **C. Financial information**

For its ongoing programmes in Africa, UNHCR's Executive Committee approved an initial Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) budget for 2011 of a total of US\$ 1.5 billion. In addition to this, the Office responded to compelling emergency situations accompanied by new operational and budgetary requirements as well as a few other less compelling developments that have nevertheless required action.

Additional requirements for the Côte d'Ivoire situation amounted to \$126 million. In view of the aggravation of the Somalia emergency, an appeal for \$145 million was

launched in July 2011. In July 2011, UNHCR and IOM issued a Special Joint Appeal amounting to \$5.8 million to provide humane and dignified voluntary repatriation assistance to more than 34,000 Angolan refugees.

At the beginning of September 2011, \$3 million were made available from the Operational Reserve to respond to the most immediate needs of the Sudanese refugees from Blue Nile State who fled into Ethiopia. Meanwhile, UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and IOM anticipate issuing a Joint Appeal before the end of the year.

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