EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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NGO Statement on Africa
Agenda item 3(ai)

Thank you Chair,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

Before we proceed to highlighting some country specific situations, NGOs recognize and welcome the progressive refugee policies some African countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti have adopted, as well as the commitment to eradicating statelessness by ECOWAS Member States. Such good practices need to be encouraged and supported by the international community. Those countries are demonstrating that it is not only an obligation, but also ultimately beneficial for humanity to grant refugees their rights to asylum in dignity. For example, Uganda, the country hosting the largest number of refugees in Africa, has one of the most progressive refugee laws and has taken measures to integrate refugee and host community assistance in their national development plans; Djibouti has taken responsibility for refugee education; and Ethiopia is moving towards facilitating free movement, employment opportunities and increasingly out-of-camps policies for refugees. At a time when wealthy countries are seemingly folding back on their international obligations, these African countries are leading the way. Therefore,

- We urge other Member States to support those countries in their endeavours to implement progressive refugee policies through increased development support;
- We call for a further roll-out of the CRRF in other African countries that host refugees and stateless persons;
- We are concerned about change of course in some countries involved in international efforts to address large scale movements. We take note of the Government of Tanzania recent withdrawal from the CRRf roll-out and hope that lessons can be learnt to maintain collaborative approaches and better understand the support needed to ensure protection, assistance and responsibility-sharing at all levels;
- We call on all Member States to redouble their efforts to eradicate statelessness in Africa, including by amending discriminatory laws, implementing safeguards against statelessness and finding durable solutions for stateless migrants and refugees.

This being said, the Africa region continues to suffer from major humanitarian and human rights crises. We would like to highlight the following:
South Sudan:
While acknowledging joint efforts to date, we would like to draw the attention of UNHCR and Member States to the deteriorating humanitarian and conflict situation. Already the largest refugee crisis in Africa, the South Sudan crisis directly threatens the lives and livelihoods of more than 10 million people inside South Sudan and in the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR). Moreover, since the secession of South Sudan, refugees from South Sudan may now be at risk of statelessness, depending on how the revisions to the Sudanese and the new South Sudanese nationality laws are implemented in practice.

- We call for more resolute actions by the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to immediately bring to a stop the on-going fighting and atrocities against civilians, help restore peace and hold the perpetrators to account.
- Bureaucratic restrictions continue to prevent the delivery of much needed aid to IDPs and affected communities in many parts of South Sudan, including for stateless persons. We urge Member States to apply pressure on the South Sudanese Government to immediately remove heavy restrictions and fees on humanitarian actors and to allow access to remote locations so that lives may be saved.
- As the crisis is regional in nature, we urge for revitalized efforts to support refugee-hosting countries through increased funding to meet life-saving and recovery needs of the refugees, the stateless and their hosting communities.

Somalia
The conflict and displacement situation in Somalia remains acute.

- We urge the UN, AU, IGAD and their Member States to continue supporting the efforts of the Somali Government and people to stabilize Somalia and restore law and order.
- We call for a re-thinking of troops withdrawal by Member States and urge the UN, European Union, AU and IGAD to increase their financial, technical, security and moral support in order to save lives and re-integrate returnees and help re-build livelihoods in Somalia.

DRC:
The crisis in DR Congo is fundamentally a protection crisis with protection violations spiking exponentially in the last two years. In North Kivu alone there was a 15 per cent spike in protection violations between 2016 and 2017 ranging from child soldier recruitment, armed occupation of schools, pillaging and sexual assault. Unfortunately, these violations are outpacing the capacity for protection response. Lack of funding and diversion of capacity has caused many humanitarian agencies to close their doors in areas where protection response is most crucial.

The situation is expected to deteriorate over the course of 2018 as the Rwandan Refugee Cessation Clause came into effect at the end of 2017. There are large caseloads of refugees in both Rwanda and DR Congo who are at risk of statelessness due to a lack of agreement by both governments on durable solutions and lack of progress on the tripartite process. There is a risk of forcible return of Congolese who have sought refuge in countries like Angola, Tanzania and
Zambia back into conflict zones that are not yet stable and where their safety and protection are not guaranteed—a practice that flies in the face of International Humanitarian Law. There has also been a lack of prioritization of protection for internally displaced populations which by and large is the most pressing issue in the country. Addressing neglect (or possible neglect) of legal framework on refugees and IDPs needs to be at the forefront of the humanitarian reflection and response.

- We call upon the DR Congo government to respect the mandates of the UN missions and enhance cooperation with them in order to protect civilians and provide necessary humanitarian aid to affected populations, including stateless persons, in remote areas;

- We call upon the UN Member States to closely monitor the situation in these countries and provide necessary humanitarian aid and political support to address the root causes of the problem;

- Protection must be prioritized and guide the response and to minimize risk for conflict and displacement-affected communities;

- A scaling up of the protection response must translate into meaningful enhancements to funding and protection capacity resources on the ground;

- The crisis in DRC is a protection crisis and needs strong leadership in that area. Protection risks and incidents needs to be brought up at all levels and adequate response provided.

CAR:
The Central African Republic (CAR) is in a deep and complex crisis. Recurring violence and increased conflict has led to a sharp rise in displacement, with 693,932 people internally displaced and more than 542,000 Central Africans seeking refuge in neighboring countries. No such numbers have been seen since the height of the crisis in 2013. This should serve as a call for action for the international community.
Continuing insecurity, logistical obstacles and declining funding are hindering access to humanitarian assistance for the displaced population. Forced to flee from their villages due to violent attacks and atrocity crimes, many stay in hiding as they are unable to access protection.

- We call upon the government of the Central African Republic to closely collaborate with the humanitarian community and the peacekeeping mission to ensure that aid can be delivered and protection provided for the displaced and affected population;

- As chronic underfunding severely limits the humanitarian response, we urge Member States to allocate the necessary funding to provide humanitarian aid and protection to population in need.

Lake Chad Bassin:
Lake Chad Basin is experiencing one of the most complex humanitarian disasters today in Africa. The disaster in this region is affecting around 17 million people. It has destroyed lives and livelihoods and forced million of people to flee their homes. The majority of the displaced are sheltered by communities who are among the poorest in the world. Food insecurity and malnutrition have reached critical levels. The Refugee Response Plan led by
UNHCR in 2017 has received 56% of funding on the needed $241 million. We call on donors to fully fund the UNHCR appeal together with humanitarian partners of $157 million needed in 2018 to meet the needs of displaced population.

- We call on all states and actors to ensure that returns of refugees and IDPs is voluntary, dignified and safe. The situation in NE Nigeria, where most of the displaced originate from, is improving in some areas, but remains volatile. It is imperative that the Tripartite agreement governing the return of refugees is respected in letter and spirit, and that all displaced people are given the information needed to make their own decisions about when to return;
- Assistance and support remain out of reach for many conflict-affected people in the region, including those trapped in inaccessible areas as well as those in screening and transit centres. We urge the authorities in the region to reduce the restrictions on movement for refugees and IDPs in government-run facilities, and to support the humanitarian community as far as possible in accessing hard-to-reach areas.

Statelessness in Africa
Statelessness remains a significant but poorly documented problem in sub-Saharan Africa. NGOs would like to draw attention to the challenge of statelessness, resulting from forced migration but also from gender, racial, religious and ethnic discrimination in the nationality laws of many African states. We refer, for instance, to protracted refugee situations in the Great Lakes region (e.g. Burundians refugees in Tanzania) and the denial of claims of Ivorian nationality to hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their descendants in Côte d’Ivoire. NGOs urge African States to implement safeguards to ensure nationality to children born on a territory who would otherwise be stateless, realise universal civil registration and issuance of birth certificates and identity cards.

Thank you, Chair.