



NIGERIA'S STATEMENT

AT THE

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED
NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION
FOR REFUGEES, (UNHCR)

7-8 DECEMBER 2011

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**Mr. Chairman,
High Commissioner,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Nigeria wishes to associate itself with the position expressed by the Distinguished Delegate of Lesotho on behalf of the Africa Group. We welcome the High Commissioner's statement that highlights situations of concern facing the UNHCR as we celebrate its sixty years in the service of humanity.

The last 60 years has witnessed ever increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons with consequent human rights challenges across the world. Rapid population growth, natural disasters, climate change, political instability and armed conflicts have all contributed to a hostile environment for vulnerable people in society. Tensions arising from scarce resources, environmental degradation and ethno-religious crisis aggravate displacement of persons thereby making refugee management a daunting task for governments. Africa is the most adversely affected given the transformational processes in many of its member states. In 2011, Africa witnessed several cases of displaced person/refugee challenges,

in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan and Egypt arising from conflict and deteriorating climatic environment.

Around the world, new conflicts have arisen to reinforce the effect of old ones. These conflicts call for collaboration and sustained action among nations to resolve. The UNHCR has, over the years risen up to the challenges posed by the growing number of refugees. As Africans, we cannot forget the assistance and protection that UNHCR provided to hundreds of migrant refugees stranded in several North African countries in the wake of the Arab Spring. The International Community owes a debt of gratitude to the donor countries, organizations and agencies whose generosity helped to evacuate stranded persons. We also appreciate the refugee-hosting states and neighbouring countries that opened their borders to refugees and internally displaced persons. We commend them for acting in the spirit of our common humanity, collective responsibility and burden sharing.

Mr. Chairman,

The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness that we celebrate today remain indispensable for providing succor and hope to refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. Nigeria acknowledges the importance of the two conventions as a basis for collective action. We have therefore acceded to both conventions by ratifying and depositing their instruments of accession with UNHCR in New York.

In acceding to, and ratifying these instruments, Nigeria seeks to convey support and step up commitment to the operations of the UNHCR, as it acts to ensure that all those that require protection across frontiers and those fleeing from crisis zones receive assistance and protection. Despite internal security challenges, Nigeria will always endeavour to keep her borders open to genuine refugees, and in collaboration with the UNHCR, ensure their welfare and protection at all times. We therefore, call on member states that have not acceded to these conventions to do so in order to give the instruments wider application.

Mr. Chairman,

Voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement should constitute key elements of international protection for refugees. On its part, UNHCR should embark on new research and new measures to tackle the emerging refugee challenges, and address the root causes of mass dislocation and displacement of peoples.

In this regard, the role of regional and sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS is important. The first Ministerial Conference on Internally Displaced Persons in West Africa organized by the UNHCR in partnership with ECOWAS was very helpful in sensitizing all stakeholders in the administration and protection of refugees. We should sustain such regional meetings.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, Nigeria supports the reforms introduced by UNHCR to facilitate its operations, especially establishment of an

Audit and Oversight Committee to promote transparency and accountability. We call on all stakeholders to act courageously to strengthen the operations and performance of UNHCR.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.