

Introductory remarks by Valentin Tapsoba, Director, Regional Bureau  
for Africa, for the overview of UNHCR's operations in Africa

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Your Excellency, Distinguished Chairperson of the Executive  
Committee

Heads of Delegations to the Standing Committee,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I return this year to tell you that Africa continues to host the largest proportion of displaced people in the world – the number which now stands at over 20 million displaced people of which some 5.7 million are refugees and asylum seekers.

Since October 2017, the situation in some countries in Africa has deteriorated significantly and triggered new waves of population movement. The **crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo** is of particular concern as renewed unrest has led to a humanitarian crisis of extraordinary scale. There are now more than 4.5 million IDPs, of which 2 million were forced to flee their homes during the course of

last year. Let me commend here the governments of Angola, Burundi, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda for admitting some 120,000 Congolese refugees last year which brings the total to more than 740,000 refugees.

Conflicts in both **South Sudan** and **Nigeria** have entered their fifth year. With no resolution to the South Sudanese crisis in sight, the number of refugees now stands at over 2.4 million, and projections are that this number will cross the three million mark by the end of this year if a solution is not found. In other words, more than one-third of the population would have fled the country as refugees. This will also sadly mark the South Sudan refugee crisis as the largest in Africa since the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Protracted crisis also continues to affect Somalia, with more than 2.1 million IDPs displaced by drought and conflict in 2017. In addition, almost 900,000 Somali refugees are still hosted in neighbouring countries.

The resurgence of conflict in some parts of the **Central African Republic** is alarming, with more than half a million refugees and close to 700,000 internally displaced people. The most recent influx into southern Chad is putting pressure on host villages that are already poor and whose resources have been stretched to their very limits. Here again, let me commend the Government and people of Chad for generously accommodating large numbers of refugees.

In **Nigeria**, we are concerned with the deteriorating security situation, in particular the renewed insurgency in the north-east where we have

seen a roll back in progress made by the humanitarian community in accessing some liberated areas. We are also gravely concerned about the recently reported abduction of more than 100 schoolgirls in Borno State of northern Nigeria. Asylum space continues to shrink. Since last year, the injury or deaths of our people of concern in attacks by non-state actors and security incidents by state actors is a cause for alarm and great sadness. We are equally saddened to see the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers, as illustrated by the most recent killing of three aid workers in Nigeria, in the northern town of Rann and that of another in the Central Africa Republic.

Chairperson,

The situation in the **Sahel region** is increasingly distressing. Insurgency and counter-insurgency in the border areas of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali have forced population movements inside Burkina Faso as well as across the border into Mali.

The raging conflicts, perpetration of extreme forms of violence and gross violations of the human rights of persons of concern, especially women and children require an increase in the availability of specialist protection services, such as the safe from the start project. There is an urgent need to strengthen our work on prevention and response to sexual and gender based violence as well as the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse. In addition, the delivery of effective assistance and protection services require robust and credible

registration and data management, including case management information systems.

The complex situation that I have just outlined is compounded by challenges related to climate change, which threaten the **food security** of vulnerable refugees and their host communities across Sub-Saharan Africa. South Sudan, North-Eastern Nigeria and Somalia are cases in point. Cuts in food rations and the inability to farm is preventing food self-sufficiency and threatening famine. Many children are undernourished and some refugees have had no choice but to resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive.

Chairperson,

In this context, on behalf of the Bureau, I would like to take this opportunity to **thank all donors** who contributed to our programmes in 2017. Including un-earmarked donations, the income level reached US\$1.4 billion, the highest ever recorded. Un-earmarked donations have made it possible for small operations to continue their programmes. However, more needs to be done as requirements continue to be outpaced by available resources. In the past three years the region has only received an average of some 40 per cent of required funding. Our budget for 2018, which stands at USD 2.8 billion, is currently funded at only 5 per cent. Our close partner, the **World Food Programme**, is facing similar challenges as are other partners; 2 million refugees across nine countries had their food rations decreased last year, with further cuts expected in 2018. To address major refugee

situations, UNHCR is leading the launch of four inter-agency regional refugee response plans this year, for the Burundi, DRC, Nigeria and South Sudan situations.

Chairperson,

It is clear that in a world confronted by record levels of displacement and limited donor funding, a **“new way of working”** is not a choice but a necessity. The “whole of society” comprehensive refugee response approach that we have collectively been advocating for recognizes that humanitarian action needs to be supported by targeted development responses to manage large scale refugee situations. African governments are to be applauded for demonstrating strong leadership in adopting this approach with six countries and one regional situation applying the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework**. In the face of adversity, we have noted a strong commitment to do things differently by a number of countries on the continent, with remarkable examples of states pursuing policies that foster refugee inclusion and self-reliance. Djibouti, which the High Commissioner visited last December, is a country with a population of under 1 million people and a high unemployment rate, but has courageously, nonetheless, passed laws to strengthen refugee access to education, health care, employment and eventual naturalization.

We are also highly encouraged by new breakthroughs reached in terms of **positive cooperation with development actors**. On a global level, UNHCR is very impressed with the steps taken by the World Bank in

opening up the sub-window on Refugees and Host Communities within the IDA 18 programme. We are pleased to note that seven of the eight initially eligible countries are in Africa. We are also developing fruitful partnerships with other development partners, including the African Development Bank, on new projects to support countries to include refugees and host communities in their national development plans.

**Regional collaboration** in Africa has become indispensable to ensuring robust and comprehensive approaches to refugee situations. UNHCR has enhanced its co-operation with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities. The first regional thematic IGAD Conference was held in Djibouti, last December, on the theme of refugee education, where for the first time Education Ministers committed to integrate education for refugees and other persons of concern into National Education Sector Plans by 2020. IGAD member states also committed to pursuing a comprehensive approach to delivering durable solutions for displaced Somalis, as agreed in the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees. Furthermore, in the area of statelessness, we have also seen African regional bodies leading by example. Last year, the Economic Community of West African States and the member states of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region committed to further enhancing their work on statelessness through concrete regional plans of action.

Chairperson,

Allow me to turn to **Uganda**, a country that is truly a generous host country for refugees. Despite recent challenges, Uganda remains a steadfast pioneer of progressive refugee policies, and has shown its resolve to address identified problems, which, UNHCR is supporting by all means possible. We are currently supporting the Government to undertake a strengthened population verification exercise using biometrics for refugees in Uganda in settlements. This exercise started on 1 March and will last approximately six months. I also wish to highlight that as we speak, on top of the huge numbers of refugees it has already received, Uganda is once again opening its doors to Congolese refugees, providing them with land and access to basic life-saving services.

Chairperson,

We have also been working relentlessly to facilitate **solutions** where possible to long standing refugee situations in the region. We continue to make progress in supporting the voluntary repatriation of Somali, Ivorian, Chadian, Sudanese as well as Burundian refugees. The drop in resettlement places by almost half in 2017 has had a significant negative impact, not least on the thousands of refugees who are now left with no solution in sight.

Finding solutions and providing protection to refugees and asylum-seekers in **mixed migratory flows** remains a pressing priority. Since our last update, we have developed a cross-cutting regional strategy for protection and solutions to mixed migration along the Central

Mediterranean route. This recognizes the need to both address the drivers of refugee and migratory flows towards the Mediterranean Sea, while providing immediate protection services to persons of concern, including through the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM). Here we must acknowledge, with appreciation, the efforts of the Government of Niger for giving refuge to more than 1,000 vulnerable persons in need of life-saving protection services through humanitarian evacuation. Resettlement remains central to the success of this strategy and the support received from resettlement countries is very much appreciated.

Chairperson,

While we are galvanized by many of the significant developments in the region, **more inclusive policies for refugees have to go hand-in-hand with more international support for host countries and communities.** During the High Commissioner's exchange with the Africa Group last week, what resonated was that we cannot wait any longer to tangibly operationalize solidarity, responsibility and burden sharing as agreed in the New York Declaration and as foreseen in our current work on the Global Compact on Refugees. African countries are doing their part, and we too should strive to support them in maintaining their generosity and hospitality. It is time that we - UNHCR, host governments, donors and all partners – work together to tap into new sources of funding, and to better harness opportunities for refugees through a win-win approach. Development actors also need to visibly step up and expedite their efforts so that refugees and host communities start seeing tangible improvements in their living



conditions. In the meantime, let me stress again that funding for emergencies remains critical in order to provide life-saving assistance.

Lastly, without addressing the root causes of displacement, we will continue to witness ever increasing numbers of people fleeing conflict, violence and persecution. We all have a shared responsibility to holistically address these crises using a “whole of society” approach and we call on all stakeholders to support us in making a substantial difference for the people we care for.

Thank you.