

**Talking Points for the Director of the Africa Bureau**

**Mr. David Lambo**

**Forum meeting**

**12 March 2004**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of our discussions today on Convention Plus initiatives, especially in the area of durable solutions and burden sharing, I would like to take this opportunity to brief you on two areas where I believe we are making progress. Firstly, I would like to go over some of the elements which came out of Monday's Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa. And secondly, I would like to say a few words about the preparatory project for a Comprehensive Plan of Action, or CPA, for Somali refugees.

On Monday, as many of you will already know, UNHCR organized a Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa. The objective of the meeting was to create a better understanding and awareness on the unique opportunities which we have in the African Continent right now for durable solutions, especially voluntary repatriation. In the course of the meeting, delegations not only to

expressed their optimism and solidarity in light of the new developments in Africa, but also their concern at the complexity of the challenges ahead.

I do not intend, Mr. Chairman, to go into great detail on the conclusions reached at the Dialogue, as they are available at the back of the room. Suffice it is to say, we covered all aspects of the process of voluntary repatriation and reintegration, including issues surrounding the refugees and returnees themselves, internally displaced persons, demobilisation of soldiers and reintegration of ex-combatants, and the need to focus on receiving communities in the repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction process (i.e. the 4Rs).

At this point, Mr. Chairman, several delegations agreed that we should try to find a way of moving the conclusions and Agenda of the Dialogue forward, it being agreed that whatever mechanism was developed should be as informal and flexible as possible.

As I have already said, Mr. Chairman, many delegations during the Dialogue expressed interest in the Convention Plus initiatives that could benefit protection and durable solutions in Africa. As such, I would therefore like to brief you on how we are trying to use the Convention Plus approach to make progress on one of the most protracted refugee situations in Africa, and this is in Somalia. There are some positive developments in Somalia: the third phase of the peace talks should start today after the signing of the 29 January agreement; there is strong commitment from IGAD to help the Somali people resolve their problems; there is peace and security in NW and

NE Somalia and this has resulted in the voluntary repatriation of approximately 1 million refugees in the past decade.

At the same time, there is also recognition that there is not enough international attention with regard to the political and humanitarian situation in Somalia as well as the situation of Somali refugees. There does not seem to be the same international attention to the peace process for Somalia, if compared to other situations in Africa. On the humanitarian side, in 2003 the UN appealed for USD 75 million in the Consolidated Appeal for Somalia but only USD 35 million was received. Funding for the Somali refugee programmes in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen is very difficult and particularly worrying are the continuing food shortages WFP is facing in the region.

It is in this context that UNHCR has envisaged a preparatory project for the establishment of a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somalia. The main objective of the CPA would be to better and more fully address all aspects of the Somali refugee and forced displacement phenomenon, with a view to achieving durable solutions for these populations. The European Commission and the governments of the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Denmark have agreed to finance the preparatory project.

The CPA would focus on a number of aspects of the Somali situation. Firstly, there is a need for an emphasis on dealing with the root causes of conflict and instability inside Somalia, including the socio-economic and political factors which cause refugee flows

and which have hampered voluntary repatriation and the sustainability of the return process that I have mentioned earlier. Whilst peace and security are clear pre-conditions for voluntary repatriation, community based assistance and longer term development assistance are essential factors in ensuring the sustainability of returns.

Secondly, attention should be paid to the situation of refugees in countries of asylum.

In particular gaps in the protection and assistance sectors may require additional planning and resources. Activities such as capacity building, registration and camp security are examples. Whilst immediate prospects for durable solutions may not be available for certain groups, planning for eventual voluntary repatriation should be the basis for any interventions in countries of asylum. This includes education, vocational training and self-reliance activities.

Mr. Chairman, all three durable solutions: voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration and/or self-reliance should be considered and a mix of solutions may be the most appropriate. In this context, another Convention Plus initiative, the protection gap analysis project, will feed into this part of the CPA

Consideration not only of root causes of refugee flows from the country of origin, but also of secondary movements may require further study to understand the motivations that prompt people to leave Somalia in the first place or to move to countries outside the region. The Convention Plus survey on irregular secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum seekers, which was discussed in the core

group on irregular secondary movements yesterday, should, we hope, provide useful information in this regard.

Finally, UNHCR will as a next step enter into bilateral (or where appropriate limited multilateral) discussions with stakeholders in the region and beyond to explain the objectives of the project, ascertain the level of interest and start working on some preparatory activities.