

**45th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee
of the High Commissioner's Programme**

**23 – 25 June 2009,
Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

**Introductory Statement by George Okoth-Obbo, Director, Division of
International Protection Services, for agenda item 3(c), "Report on
the International Protection of Women and Girls in Displacement"
(EC/60/SC/CRP.11)**

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

The "Report on the International Protection of Women in Displacement" contained in Document EC/60/SC/CRP.11) before you continues UNHCR's reporting to the Executive Committee on its policies and programmes to protect women and girls. The objective of these activities is not only to target the protection problems faced by women and girls in situations of displacement, but so also as to redress the inequalities they face because they are women. Protection is thereby ultimately achieved by tackling gender inequality and empowering the women and girls. It is this empowerment cycle which the report concentrates on. That cycle includes, first, access by women and girls to education; second their equal and meaningful participation in policies and programmes that affect them; and, third, their ability to meet the immediate and long-term needs of their families, their children and themselves.

Once again, the picture which the report depicts on these questions is quite mixed. For instance, in regard to education, it highlights that 67% of refugee children aged between 6 and 17 were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in 2008. At the primary level, there was near gender parity between girls and boys. Yet, this figure means that over 30% of refugee children are not accessing education. Moreover, at secondary level, where overall enrolment is only some 20%, there is a disturbing disparity to the detriment of girls in both enrolment and retention, a factor which compounds the risks and vulnerabilities that face adolescent refugee girls.

With regard to participation, the report underlines that, across all UNHCR programmes, refugee women and girls are being closely involved in identifying, understanding and addressing properly the protection risks they face. As their voices are increasingly and seriously heard, the true nature, scale and gravity of problems such as sexual violence are becoming better and more truly known, sometimes for the first time in decades. The necessary responses can also be designed with the expectation of a much better fit, across from SGBV itself, management and leadership, adult literacy and

vocational training and registration to documentation. These responses however, it must be acknowledged, still do not cater fully to even the most basic and fundamental of the needs. So, for instance, women and girls still face problems in obtaining personal documentation. While, especially in the camps, their participation in management and leadership has increased over the years since the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women was launched in 2001 and the Age Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming strategy introduced in 2004, in many cases it remains well below 50%. And, to take an even more basic need, sanitary materials are still not universally provided to all refugee women and girls of reproductive age.

This dual picture is the same for the economic empowerment, independence and livelihood of women. All regular UNHCR programmes are constructed in such a way as to specially pursue these objectives. They are supplemented by special projects such as Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL). Yet, globally speaking, the fact is that the social and economic plight of women and girls, whether in camp, urban or other non-camp environments can be extremely crushing as you will have seen in the montage of photographs that was running up here earlier. UNHCR programmes have not yet been structured in such a manner that particular objectives relating to women and girls, including livelihoods and empowerment, would be absolutely, to use the jargon of the house, "firewalled" or made "non-negotiable".

In view of all this, it is clear that all ongoing targeted programmes for the protection of women and girls, such as those which are overviewed in the report, should not only be sustained and consolidated, but also be increased and expanded in the breadth and depth of needs assessment, planning, resourcing and implementation. The Office is aware that such programmes will not fully have their desired outcomes if boys and men are not factored in them, and the special risks of discrimination, exploitation, and violence addressed duly. In fact, a proper application of the AGDM strategy, along with specific tools such as our the Best Interest Determination of the Child guidelines finalized in May last year, should ensure that the problems facing other groups are not ignored or themselves allowed to become invisible. This integrated, comprehensive approach in addressing the sexual and gender based problems facing both female and male persons of concern to UNHCR is what UNHCR is striving to achieve and looks forward to continue working with its partners on.

We will be keen to have the feedback, and, of course, the support, of the Executive Committee on the issues reflected in the report.

Thank you very much.
24 June 2009