

PLACE

Abidjan

DATE

07 September 2021

Côte d'Ivoire and asylum countries agree to end the Ivorian refugees' situation

The Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and countries hosting large numbers of Ivorian refugees signed, today, a joint declaration leading to cessation of refugee status for the vast majority of them.

The two-day regional meeting held in Abidjan also stressed to intensify voluntary repatriation and support alternative legal status for those who opt to remain in their countries of asylum.

“Based on an in-depth analysis of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR believes that the circumstances in which many Ivorians fled their country as refugees have ceased to exist and that many are no longer in need of international protection”, said Raouf Mazou UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Operations who signed the joint declaration on behalf of the UN refugee agency.

The decision comes at a time when 60 percent of Ivorian refugees surveyed wish to repatriate, while 30 percent of Ivorian refugees and asylum seekers in West and Central Africa say that they are undecided, and 10 percent have made up their minds to stay in their host country where they have developed strong links.

Currently, UNHCR is organizing weekly repatriation convoys of 1,800 Ivorian refugees from Liberia, the majority reside.

Since 2011, a total of 287,000 Ivorian refugees, representing over 92 per cent of those in West Africa, have voluntarily returned to Côte d'Ivoire and more are returning. Currently, 51,000 remain refugees and asylum seekers in the West and Central Africa region, mostly in Ghana, Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Togo.

Since 2018, UNHCR has engaged with refugees and authorities to find solutions to the situation. This includes promoting voluntary repatriation and the issuance of civil, identity and travel documents. It also entails the acquisition of residency permits Ivorian refugees who opt to remain in their host country. Those who still consider themselves at risk in case of return may request an exemption procedure to remain under UNHCR protection.

“We consider critical that States and other relevant actors provide full support to these solutions in a timely and concerted manner,” said Raouf Mazou. “This will secure a way forward for all Ivorian refugees.”

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“Among the challenges associated with refugee return, there is the risk of statelessness,” noted Annadif Khatir Mahamat Saleh, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

The cessation clause is expected to be officially recommended by the UNHCR High Commissioner during the 72nd session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR, from 4 to 8 October 2021. States are expected to announce it by January 31, 2022. UNHCR has recommended that cessation come into effect from 30 June 2022 on.

Cessation clauses are built into the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention. They provide for refugee status to end once fundamental and durable changes have taken place in the country of origin and the circumstances that led to flight no longer exist.

The [link to the declaration](#) can be found [here](#).

Notes to the editor:

The two Ivorian civil wars (2002-2007 and 2011-2012) resulted in two distinct waves of large-scale civilian displacement inside and outside the country. During the first Ivorian civil war (2002-2007), more than half a million Ivorians were displaced, with those who moved out seeking refuge primarily in Liberia, Guinea, and Mali. From December 2010 to late February 2011, post-election violence erupted, displacing half a million Ivorians, most of whom fled to Liberia.

Since 2011, 287,000 refugees have voluntarily returned to Côte d'Ivoire, while 51,000 remain refugees and asylum seekers in the West and Central Africa region as of December 31, 2020. In addition, there are 31,731 refugees and asylum seekers in the Europe, North Africa and Americas. Nearly all the Ivorian refugees in the region were granted refugee status on a 'prima facie' basis under Article 1(2) of the 1969 OAU Convention, having fled as a result of the civil wars that affected Cote d'Ivoire between 2002 and 2011.

Based on the developments in Côte d'Ivoire over the past 10 years, in consultation with the main countries of asylum and the country of origin, UNHCR considers that the refugee status of Ivorian nationals may now cease to exist. It is in accordance with paragraphs 6 (A) (e) and (f) of the UNHCR Statute, Article 1C (5) and (6) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and Article 1 (4) (e) of the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention.

Article 1C of the 1951 Convention sets out the conditions under which refugee status ceases to apply due to a "change in the objective circumstances which formed the basis for the recognition of refugee status" except for those who show compelling reasons for refusing to avail themselves again of the protection of their country of origin.

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Some 82.4 million people have been uprooted by conflict and persecution in the world today, the highest number in the last 25 years.

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