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UNHCR welcomes South Sudan's accession to the African refugee convention

The UN Refugee Agency hails the decision of South Sudan to accede to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. The instruments of accession were deposited at the African Union in Addis Ababa on 19 May 2016 and the Convention has now entered into force in South Sudan.

In addition to becoming the 46th country to have ratified the 1969 AOU Convention, South Sudan adopted national legislation on refugees in 2012 and established a Commission for Refugee Affairs to coordinate the government response to asylum matters.

"This signals South Sudan's commitment to meeting international standards for refugee protection and provides us with additional legal instruments to advocate for refugee rights," says Ahmed Warsame, UNHCR's Representative in South Sudan. "This is very much consistent with the government's open door policy to asylum seekers and the welcoming attitude of the South Sudanese people."

The OAU Convention, adopted on 10 September 1969 at the sixth ordinary session of the OAU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government, is a regional complement to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, for which South Sudan has embarked upon the accession process.

The 1969 Convention contains a wider definition of a refugee compared to the 1951 Convention and offers legal protection to a broader category of people, including those fleeing war and civil strife. "We congratulate South Sudan on this achievement and we stand ready to support the country in becoming a party to the 1951 Convention with no reservations," says Warsame. "Accession to both instruments is essential for effective universal protection of refugees."

In South Sudan, UNHCR works closely with the Commission for Refugee Affairs and partner organization to provide assistance and protection to more than 260,000 refugees. The vast majority are Sudanese from South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, with smaller numbers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Central African Republic. UNHCR's key priorities are improving the living conditions of refugees in camps; building better shelters for families; ensuring high standards in health care, education, water and hygiene; providing documentation such as refugee certificates and ID cards; and helping men and women who found refuge in South Sudan become more self-sufficient.

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