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Overview of UNHCR's operational strategies in Africa

UNHCR continues to promote durable solutions for refugees in Africa. At the same time, the Office strives to maintain an adequate capacity to respond to new and ongoing emergencies, while advocating for the preservation of asylum space across the continent.

A. Situational analysis

In the East and Horn of Africa, UNHCR's working environment has continued to be characterized by growing insecurity, in particular in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, where refugees and law enforcement officers have been victims of violent and sometimes deadly attacks.

In December, the Kenyan Government issued a directive to discontinue the registration of asylum-seekers in urban areas and relocate them to the refugee camps in Dadaab and Kakuma. The Office has expressed serious concerns about the impact this would have on the lives of more than 56,000 refugees, the vast majority of them Somalis, who have lived in urban centres for years. UNHCR has been working with relevant actors to ensure that, if implemented, the directive would be carried out in respect of refugee protection and humanitarian principles so as to avoid human suffering.

Somalia remains the centre of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with more than one million Somali refugees in the region and 1.36 million persons internally displaced. The fall of militia strongholds in southern and central parts of the country and the inauguration of a new President in September 2012 have brought hope for peace and stability in the country.

In 2012, UNHCR assisted some 2,000 internally displaced Somali families to return home and, together with partners, invested in the return areas to ensure their sustainable reintegration. In line with the rest of the UN system, UNHCR has moved its representation from Nairobi to Mogadishu; the Office has also strengthened its presence in south and central Somalia.

Since the start of the conflict in northern Mali one year ago, more than 167,000 refugees have been registered in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, while nearly 230,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have sought safety in other areas of the country. Since January, an additional 23,000 refugees have fled the conflict in Mali. UNHCR is contributing to the overall United Nations humanitarian response efforts in Mali, though insecurity continues to restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the north. In Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger, UNHCR has reinforced response and preparedness measures, including the repositioning of humanitarian aid, and has strengthened its staff in the region. Maintaining the humanitarian and civilian character of the refugee camps, in particular in Niger, remains a serious concern. UNHCR and the authorities of Niger are redoubling efforts to relocate refugees away from border areas to protect them from cross-border attacks and forced recruitment.

While parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are now relatively stable, violence and human rights abuses in the east of the country continue to cause displacement. The serious deterioration of the security situation in the provinces of North and South Kivu, which began in March 2012 and escalated in November, led to the internal displacement of an additional 390,000 people, bringing the total number of IDPs in the east to 1.8 million. Fighting between the Congolese army and the M23 rebel movement forced an additional 71,000 people to seek refuge in neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. UNHCR offices in the region have updated their contingency plans to ensure a rapid response should more refugees arrive.

Fighting that began in 2011 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states has resulted in over 170,000 refugees crossing into Unity and Upper Nile states in South Sudan, with a further 30,000 crossing into Ethiopia. In South Sudan, efforts are ongoing to relocate Sudanese refugees from Yida camp to safer sites. Meanwhile, in Upper Nile state, UNHCR is finalizing preparations to decongest Doro camp and to relocate refugees from Jamman refugee camp to Kayad camp.

The surveying of sites for additional camps that could accommodate up to 110,000 people is underway. UNHCR is working closely with the Government of South Sudan to improve screening mechanisms to ensure the civilian character of the camps.

Restricted humanitarian access due to insecurity continues to be a challenge in many UNHCR operations in Africa. In Chad, the presence of the UN-trained police force, the Département Intégré de Sécurité (DIS), has improved security conditions in the east and south of the country and increased access to displaced populations. Negotiations with the Government of Chad concluded at the end of 2012 with an agreement on a gradual decrease in financial support from the donor community over a two-year period and the full handover of DIS to the Government in January 2015.

The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa came into force in December when Swaziland became the 15th country to complete the ratification process. The Convention provides specific obligations for engagement by States in the protection of IDPs, including the adoption of national legislation and implementation of relevant policies.

B. Achieving the Global Strategic Priorities

Redoubling efforts in the search for durable solutions

While substantial resources have been directed at new or escalating emergencies in Africa, the Office has also pursued opportunities to bring to a close protracted refugee situations.

Comprehensive solutions strategies

The cessation of refugee status for Angolan and Liberian refugees at the end of June 2012 was preceded by a significant increase in voluntary returns and opportunities for local integration. In 2013, UNHCR will support the return of up to 24,000 former Angolan refugees, primarily from the DRC, who were unable to take part in organized returns before they ended on 30 June 2012. The Office is also supporting the local integration of up to 60,000 former Angolan refugees in their countries of residence. The screening of this population against established criteria is underway by the national authorities. UNHCR is facilitating the return of an estimated 700 Liberians who remain in Côte d'Ivoire and is supporting the local integration of an estimated 10,800 others in their countries of residence. UNHCR is also providing guidance to host governments on procedures related to exemption from the application of the cessation clauses.

Some progress has been achieved in the implementation of the comprehensive solutions strategy for Rwandan refugees. More than 9,000 refugees have returned home, primarily from the DRC, and several countries of asylum have expressed a willingness to regularize the status of Rwandan refugees. The launch of a three-year programme for the return and

reintegration of over 70,000 Rwandan refugees by the Government of Rwanda and the United Nations is also expected to have a significant impact. With the cessation clauses for Rwandan refugees coming into force on 30 June 2013, UNHCR will work closely with all concerned governments to facilitate the return of those who wish to do so before that date, while securing local integration opportunities in asylum countries and processing any claims for exemption. The Office is planning to facilitate a regional meeting in early 2013 with Rwanda and the countries of asylum to agree on a common vision and strategy for further implementation of the comprehensive strategy.

UNHCR is pursuing the implementation of a multi-year plan of action to address the situation of some 430,000 refugees from the DRC who are living in sub-Saharan Africa. In West Africa, UNHCR is implementing a strategy aimed at bringing to a close the following six small protracted refugee situations: Mauritians in Mali and Senegal; Ghanaians in Togo; Chadians in Niger; and Togolese in Benin and Ghana.

Voluntary repatriation

In addition to the large number of Angolan and Liberian refugees who returned home in 2012, more than 46,000 refugees were successfully repatriated from the Republic of the Congo to the DRC. Some 90,000 refugees from the DRC remain in the Republic of the Congo, including 28,000 who have expressed a wish to return home and who will be assisted to do so in 2013.

Of the 1,660 Chadian refugees in Cameroon who have opted for voluntary repatriation, nearly 1,500 had returned by the end of 2012. The rest will be assisted to repatriate according to the tripartite agreement signed by the Governments of Chad and Cameroon and UNHCR in November 2012.

More than 130,000 people returned from Sudan to South Sudan in 2012. Some 300,000 South Sudanese remain in Sudan, including around 40,000 who are stranded at departure points in Khartoum and Kosti. UNHCR continues to support the Government of South Sudan in issuing identity documents to enable these individuals to return home.

At the end of 2012, the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, with the support of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), organized the return of more than 34,000 Burundians whose refugee status had ceased in August. The Office continues to support the Burundian Government in addressing challenges to their sustainable reintegration, particularly access to land, education and health care. UNHCR is working with the Tanzanian Government to advance the integration of newly naturalized Tanzanians who were formerly refugees from Burundi.

Local integration

Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, UNHCR will continue implementing the Transitional Solutions Initiative in eastern Sudan. A joint oversight structure has now been created and the conversion of three refugee camps into villages through sustainable socio-economic integration is in its final stage.

Resettlement

Some 16,000 refugees in Africa were submitted for resettlement in 2012, and more than 10,000 departed for their new homes. Making resettlement a meaningful component of comprehensive protection strategies in Africa remains a key priority for UNHCR in 2013. An initiative adopted at the end of 2012 foresees the resettlement, over the next three years, of 50,000 refugees from the DRC currently in the region. Priority also continues to be given to Somali and Eritrean refugees living in protracted situations.

Promoting a favourable protection environment

While 2012 saw many States provide protection to large numbers of refugees fleeing armed conflict, asylum fatigue is increasingly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, with more restrictive asylum policies in countries of transit and destination and a greater tendency to pursue

“refugee-free” zones. Security concerns have also contributed to the shrinking of asylum space on the continent.

UNHCR remains committed to assisting governments to ensure proper functioning asylum systems and to strengthen their institutional frameworks. A Ministerial Decree adopted by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in February 2013, granting *prima facie* recognition to refugees from the Central African Republic, will improve the level of protection afforded to this group. Special attention will be paid to new legislation and policies affecting persons of concern in Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal and Zambia.

Individual registration is a vital component of the overall protection strategy in Africa. The use of biometrics was expanded in 2012 to ten countries, including South Sudan. The Government of Angola decided to embark on a country-wide registration exercise in an effort to identify and document asylum-seekers and refugees.

UNHCR provides training as well as technical and financial assistance for refugee status determination (RSD) across the continent. Positive developments include the handover of RSD functions to the Government of the DRC at the end of 2012, and discussions with the Cameroonian authorities concerning the assumption of RSD responsibilities in 2013.

Ensuring access to protection in the context of mixed migratory movements and increasing intolerance towards refugees remain particularly challenging. Faced with a growing number of people moving from the East and Horn of Africa southwards, countries in southern African have tightened their migration and asylum policies. While some countries have coined the phrase “protection elsewhere” to reject new asylum claims, others have adopted stricter encampment policies. UNHCR, in cooperation with partners, advocates with governments for protection-sensitive migration policies and practices. It also pursues activities to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

In 2012, thousands of people, including refugees, risked kidnapping, torture, prolonged detention and *refoulement*, as they moved from the East and Horn of Africa through Egypt to Israel and Europe. The recent abductions and disappearances of Eritrean refugees from the Shagarab camps in Sudan are of great concern. UNHCR, IOM and other humanitarian organizations are supporting the Government’s efforts to improve security in the Shagarab area and to reduce the risk of kidnappings. UNHCR assists refugees in these camps with a community-based policing system and provides psycho-social counselling to survivors of trafficking, as well as legal aid to those in detention. In addition, UNHCR will shortly launch a strategy and a plan of action to address trafficking and smuggling in the East and Horn of Africa. The African Union is planning a regional meeting in 2013 to improve cooperation and coordination on this matter.

Child protection

In 2012, a study was completed on unaccompanied Eritrean children in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, aimed at identifying key push and pull factors as well as protection risks associated with the arrival of increasing numbers of unaccompanied children. The study’s findings will inform UNHCR’s programmatic and protection response in the sub-region.

Protracted refugee situations have benefited from the roll-out of UNHCR’s education strategy. In 2012, the emphasis was on improving access to education for girls. The “Educate a Child” initiative, which was launched by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar in November 2012, will enable over 80,000 children to complete primary school in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains a principal protection concern, and UNHCR’s 2011 SGBV strategy will continue to guide prevention and response efforts. SGBV remains a serious concern in the DRC. In 2013, UNHCR will work with local governments, partners, and communities to implement a strategy focused on the following

four key objectives: expanding community mobilization; reinforcing monitoring mechanisms to identify and protect particular groups at risk; improving the self-reliance of SGBV survivors; and reinforcing the capacity of the Government to promote a protective legal framework and more effective delivery of services.

As part of the High Commissioner's Special Project on SGBV, mobile courts will be established in Ethiopia in 2013 to provide legal assistance to refugees in the Shire, Fugnido and Gambella refugee camps. A similar project is underway in Chad, where refugees in Gaga, Bredging, Treguine and Farchana camps have identified women leaders and formed community watch groups to discuss measures to combat SGBV. Hundreds of women and girls have attended literacy and English and Arabic language classes. Recreational activities established for boys and girls include football, volleyball, theatre and traditional dance.

Statelessness

Some 200,000 people in South Sudan have acquired nationality documents since the country gained independence in 2011. Previously only available in the capital, the documents can now be issued in four states, and there are plans to extend the process to all ten states in the country in 2013. In Sudan, UNHCR supports the Civil Registry to establish efficient registration procedures so as to reduce the risk of statelessness. Sensitization campaigns to promote birth registration and a profiling exercise to verify the extent of the risks of statelessness will be conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in 2013.

Urban refugee policy

Following the pilot phase of UNHCR's urban refugee policy in Kenya, high-level missions were conducted to Ethiopia and Uganda in order to engage the relevant authorities in further implementation. A technical mission was also dispatched to Cameroon to advance the implementation of the policy. In Ethiopia, more than 1,500 refugees have been able to access tertiary education in urban areas as a result of the "out of camp" initiative. Uganda has pursued a progressive policy since 2006, allowing at least 40,000 refugees to take up residence in Kampala and other cities.

C. Financial information

Predictable and adequate resourcing is essential in meeting the operational and institutional objectives of UNHCR in Africa. The Office's financial requirements in Africa have grown significantly during recent years. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment resulted in consolidated budgetary requirements of US\$ 1.82 billion for 2013, as approved by the Executive Committee. The Office will shortly present a supplementary budget of some US\$ 70 million to address needs resulting from new displacement in the DRC and refugee movements into Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.

While UNHCR received strong donor support in 2012, including for unforeseen emergencies, the gap between needs and available resources is widening. This has consequences not only for emergency response, but also for ongoing protection and assistance programmes. The need to prioritize resources for immediate life-saving protection and assistance over investment in long-term activities, such as education, livelihood opportunities and durable solutions, will continue to characterize programmes in Africa in 2013.