

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No:
Venue: Nairobi, Kenya

Date: 28 November 2023

The 11th Humanitarian Symposium to advance Effective and Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Africa



The Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development of the African Union Commission (AUC) in collaboration with the Government of the republic of Kenya and the AU Humanitarian Partners, namely, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is hosting the Eleventh Session of the AU Annual Humanitarian Symposium on **27 – 29 November 2023** in Nairobi, Kenya under the theme “**Advancing Effective and Inclusive Humanitarian Action in Africa**”. The symposium is focusing on strategic approaches to advancing effective and inclusive humanitarian action in Africa, in accordance with the collective commitments of the African Union Member States as encapsulated in the [2016 Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness \(CAP\)](#), the [2022 Malabo Declaration](#) and the [2018 Global Compact on Refugees](#). The establishment of the **African Humanitarian Agency** as Africa’s Institutional pillar in responding to forced displacements and disasters on the continent gives effect to the centrality of African States in humanitarian action on the continent and marks a significant development in shaping Africa’s Humanitarian Agenda and Architecture.

During the opening ceremony H.E. Amb. Minata SAMATE CESSOUMA, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs & Social Development (HHS) delivered her welcome remarks through video interlude. She thanked all the participants, and expressed her concern about the degradation of security tissue stained by armed conflicts, terrorism in the Guinea Gulf States, lake Chad basin, epidemics, climate disasters (floods, droughts, earthquakes, etc.), the different crises happening in Sudan, East of DRC and in the World such as the situation in Gaza and in Ukraine which also affects Africa and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and inequalities.

The Commissioner briefed the audience about the Common African Position (CAP) and the advancement of the African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA). “The operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency as Africa’s Institutional pillar in responding to forced displacements and disasters on the continent gives effect to the centrality of African States in humanitarian action on the continent. The CAP set priorities and defines Africa’s humanitarian architecture with the main objective of transforming AU’s governance on humanitarian issues to match other efforts on the continent. This transition aimed to address governance and policy gaps at continental, regional, and national levels with a target to achieve effective humanitarian Action in Africa,” said H.E. Amb. Minata SAMATE CESSOUMA. She also emphasized the need to come out with a holistic, concerted, and collective approach on Humanitarian action. The Commissioner called for the willingness of all partners to truly contribute to advance the cause of the health problem in Africa as well as that of climate change. The Commissioner also informed of the pledges to be made at the Global Refugee Forum that will take place in Geneva from 12 – 15 December 2023, focused on the Operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency; Inclusivity and Integration of Refugees in national plans and programming; as well as Coordination with RECs to streamline, harmonize and implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of Africa wide pledges made.

In his welcoming remarks during the opening ceremony, H.E Almon Mahlaba MAMBA, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Eswatini to Ethiopia, Permanent Representative to the AU & ECA and Chairperson of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees, & IDPs thanked the Government and people of Kenya for the hospitality. Amb. Almon Mahlaba Mamba highlighted the importance of such Symposiums and the key role played for the ten past years in bringing together a wide range of participants to deliberate on and develop common approaches to tackling Humanitarian challenges. “For several years now, the Symposium has played an irreplaceable role in bringing together a wide range of participants to deliberate on and develop common approaches on tackling humanitarian challenges. Against the backdrop of the Humanitarian Situation on the continent that is increasingly becoming complex with new emerging trends, the symposium will provide the opportunity for constructive dialogue between the AU and its Humanitarian Partners as well as key stakeholders including affected populations, on how it can better deliver and support humanitarian action on the continent. This discussion is even more relevant today, against a backdrop of the recent adoption of the Statute of the African Humanitarian Agency at the 36th Ordinary Session of Assembly of Heads of States and Governments on 19 February 2023, and the ongoing processes to operationalize the Agency,” said Amb. Almon Mahlaba Mamba.

Amb. Almon Mahlaba Mamba noted that despite these challenges it is heartening to see AU Member States continue to play an active role, in putting in place measures to prevent displacement, and in the event they do occur, for the timely response by offering Protection and Assistance to those affected. “Member States have also continued showing great solidarity with their displaced brothers and sister who are forcibly displaced into neighboring countries, by keeping their borders open. Therefore, the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees Returnees and IDPs lauded and appreciated the extraordinary work undertaken by the Member States, AUC, and Partners and acknowledged the African Union positive steps and implementation of a wide range of measures to fill governance and policy gaps in tackling challenges of forced displacement and humanitarian situations in Africa. These measures, inter alia, include the adoption of pioneering normative and policy instruments,” said Amb. Mamba.

In conclusion, Amb. Almon Mahlaba Mamba reiterated the readiness of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs to fully support the work of Member States, the AUC and its partners in implementing actions aimed at strengthening Effective and inclusive Humanitarian Action in Africa.

Prof. Selma Sassi- Safer, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Displaced Persons and Migrants in Africa, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) stated that a transformative and inclusive Humanitarian Action has become crucial and vital to address humanitarian issues on the continent. She stressed the large range of legal frameworks and initiatives undertaken by AU Commission and organs to tackle the different crises in Africa Silencing the guns, avoiding constitutional revisionism, and refraining from unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). Prof Selma pleaded for the ratification, implementation, and domestication of the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees and the 2008 Kampala Convention on Internally Displaced Persons, to guide Africa’s humanitarian and social-economic transformation in line with Agenda 2063 aspirations. She stated that resolution 568 adopted by the ACHPR aims to conduct periodic assessment, monitoring, and evaluation in view to assist the displaced persons. She added that will require realistic, holistic, and efficient actions which require empowering local communities and associating them during decision-making that has a direct impact on their lives.

Dr. Buti KALE, UNHCR Representative to AU and UNECA and Chair, AU Humanitarian Coordination Forum proposed a reflection that revolved around a dozen strategic directions, ranging from prevention of, and addressing, the causes and drivers of forced displacement to the quest for durable solutions to forced displacement. He recalled that humanitarian action has to be able to ensure that aid reaches affected populations, and noted the need to uphold International Humanitarian Law in order to ensure that civilians are protected and access humanitarian aid, humanitarian workers are protected against attacks, and assets and civilian infrastructures are equally protected from attacks, looting or destruction. He underscored the need to ratify and implement the AU Convention on Free Movement and Migration to promote intra-African best practices on migration, human rights, and safety. Dr. Buti KALE recalled the recommendation of the Ten-year action plan of the common African Position on Humanitarian to move to actions in order to transform lives. He further emphasized that Humanitarian actions make more sense when there

is the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of decisions and humanitarian actions to ensure the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and efficiency of the efforts which has been done since the inception of the AU Humanitarian Symposium. Dr Buti Kale stated that Nothing about refugees can be done without them participating meaningfully in the matters that affect their livelihood and their inclusion in national systems. He concluded his key speech on the need to mobilize the necessary means to handle with great impact the issue of amplifying, coordinating, and working together with the international community and Private Sector to advance effective and inclusive humanitarian actions in Africa.

The Annual Humanitarian Symposium was institutionalized in 2013 as a platform to bring together policymakers and practitioners from the Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Donors, UN Agencies, African and International Humanitarian Organizations, and other stakeholders including Think Tanks, Academia, Civil Society, Youth, Affected Populations, the Diaspora, Innovators, Social and the Private Sector and the wider global humanitarian community to discuss and review the preparedness, the effectiveness and the improvement of humanitarian action in Africa.

Note to Editors:

The Humanitarian Agency:

The Assembly of the AU adopted a Decision to establish an African Humanitarian Agency as part of AU's vision to strengthen its humanitarian architecture. It shall be established as a specialized technical institution of the Commission charged with the responsibility to coordinate humanitarian responses in Member States, playing a complimentary role and driver of humanitarian action in the continent.

Its necessity arose out of three factors: Desire for AU capability and presence in humanitarian action; Strengthen the primary responsibility of States in humanitarian action; and the Need to strengthen coordination of humanitarian issues in the continent.

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