ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs 1 – 3 JULY 2015 - International Conference Center Geneva

REGIONAL SESSION: AFRICA

BACKGROUND PAPER

<u>Date:</u> Thursday 2 July

Time/Room: 14h30 - 18h30 - Room 2

For the past 18 months, the humanitarian community, governments and donors have been responding to crises in Africa. At the time of writing six large-scale crises are ongoing. UNHCR in Africa rarely reaches beyond 30% of overall funding needs; other humanitarian actors equally face serious funding shortages severely constraining humanitarian action. Burundi is the newest crisis, with tens of thousands fleeing. Unresolved conflicts remain in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Yemen, and Mali. Neighboring countries to these countries in crisis equally are affected.

These crises have used the bulk of UNHCR's resources dedicated to Africa – more than 80% of staff, money and logistics available are absorbed in responding to life-saving activities. Consequently, UNHCR has had to scale back, and even delay progress on finding solutions in such situations as Togo and Zambia.

The session will open with a short introduction of the new UNHCR Director for the Bureau for Africa, Mr. Valentin Tapsoba. The Director will then proceed with an overview of UNHCR's operations in the region focusing on the crises. He will also highlight a few positive stories of how and where partnership with NGOs has made a significant difference: Chad, Cameroon, Niger.

The latter part of the session shall consider how to incorporate a solutions focus in the delivery of emergency assistance from the very first days. It has become clear that positive refugee interactions with hosting communities can immediately save the lives of refugees, rapidly normalize their situations, and significantly ease the burdens placed on hosting communities in the longer term. Recent UNHCR policies issued, including Alternatives to Camps Policy and the Urban Refugee Policy, include increased assistance and advocacy for support to hosting communities and may signal increased interaction with local leadership, and heightened tolerance practices by governments as a whole (including in Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Uganda and Ethiopia). The aims are to empower refugees, therein restoring dignity and pride in a longsuffering and traumatized population. The High Commissioner has said that 'it is not acceptable have three generations refugee in (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8I2IS0h2gM). Finding traditional permanent solutions (return, integration and resettlement) has not proven to be an easy task. This discussion shall focus on how to restore refugees, and other displaced persons' capacity to create choice, opportunity and dignity into their lives while waiting for a durable solution to become available.

Questions to guide the discussion:

- What needs to be in place to begin discussions with governments on allowing self-settlement? When is it preferable to receive refugee populations in camps?
- What can UNHCR / NGOs do to facilitate the restoration of dignity and raise the quality of life for a refugee population?
- How can we work together to better focus the interest of civil society, non-traditional donors, bi- and multi-lateral donors in supporting solutions to protracted and forgotten situations?
- What are the most significant lessons learned and positive examples from the NGO community in attracting and implementing alternative solutions in Africa?

RBA June 2015