

Regional Update for Southern Africa

NGO Collective Statement – Written Statement

This statement was drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs.

The achievement of global peace is often described as the "missing piece" for global sustainable development, as it is intrinsically linked to peace, security, and the well-being of individuals and communities. However, intra- and interstate conflicts continue to pose the most significant threats to peace, development, and the prosperity of communities, with their impacts felt most acutely following conflict and natural disasters. This is particularly evident in the Southern Africa region, where violence, conflicts, human rights violations, and natural disasters have led to severe humanitarian challenges.

Southern Africa continues to host a significant number of forcibly displaced people. According to recent [UNHCR data](#), the total number of displaced people in the region is approximately 9.1 million. Of these, 6.6 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) primarily due to conflict, with nearly 1 million refugees and asylum seekers, and 1.5 million IDP returnees. In addition, natural disasters, including those worsened by climate change, have displaced over 398,000 people in recent years.

The region has been especially impacted by ongoing violence and instability, particularly in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, Burundi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

The situation in the DRC is of particular concern. The escalating violence in Eastern DRC has reached a critical point, displacing thousands of civilians, killing hundreds, and subjecting communities to unspeakable atrocities.

Mass killings, rape, forced displacement, forced recruitment, and the destruction of schools and livelihoods have escalated. Armed groups must immediately cease hostilities, and all parties must respect the fundamental rights and dignity of the Congolese people.

Refugees from the DRC, Somalia, and Burundi, among others, continue to flow into Southern Africa, putting significant pressure on neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Malawi, and Mozambique. South Africa, as the largest recipient of asylum seekers, faces challenges related to [xenophobia](#), [slow asylum processes](#) due to a significant backlog, and legal barriers. Malawi, with its recent enforcement of encampment policies, restricts the freedom and economic opportunities of refugees, while Mozambique struggles with a growing internal displacement crisis due to insurgencies in [Cabo Delgado](#), political instability following disputed elections, and the impacts of natural disasters like Cyclone Chido.

The lack of viable economic opportunities for the vast majority of refugees has reportedly had a profound impact, not only on the pragmatic level but also on their sense of self. Refugees, deprived of the ability to contribute economically and build sustainable futures, often face a [growing sense of hopelessness and diminished agency](#). This situation perpetuates cycles of vulnerability and deteriorating mental health, compounding the already significant psychosocial challenges faced by displaced populations.

Despite the efforts of UNHCR, regional organizations like the Southern Africa Development Committee, and various NGOs, regional frameworks for protection and assistance remain weak, leaving vulnerable populations without the necessary support for survival and recovery.

However, a critical challenge lies in the continued lack of sufficient and sustained humanitarian funding from the international donor community. The insufficient commitment and support from donors are

having a direct and detrimental impact on the effectiveness of humanitarian operations and protection efforts in the region. This shortfall in resources not only hinders the ability to address immediate needs but also prevents the implementation of long-term solutions that could restore dignity and stability to displaced populations. Humanitarian partners are forced to scale back operations, leaving refugees and IDPs without essential services and support. The recent decision by the U.S. to withhold funds only serves to exacerbate the situation, making it even more urgent for the international community to commit to consistent and adequate financial contributions.

While we recognize the global nature of crises, including those in the Middle East and East Africa, we urge the Committee to not overlook the ongoing and growing humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa. Financial constraints continue to hinder protection efforts, and the lack of governmental prioritization exacerbates the vulnerabilities of refugees and displaced persons. The recent U.S. policy changes and funding freeze has further intensified the already dire situation, highlighting the urgent need for protection and assistance in the region.

Recommendation 1.

Moving forward, it is critical for Southern African governments to enhance policy reforms, strengthen regional cooperation, and improve economic integration and inclusion into national educational and healthcare services, to safeguard the rights and livelihoods of displaced people. Such policy reforms should include:

- enhanced protection frameworks that ensure the rights, dignity and well-being for all,
- access to asylum procedures as well as access to legal services,
- access to education, health care including improved mental health and psychosocial support services, access to livelihoods, and
- access to emergency services such as shelter and assistance for vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 2.

We call for increased international support to address the unique challenges faced by Southern Africa's displaced populations, including sufficient and sustained humanitarian funding from the international donor community, increasing provision of all durable and sustainable solutions for displacement, increasing development assistance to strengthen forcibly displaced populations financial integration and inclusion into national systems.

We look forward to the Committee's continued engagement and collaboration in tackling these critical issues.