

ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE
AND GOVERNMENT
Thirtieth Ordinary Session
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Tunis, Tunisia

TUNIS DECLARATION ON THE 1969 CONVENTION GOVERNING THE SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF REFUGEE PROBLEMS

We, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, assembled here in the City of Tunis in Tunisia, on the occasion of the Thirtieth OAU Summit of Heads of State and Government, take note of the fact that this year marks the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the adoption of the 1969 *OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* and the Twentieth year since it entered into force. As we take account of the refugee and displacement problem in Africa today, we consider that these important anniversaries should provide an opportunity for us to highlight the contribution that the *Convention* has made to refugee protection and to the promotion of solutions for refugees in Africa.

One quarter of a century ago, the consolidation of nationhood, democracy, national unity, social and economic progress in our newly independent States was often characterized by strife, conflict, and political instability. These, along with the continuing liberation struggles in the remaining colonial, racially-dominated and foreign-occupied territories, led to continued increase in the number of refugees in the continent posing complex legal, political and humanitarian problems for both the countries of origin and countries of asylum.

It was against this background of the specific aspects of the African refugee problems that the keenly-felt need for a regional legal regime to complement the universal one was finally met when 41 Heads of African States and Government signed the 1969 *OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems* on 10 September 1969 in the City of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

THE TEXTS IN THIS SECTION ARE REPRODUCED AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERMANENT OBSERVER'S OFFICE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU) TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN GENEVA SAVE FOR MINOR TYPOGRAPHICAL AND FORMATTING CHANGES TO ACCOMMODATE THE RSQ.

Today, the wisdom of having taken this decision continues to demonstrate itself. The *Convention* has ensured the very survival of the institution of asylum itself and its humanitarian character where the character of refugee flows has sometimes threatened the very fabric of brotherhood and peaceful coexistence between States. With 42 accessions so far and complemented in turn by other regional human rights instruments such as the *African Charter on Peoples' and Human Rights*, it continues to provide a solid cornerstone for refugee policy and state practice in the reception of, grant of asylum to, and treatment of, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as for the implementation of voluntary repatriation. We also take pride in the fact that the *Convention* has provided positive inspiration for legal developments elsewhere, such as the *Cartagena Declaration on Refugees* in Latin America. We call on all these Member States who have not acceded to it to do so without further delay, and re-dedicate ourselves to a more effective implementation of the *Convention* through, *inter-alia*, the promulgation of appropriate national refugee legislation.

While we express great satisfaction over the very positive contributions made by the *Convention* towards the protection of refugees in Africa and the promotion of durable solutions for them, we do not lose sight of the continuing crises of displacement in the continent. We therefore reiterate once more our unflinching determination to eradicate the root causes of refugee flows in Africa in line with the resolutions we have adopted as well as create a more dynamic African society characterized by the rule of law, tolerance, democracy and economic and social development. In doing so, we are cognizant of the fact that Africa is host to the largest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, namely 7 million and 15 million respectively. In dealing with this scourge we are confident that we can count on the support of the larger international community to make our efforts successful.