

Addis Ababa  
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## **UNHCR joins high-level meet to mark 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of OAU Refugee Convention**

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is supporting and participating in a continental commemorative meeting (CCM) convened in Ethiopia by the African Union to take stock of the implementation of the influential 1969 OAU African Refugee Convention as it marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

The two-day event gathers some 200 participants, including Ethiopia's President Sahle-Work Zewde and Equatorial Guinea President Teodora Obiang Nguema Mbasogo as well as refugees and senior AU and UNHCR officials.

It is one of several activities to be convened this year, with important UNHCR support, to promote the AU's theme of 2019: "Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa." The CCM started a day before World Refugee Day.

It also coincides with the release of UNHCR's annual Global Trends report, which shows that in 2018 the number of forcibly displaced people topped 70 million for the first time since the end of World War II. Africa is the worst affected region with more than a third of the world's forcibly displaced.

The CCM was preceded by a high-level ceremony to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAU Convention. Participants called on states party to the treaty to fully implement it in domestic law and policy and called on states not yet party to the Convention to ratify or accede to it in 2019.

President Obiang, who was last February appointed Champion of the AU theme of the year, said that after visiting a refugee camp in Ethiopia on Tuesday, "I realized the reality of daily life for refugees. It is a harsh reality." He also called on more countries to accede to the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. The president offered to host a summit on the issue of forced displacement in November.

President Zewde highlighted Ethiopia's history of generosity towards refugees and stressed the continuing importance of the 1969 OAU Convention. She said the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was "an important moment to have a stock-taking" on assisting refugees.

UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, George Okoth-Obbo, asked "How many of us could spend one day, let alone the average of 17 years, in a refugee camp? Let us include refugees in our societies," and stressed the need to end encampment.

Fifteen refugee women from nine African countries shared with the CCM the conclusions of a two-day dialogue convened at the start of the week in Addis Ababa. Susan, a refugee from South Sudan, urged the participants to listen more to the voices of women. "Please give us the conditions that will let us live in dignity."

The opening commemorative ceremony was followed by thematic sessions bringing together representatives of AU member states, international organizations and civil society.

To read the women's statement, go to: <https://www.unhcr.org/5d09e2f24>

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