



**MESSAGE BY**

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**ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD REFUGEE DAY**

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Every year, on June 20<sup>th</sup>, the world joins together in commemorating World Refugee Day. The day marks an opportunity to recognize the resilience of forcibly displaced people throughout the world. We celebrate the resilience and courage of refugees across the continent, the contributions of various host communities and governments, and the work of humanitarian actors in alleviating their plight.

Currently the world has over 15 million refugees, over a fifth of who reside in the continent of Africa. An even larger proportion makes up the world-share of internally displaced persons. The demographics point to a refugee population that is mostly female and young. African countries feature in the top ten for refugee generating *and* hosting countries. Most of Africa's refugees remain within their region of origin, seeking refuge in neighboring countries that sometimes are themselves facing humanitarian, developmental, and security challenges. Indeed, African countries feature in the top ten for the highest number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita. Over the past year, new emergencies have unfolded and old ones persisted. Mali, DRC, Somalia, and Sudan/South Sudan all present ongoing concerns in terms of new displacement.

While the provision of humanitarian assistance is a commendable and necessary task, we are faced with an even more urgent task of ending protracted displacement across the continent and preventing new displacements.

Firstly, Africa's displacement crisis is also a protracted one. While there are a number of new sources of displacement, the vast majority of IDPs and refugees find themselves in protracted situations. Research demonstrates that a person who becomes a refugee is likely to remain as one for many years where access to a livelihood or education is severely constrained. Protracted situations then do not only pose rights challenges, but also developmental ones. Often the process of finding a durable solution has stalled for these displaced communities, and years of instability and uncertainty deplete their coping ability.

This dire situation highlights the importance of comprehensive and innovative solutions. For one, comprehensive solutions must overcome divisions between emergency assistance and development interventions. They need to involve coordinated

engagement by a range of security, development, and humanitarian actors. Secondly, these approaches need to incorporate and be cognizant of recent policy initiatives by a wide range of actors at different levels. Moreover, the search for durable solutions needs to incorporate state and regional perspectives which underlay protracted displacement with an appreciation of bottom-up perspectives which focus on the interests and role of displaced communities, host communities, and transnational networks or diaspora.

Secondly, there are new and more frequent drivers of displacement. Mega-trends such as food and energy insecurity, water scarcity, climate change, population growth are all exacerbating conflict or combining in multiple ways, forcing communities to flee their countries. Furthermore, they are occurring within short intervals, making it more difficult for populations to recover and face the next challenge.

The African continent has been a source of normative, policy, and institutional initiatives and innovations on the issue of displacement. The 1969 OAU Convention on specific problems facing Refugees in Africa and the 2009 AU Convention on the protection and assistance to IDPs are heralded as breakthroughs in terms of the corpus of refugee and displacement law. A Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons established in the African Commission on Human and People's Rights carries a key mandate in reporting on the situation of displaced persons and assisting Member States in fulfilling their obligations vis-à-vis displaced populations. The Permanent Representatives Committee - Sub-committee on Refugees, Returnees, and IDPs, tasked with conducting assessments in affected countries as well as monitoring displacement issues in Africa so as to provide appropriate direction in the decision making processes. Through these mechanisms, provision of financial assistance has also been made at various points, to organizations providing emergency assistance to refugees in emergency situations.

Despite these policy and institutional arrangements, it is clear that we need to have a more ambitious and long-term approach which addresses underlying causes and seeks for more durable solutions including create favorable conditions for voluntary returns. The broader work of the AU in consolidating peace and security, and enhancing

governance, through mechanisms such as the African Governance Architecture and its Platform, and the African Peace and Security Architecture-including Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development programs, are all crucial in this regard, and in creating an 'Africa at Peace with Herself'. The immense task also requires greater engagement with partners, Member States and the RECs, ensuring sufficient linking up and coherence with other policy initiatives on good governance, free and fair elections, disaster management, climate change, food insecurity, and other emerging sources of shocks and drivers of displacement.

On this day, and looking at the past 50 years of the African Continent, let us acknowledge and celebrate the resilience and courage of our African people who were forced to become refugees. But let us also collectively recommit to creating a continent which will no longer speak of refugees, except in memory.