

NGO Statement on Africa

Dear Chair

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

In 2023, displacement in the African continent has continued to increase. The driving factors include new and emerging conflicts, protracted crises, human rights violations as well as climate related impacts. Moreover, the prolonged drought in East Africa shows no signs of lessening which serves to compound the continent-wide food crisis.

NGOs would like to draw attention to the following:

In **Sudan**, following the violent fighting in April 2023, a high number of Sudanese have become forcibly displaced which includes people who were already internally displaced, as well as refugees from other countries who had fled to Sudan. Over 8.1 million people have been displaced,¹ including about 1.8 million people who have been displaced outside Sudan. With over half of the displaced population being children, Sudan is facing a child displacement crisis. Refugee children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated, face severe protection challenges.

There is an imminent danger of famine in Sudan from the nexus between climate change and conflict, compounded with the added complexity with the lack of humanitarian access. In Chad, which is receiving the largest number of displaced persons among neighbouring countries, the current situation, combined with a poor agricultural season in 2023 and the low level of development of basic infrastructure and social services, exacerbates vulnerabilities and leads to residual humanitarian needs such as food insecurity, access to clean water, and access to health services.

Many Sudanese refugees in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Sudan are struggling with local integration as they are not able to speak the local languages and English, for those who speak Arabic. Many youths are turning to negative coping mechanisms because of frustration and hopelessness.

- NGOs urge support for holistic integration for Sudanese refugees, with a strong focus on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs, especially targeting refugee youth and children.
- NGOs, especially refugee led organizations and associations should work with providers of alternative learning opportunities where refugee youth and children can be integrated in local schools in the countries they are displaced to. Local and international NGOs should work together to ensure that they coordinate their efforts and share their experience and capacity in handling these programs.
- NGOs urge that during the current discussions on a ceasefire and potential peace talks about the Sudan situation that all stakeholders are engaged. NGOs ask partners to involve especially displaced Sudanese women and youth in these forums so that they

¹ See, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation>

are part of the solutions to sustainable peace in the country. Addressing the root causes of the conflict without including the population affected by conflict will not yield the needed long-term solutions.

Currently, Sudan's Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) project focuses mainly on ecosystem restoration and management, resilience enhancement, and livelihood improvement of local communities. However, the project faces significant challenges in ensuring meaningful participation and ownership with refugee-led organizations (RLOs) to enhance the protection and assistance of refugees and knowledge sharing from different contexts.

- NGOs call on these challenges to be addressed through a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies, to ensure an inclusive and equitable approach to National Adaptation Plan development and implementation.

In Somalia, continued and renewed conflict has created forced displacement that has been on-going for decades, exasperated by climate related impacts, as well as the effects of the drought. An estimated four million people are internally displaced, many of whom have been displaced multiple times.² Durable solutions remain elusive despite the adoption of the National Durable Solutions Strategy (NDSS) 2020-2024. There has been some progress with the passing in 2019 of the National Policy on Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons and ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance for IDPs in Africa (the Kampala Convention).³

- NGOs ask to work with the local authorities in Somalia to ensure that the above strategies and policies are not only passed but implemented and monitored by the people of Somalia. This will help in ensuring that the processes are owned by the people and that the people trust their government.
- International bodies and regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) should monitor the situation between Somalia and Ethiopia over the agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland. The tension between the two countries can easily escalate and be a source of further displacement in the region.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), there are over 1 million refugees in the region. Over 4 million people have been internally displaced across the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. There has been an increase in human rights abuses and continued waves of violence. Protection needs are complex and increasing, impacting women and girls disproportionately.

- NGOs urge for continued and targeted protection of certain groups (e.g., women and girls) be implemented as a necessary element in terms of policy and practice.

The Central Sahel region is experiencing an on-going and immense humanitarian crisis. In recent months, the protection environment in the Central Sahel has been particularly affected by violations of freedom of movement, violations of the rights of access to humanitarian aid and access to services for host and displaced communities.⁴ Two thirds of new displacements are directly linked to conflict. Enclaved zones are expanding in the region. Restrictions and obstacles to free movements of populations are reported due to the activity of armed groups, with direct impact on access to basic services and protection.

- NGOs call for continental bodies such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and other international organizations to work and support the Economic

² [Somalia | IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(internal-displacement.org\)](#)

³ [No Going Back: The New Urban Face of Internal Displacement in Somalia - Somalia | ReliefWeb](#)

⁴ [Sahel Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News | USA for UNHCR \(unrefugees.org\)](#)

Community of West African States (ECOWAS) by providing a platform to mediate and resolve the challenges leading to the breakaway of three states – Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali from the body. This mediation can lead to easing of the freedom of movement within the Sahel. Such withdrawal from the regional body will have a long-term impact on the region and the movement of the people that are already stricken by conflicts and natural disasters.

In Nigeria, the fragile situation is on-going, and active conflict remains, especially in North-eastern Nigeria. Forced displacement, exacerbated by climate shocks and disease outbreaks, have left millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.⁵

- As instability, conflict and displacement represent the major triggering factors for the humanitarian crisis, NGOs call for a coordinated response plan to be drawn and implemented with defined involvement of the major stakeholders including communities, governments, NGOs, and partners.

We wish to highlight thematic areas of importance:

Firstly, on partnerships:

There have been several Regional Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) launched in the region to support affected populations. The Response Plans are essential, as they provide a platform for UNHCR partners including NGOs to plan, coordinate and mobilize resources for responses, as well as bring needed attention to the situation of refugees.

In refugee responses, it is important for NGOs, refugees, refugee-led organizations, and local actors to be actively involved. Momentum is necessary to co-create partnership models that are aligned to localization and nexus approaches and based on principles of partnership. Partnerships are a first step to address the growing humanitarian and development challenges and support those people most in need.⁶

- NGOs call for the full potential of multi-stakeholder partnership models to be realised to ensure that humanitarian and development partnerships are strengthened in a new spirit of solidarity and humanity.
- Host governments should ease the restrictions on private sector partners to access displaced populations, especially refugees and IDPs in settlements and camps. This will help to support self-reliance through increased livelihood opportunities.

Secondly, on funding

The decline in humanitarian funding disproportionately impacts the continent. New sources and diversified funding is needed and for sustained advocacy on the urgency for funding. There should be transparency in the use and allocation of the little available funds available, especially for protracted situations.

- In view of discussions around ‘prioritization,’ NGOs call on UNHCR to ensure that programmes responding to the needs of children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations, including stateless persons, do not run out of vital support. Failing to do so not only will have an impact on the effectiveness of responses but also will contribute to long term aggravation of inequality.

Thirdly, regarding solutions

Solutions are limited, and more can be done in the prevention of conflicts and finding peaceful solutions, so refugees can **return home in safety and dignity**.

⁵ [Nigeria | DRC Danish Refugee Council](#)

⁶ See Action for the Needy partnership with IGAD: <https://ane-ethiopia.org/>

On local integration, NGOs acknowledge efforts to improve the regulatory environment facilitating reception, registration, and entry of refugees - with the necessary protections in place. Yet, more can be done to facilitate local integration and related support measures - including legal frameworks leading to nationality. The contributions that forcibly displaced persons, refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons provide to host communities must be recognised and celebrated.

- NGOs call on States to ensure that displaced populations can access rights through progressive refugee laws and policies, with permanent status and rights commensurate with citizens, with a pathway to nationality. This will also create dividends for hosting communities in the long term and the promotion of local integration as a key durable solution.

NGOs are also concerned about reservations raised by some States in the region to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and suggestions by some States to withdraw entirely.

- NGOs urge States not to withdraw from the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol nor make any reservations particularly limiting refugees' socio-economic rights, such as the right to work or the right to education.

NGOs ask for States and relevant stakeholders to increase **third-country solutions**.

Fourthly, on Age, Gender, and Diversity

LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers, refugees and displaced persons are at increased risk and can face barriers and hardship in some countries in the region, and who face criminal penalties on account of their diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

- NGOs see the need for enhanced and comprehensive advocacy and action to improve the situation for refugees and other persons of concern in the region on diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Displaced children face significant challenges and vulnerabilities; NGOs call for redoubled efforts to protect children.

Fifth, on climate change

Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia have implemented *Green Legacy Projects* which contribute to the rehabilitation and protection of the environment. NGOs recognize this as a step in the right direction, especially where the planting of seedlings and other environmental protection measures are taken through popular mobilization of host and displaced communities.

- NGOs recommend the effort being made in this respect to be strengthened with specific funding allocated for climate action as part of the agenda on localization with a possibility for civil societies and NGOs to access the Loss and Damage Compensation Funds to be established through and by the COP processes.

The climate of the Sahel is arid and hot, with temperatures rising at a rate of 1.5 times higher than other parts of the world. Each year, Niger loses immense areas of arable land to soil erosion and desertification. Climate shocks displace people and destroy their livelihoods.

- Underpinning the inseparability between human wellbeing and environmental stability, NGOs recommend concrete action to be taken to reduce the adverse impacts of rainfall variability, land degradation and desertification with specific funding allocated to climate action as part of the localization agenda.

The impacts of climate change in Southern Africa are increasing internal displacement.

- NGOs urge governments to be proactive by including forcibly displaced as key stakeholders in the development of National Adaptation Plans, adhering to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) principles.

Finally, on statelessness

NGOs commend the notable progress on statelessness made by some countries in the region during 2023,⁷ yet statelessness requires continued attention, especially as we enter the final year of the UNHCR *#IBelong Campaign*. In line with progress made, we urge governments to take immediate steps to end statelessness, including by upholding citizens' equal right to confer nationality without discrimination.

Three months ago, the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF) took place, and NGOs were encouraged with the attention given during the Forum to Africa, and of the new pledges that deepen the focus on protection and durable solutions, and efforts to prevent and end statelessness.

It is hoped that momentum from the Forum will be sustained and for collective action to continue by all stakeholders to protect refugees and find durable solutions. NGOs stand ready to work with all stakeholders towards this aim.

Thank you.

⁷ See [#IBelong Campaign Update, January-March 2023](#), Report, UNHCR, 23 June 2023