

INFORMATION NOTE:

PREPARATORY PROJECT FOR THE ELABORATION OF A
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION FOR SOMALI REFUGEES

I. BACKGROUND

1. Just over a decade ago, at the height of the civil conflict in Somalia, some 2 million persons, i.e. nearly one-third of the population, were displaced either internally or externally.
2. Since then, voluntary return has reduced the number of internally displaced to 370,000 and that of Somali refugees still in exile to 430,000 at the end of 2002. With 470,000 Somali refugees having repatriated with UNHCR assistance, and many others having done so spontaneously, it is estimated that over 10 per cent of Somalia's population are actually returnees from exile. The majority of them by far have returned to the northern parts of Somalia, i.e., Somaliland and Puntland, which have enjoyed relative peace and stability compared to the rest of the country.
3. Nevertheless, the extent of forced displacement in Somalia remains a serious challenge which presents one of the most protracted refugee situations on the African continent and beyond.

Displaced Somali Populations

Refugee population: 430,000 Somali refugees. At least 250,000 refugees live in Somalia's neighbouring countries: Djibouti (25,500), Ethiopia (26,400), Kenya (155,000) and Yemen (47,000). Somalis have also found asylum in Europe (18% of the whole refugee population), in North America (8%), and in a few other countries (8%). Some 66% of the Somali refugee population lives in camps.

Returnees: Over 1 million Somali refugees have returned to Somalia since the early 1990s. So far UNHCR has assisted the voluntary repatriation of 470,000 refugees, mainly to Somaliland and Puntland.

Refugee status applications: 236,000 asylum applications by Somalis in 35 industrialized countries in the period 1990-2002 (including 16,460 applications in this last year). Other countries received 7,200 applications in 2002 (South Africa and Egypt alone received 6,000 applications).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): Approximately 370,000 Somalis are internally displaced (including 250,000 in Mogadishu, 28,000 in Bosasso and 15,000 in Kismayo). About 100,000 IDPs live in Somaliland and Puntland.

II. WHY A CPA FOR SOMALIA?

4. Against this background and in line with the High Commissioner's initiative on Convention Plus, UNHCR felt that a comprehensive approach would be most appropriate to address the complex and multi-faceted humanitarian crisis facing Somalia and Somali refugees.

- Firstly, there is a large-scale displacement situation which has internal, regional and global dimensions, with still some significant ongoing population movements.
- Secondly, there is a protracted refugee situation which is mainly regional but also has a major global dimension. Conditions for refugees in neighbouring countries are poor, affected as they are by various protection problems, low standards of assistance and limited possibilities for self-sufficiency.
- Thirdly, with much of Somalia still afflicted by conditions of insecurity and violence, and still without a central governmental authority, there remain serious obstacles to the attainment of durable solutions for many refugees and displaced persons. At the same time, parts of northern Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) have achieved a degree of peace and security, allowing UNHCR to promote voluntary repatriation to these regions.
- Fourthly, the IGAD-led peace process for Somalia has been gaining new momentum, leading recently to the establishment of a transitional legislature, as the first critical step towards the re-establishment of a central government, to be eventually based in Mogadishu.

5. It is within this complex context of ongoing conflict, an evolving political peace process, and a protracted humanitarian crisis that UNHCR has been entrusted with the implementation of a preparatory project for the drawing up of a Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somali refugees. The project is co-sponsored by the European Commission and three EU Member States, namely Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The duration of the project, which started in June 2004, is one year.

III. OBJECTIVES AND CONTENTS

6. The overall objectives of the CPA will be:

Firstly, to further promote and support durable solution programmes for Somali refugees and, in particular:

- Promote and facilitate voluntary repatriation to safe areas in Somalia, as well as to examine and address any obstacles preventing refugees from returning;
- Ensure sustainability of return and reintegration processes in the country of origin;
- Explore and support any further possibility of improving refugees' access to local integration in the countries of asylum; and

- Seek to enhance resettlement opportunities for Somali refugees.

Secondly, where durable solutions are not immediately available, additional measures may be required to provide better protection and improve assistance to refugees in the main countries of asylum and, in particular, to :

- Address any gaps in protection and assistance at the legislative, institutional and capacity levels;
- Promote refugees' self-reliance to the extent possible; and
- Improve rehabilitation and development in areas affected by the presence of refugees.

Thirdly, to address the causes of irregular secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers at national and regional levels. This aspect of the CPA preparation is being managed under a related Convention Plus project, described in paragraph 8 of this note.

IV. APPROACH, METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROCEDURES

7. The EC-funded project is to be managed by the Africa Bureau, working in close co-operation with the Department of International Protection and the Convention Plus Unit in the Executive Office and with external collaborators (notably States, United Nations agencies, NGOs and the Somali refugee and returnee communities). The project will follow a two-fold approach:

- (i) Specific research is to be undertaken in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation of the forcibly displaced Somali populations;
- (ii) A number of bilateral, multilateral and other consultative meetings will be held in order to secure a constant and informed dialogue with all the stakeholders concerned and to build a common understanding and support for the objectives and outcome of the project.

V. RELATED PROJECTS

8. In addition to ongoing UNHCR and inter-agency activities on the ground, there are two other specific preparatory projects, the analyses and outcome of which are expected to feed into the Somali CPA process:

- The Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP): The SPCP is mainly aimed at devising tools and approaches to strengthen the capacity to receive and protect refugees as well as to empower them to attain self-reliance. It is managed by the Department for International Protection (DIP) and will initially cover four African countries, including Kenya and run for one year, having started in July 2004. This project is funded by the same donors as the CPA preparatory activities project.

- Survey on movements of Somali Refugees and Asylum-Seekers and State Responses thereto: This survey project, besides contributing to a well-informed discourse on how to address irregular movements in the context of Convention Plus, will also complement UNHCR's preparatory activities for the CPA for Somali refugees and asylum-seekers. The survey will seek to understand the underlying factors which prompt or influence movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers from a country of first arrival further onward. The survey project will focus on a number of key host/transit countries for Somali refugees, including those covered by the CPA, i.e. Kenya, Yemen and possibly Djibouti and Ethiopia. Other countries to be surveyed are South Africa, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy and Egypt. The survey is currently funded by Switzerland and the Netherlands. It was launched in the second quarter of 2004, with Kenya and Yemen among the first countries to be surveyed.

VI. EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE PREPARATORY PROJECT FOR A CPA

9. There are broadly speaking two main expected outcomes:
 - In the short term, a clear and common understanding of the problems surrounding the Somali refugee populations and the measures required to address them; and
 - In the longer term, development of new and innovative tools for a comprehensive action plan to provide effective protection and durable solutions.

VII. SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

10. In addition to the survey, preparatory activities for the elaboration of a CPA will include the following :
 - Data collection and research concerning the demographic, political, socio-economic and security situations in Somalia, as well as repatriation and reintegration in the north of the country. UNHCR will also study displacement patterns and protection and assistance standards in asylum countries;
 - Registration and profiling to study demographic and socio-economic trends of the Somali refugee population, and to ascertain refugees' concerns and aspirations, with particular regard to refugee women and refugee children;
 - Fact finding and programme formulation missions to collect additional information and, possibly, to create additional programmes for income-generation, education, community-based assistance, protection training, capacity building, reintegration and post-conflict recovery;
 - Result publication and dissemination to encourage support from all interested parties; and External evaluation to assess the usefulness of the activities and their possible replication for other refugee situations.

VIII. ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

11. A Steering Committee (SC) has been established to supervise the development of the Somali CPA Preparatory Project which is chaired by Africa Bureau. The SC comprises UNHCR, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, representatives of the countries from the region concerned (Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen and Somalia), as well as representatives from the co-sponsors of the project (Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the European Commission). The planned quarterly meetings of the SC, which will be mainly convened in the field (Nairobi), are to be complemented by periodic validation workshops and consultations with the members of the Convention Plus Core Group that oversee the survey on movements of Somali refugees, representatives of various beneficiary groups, local authorities and NGOs.

IX. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A BROADER GROUP OF CPA STAKEHOLDERS

12. In addition to these mechanisms, it is proposed that the preparation of a CPA be guided by a broader group of stakeholders comprising the following:

- The members of the Steering Committee;
- The African Union, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and other regional or sub-regional organizations;
- Other countries with a demonstrated interest in the Somalia CPA, for example, host countries of Somali refugees;
- Actual and potential donor countries and institutions; and
- Other United Nations and international agencies.

13. It is proposed further that such a broader group, to be known as the High Level Consultative Group (HLCG) or Preparatory Conference (PC) would meet on at least two occasions, in conjunction with a meeting of the Executive Committee, its Standing Committee or the High Commissioner's Forum.

14. The HLCG/PC would be expected to provide advice on the content of the CPA, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that the resulting plan of work is both implementable and fundable. Hence, the drafters of the CPA can turn to the HLCG/PC for assessment and confirmation as to whether the CPA is in conformity with the expectations and wishes of the beneficiary/asylum countries, as well as with those of the donors.

X. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOMALI REFUGEES

15. The final CPA will be adopted at an International Ministerial Conference on the CPA for Somali Refugees, planned to be held in mid-2005. By then the key components of the CPA will have been identified, and in adopting the CPA the Conference will aim to mobilize and sustain the necessary political support and financial commitment for its effective implementation.