



**THE YEAR OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES  
AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS:**  
Towards Durable Solutions to Forced  
Displacement in Africa.

## SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

### Roundtable on Addressing Root Causes and Achieving Durable Solutions in Africa



09:00-17:00, Saturday 9 February, 2019

UNCC Conference Room 2, UNECA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



## Introduction

The African Union Commission (AUC) convened a “Roundtable on Addressing Root Causes of Forced Displacement and Achieving Durable Solutions in Africa.” Held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 9 February 2019, the meeting was organized as a part of a series of events planned by the AU to mark its “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).” UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, provided technical support and assistance.

This year’s focus on forced displacement comes as the African Union (AU) prepares to commemorate two key treaties on forced displacement in Africa: the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention on Refugees, and the 10th anniversary of the 2009 AU Convention on the Protection of and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, or Kampala Convention. The AU and its partners, including UNHCR, plan several events during the year.

The roundtable aimed at galvanizing support from a wide variety of AU partners to the theme of the year 2019 and to serve as a forum for AU partners to exchange views on root causes of forced displacement and ways to achieve durable solutions. The event consisted of an opening session followed by five thematic panels on issues such as drivers of forced displacement; preventive

diplomacy and mediation; social inclusion and sustainable development with focus on youth, children and women; climate change and natural disasters; and responsibility sharing and partnerships.

Representatives of member states, Ms Cecilia Jimenez the Special UN Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), diplomats, experts, refugees, the media and other stakeholders in a debate, focused on good practices, lessons learned and action proposals. Humanitarian agencies and refugees arranged an exhibition as well as a musical performance by refugee children from countries in Africa.

The summary conclusions from the roundtable do not necessarily represent the views of individual participants or their organizations, but broadly reflect the themes and understandings that emerged from the discussions.

The meeting was opened by **Dr Khabele Matlosa**, Director of the Department for Political Affairs, African Union Commission. Other speakers at the opening session included **Mr Mohammed Affey**, UNHCR Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, and **Ms Katherine Zappone**, Irish Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and **Professor Chaloka Beyani**, professor of law at the London School of Economics and the Former Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. During the discussions the following were highlighted:

- The African continent is struggling with massive forced displacement, hosting more than a third of the world's displaced population. Most displacement situations are found in conflict-affected countries, in protracted crises that span decades. If the guns are to be silenced in Africa, durable solutions to forced displacement and other humanitarian crises must be found - most forced displacement results from conflict. More democratization, and less authoritarianism could address root causes and help efforts to resolve forced displacement.
- A number of structural and proximate factors drive forced displacement in Africa. Structural factors include underdevelopment, inequality, unemployment, corruption, poverty, mismanagement of resources, civil strife and violent conflicts, natural disasters, drought and climate change. Proximate factors include human rights violations and persecution, election-related violence, intolerance and discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, impunity, terrorism and violent extremism.
- Conflicts are the primary drivers of forced displacement in Africa. Addressing the structural drivers of conflict requires long-term strategies and joint ownership. The role of states in pursuing political solutions and preventive diplomacy is paramount. All stakeholders must strive to build a common understanding of these drivers and implement an integrated holistic approach to conflict prevention.
- The AU is aware of the enormity of the challenge posed by displacement for maintaining or restoring peace, security, democracy and good governance and for socio-economic

development and structural transformation. African institutional efforts have proved instrumental in realizing negotiated settlements.

- Africa has progressive humanitarian laws and policies. Developing norms to address forced displacement is one thing, but the implementation of these norms is another. There is need for strong political commitment from all 55 AU member states to ratify and implement both the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the 2009 Kampala Convention. The AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are also uniquely suited to provide pragmatic and practical support to Member States. The AU Model Law for the implementation of the Kampala Convention is an excellent source of reference.
- Humanitarian financing is key to an effective African response to forced displacement. The scale and magnitude of the problem of forced displacement is immense. The number of protracted refugee situations is growing and they are becoming more complex. Ongoing reform of the AU is expected to make a significant contribution in financing initiatives. The fact that 75 per cent of the new Peace Fund will be used to support mediation and preventive diplomacy is indicative of the growing recognition by the AU of the importance of political solutions to Africa's conflicts.
- All stakeholders must continue to work together to implement solutions and deliver on the robust policy frameworks in place in Africa. The role of partners is to support states to identify and address drivers and meet national and structural and capacity needs in this regard.
- International burden-sharing and solidarity is key for successful implementation of Africa's progressive laws and policies. Ireland's Minister Zappone said her country had increased its humanitarian funding significantly and the small nation planned to grow this support further. In 2018, it gave US\$15 million to UNHCR alone.
- AU member states should not only learn from previous anniversaries. Member states should also hold themselves to account. Durable solutions, for refugees and the internally displaced, require the establishment of conditions of normality as a prerequisite for success. The triggers and drivers of refugees and displacement have become more multi-causal in effect. To achieve durable solutions, structural root causes must be tackled by means of structural prevention.

## Understanding root causes and drivers of conflicts

Roundtable participants noted that eliminating root causes is the most effective way to achieve solutions, and that root causes are **numerous, complex and often interconnected**. Participants agreed that Member States, the international community and regional organizations must do a better job of identifying the root causes of forced displacement, and the relationships between them, in order to prevent people fleeing their homes.

- a. Root causes cited by participants included **armed conflict, terrorism, a lack of good governance, the absence of the rule of law and lack of compliance with**

**international humanitarian law and human rights, corruption, economic inequality, and inequitable resource distribution.**

- b. The importance of undertaking further analysis and studies to understand interconnectedness and linkages among the various factors was mentioned. Addressing root causes must be treated as an ongoing effort and conflict sensitivity should equally be mainstreamed throughout.
- c. Participants stressed that **statelessness**, if ignored, can undermine social cohesion and lead to marginalization, discrimination and forced displacement.
- d. Participants noted that **climate change and environmental disasters** can threaten stability and cause displacement. Climate change was mentioned as a root cause of displacement, a threat for those who are already displaced, and an obstacle to the realization of solutions, in particular return.
- e. The roundtable agreed that **sexual and gender-based violence as a result of gender inequality and discrimination can be both a cause and a consequence of displacement.**
- f. Echoing the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), participants noted that **averting and resolving large refugee situations is a concern to the international community**, requiring early efforts to address drivers and triggers, as well as improved cooperation among human rights, political, humanitarian, development and peace groups.

## Ensuring Early Warning and Prevention

In all activities, including those aimed at putting in place early warning and prevention mechanisms, the critical nature of ensuring full participation of refugees, IDPs, returnees, stateless people, host communities and all those who will be affected by decisions.

- a. The implementation and full operationalization of the African Governance Architecture (AGA), the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) as well as the AU's strong legal and policy framework governing human rights, situations of forced displacement and humanitarian crises, is crucial. Resources and efforts must be deployed to advance their implementation by strengthening compliance and norm-monitoring and ensuring accountability.
- b. The importance of **development programming in fragile African states** was highlighted, along with the need for preventive diplomacy, peace building and early identification of root causes.

- c. Focus was put on **women and girls**, who are disproportionately affected by displacement, and their role as agents of peace and development in Africa. Participants stressed the importance of gender-responsive actions to promote equality and female empowerment; SGBV prevention and response (including access to justice); and meaningful participation of women and girls in peace processes.
- d. **The role of youth** as the driving force of the continent – and the role they can play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding – was also mentioned.
- e. Stress was put on the importance of female education and expanding job opportunities as a means to prevent radicalization and recruitment by armed groups.
- f. Participants cited the need for **early warning and action as soon as root causes are identified**. Prevention and conflict sensitivity are not just “before” a crisis; they are necessary to prevent a crisis from continuing, escalating further or recurring. “Building back better” is typically understood as disaster recovery but it also suitably describes the structural and systemic changes needed to ensure that grievances and root causes are addressed in conflict recovery.
- g. Conflict resolution and prevention activities must recognize the importance of dialogues. AU Agenda 2063 highlights the need for dialogue-centered conflict prevention as well as the management of, and resolution of, existing conflicts. This also goes hand in hand with important initiatives in the continent such as silencing the guns 2021.
- h. The meeting stressed the importance of **quality education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels**, including through improved access to ICT as well as vocational training. These were described as investments in the future, supporting social cohesion and self-reliance.
- i. Emphasis was also placed on the need **to ensure access to employment, economic empowerment, and expanded livelihood opportunities**.
- j. The **role of the private sector** was cited in promoting positive attitudes to, and finding solutions to forced displacement situations.

## Responding to Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement

Participants discussed the multifaceted links between conflict and effects of climate change. They also underlined:

- a. The need to clarify the inclusion of **climate change and disaster displacement**, questioning if this was covered by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Member

States and regional bodies need to be supported to incorporate and mainstream mobility and displacement in wider Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) efforts.

- b. The **refugee definition in the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention** may allow decision-makers to recognize refugee status in the context of climate change. A request for guidance from UNHCR was proposed.
- c. The use of **existing international processes** in relation to disaster displacement and climate change, citing the **Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda**.
- d. DRR is significantly more cost effective than spending on response and recovery. The importance of aligning disaster risk reduction strategies with the Sendai Framework, and seizing the opportunity of post-conflict reconstruction to invest in sturdy and accessible infrastructure, integrating disaster risk reduction into national and sectoral investment planning, was discussed.

### Responsibility sharing and partnership mechanisms to address root causes and find durable solutions

The roundtable discussed in details the importance of improved responsibility sharing and partnership to realize the purpose and objective of the AU theme of the year. In particular:

- a. Solutions to conflicts and other causes of displacement and humanitarian crisis is fundamentally political and, as such, political commitments are prerequisite actions in addressing root causes and ending conflicts.
- b. The meeting underlined that while addressing root causes of displacement, measures must be put in place to enhance return, resettlement and local integration.
- c. The importance of the Global Compact on Refugees and CRRF, and their potential to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in host communities and enable self-reliance, was highlighted. In the quest to reach Sustainable Development Goals, it was proposed that refugees, IDPs and stateless persons be included in national development plans to harness their potential. Action and plans on inclusion of refugees need to be anchored in progressive laws and policies. The ratification of international and regional treaties on refugees, IDPs and stateless persons play a crucial role in this regard.
- d. Displacement problems present regional and international problems. Participants underscored the need to consolidate and strengthen international solidarity and burden-sharing. Participants also highlighted that regional institutions have a critical role to play in comprehensive responses to forced displacement, including through:

- i. Technical cooperation with member states;
  - ii. Ensuring free movement of people, including as a complementary pathway;
  - iii. Safe and dignified voluntary repatriation efforts in member states;
  - iv. Cooperation with the private sector;
  - v. The mobilization of assistance; and
  - vi. The launch of a resettlement scheme within Africa, in the spirit of article II(4) of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention.
- e. Participants also highlighted that other stakeholders have a role to play in supporting efforts by AU member states. These include the private sector, development experts, NGOs, and international and national NGOs.

## Closing Session

The high-level closing was chaired by **AU Commissioner for Political Affairs Mme Minata Samate Cessouma** and included the UN High Commissioner for Refugees **Filippo Grandi**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights **Michelle Bachelet**, and **Antonio Vitorino**, Director General of the International Organization for Migration.

During the closing session, **Grandi** underlined the importance of establishing a strong link between the AU theme of the year on refugees, returnees and IDPs, and the GCR, which is widely supported by AU states. **Bachelet** underlined the centrality of human rights when looking at root causes of forced displacement and finding solutions. **Vitorino** explained how IOM has been working with AU member states to enhance local capacities in resolving forced displacement situations and mixed migration. **Mme Minata Samate Cessouma** thanked all participants for their participation in this important roundtable and stressed that the AU Commission will work closely with member states and partners to implement the recommendations proposed in the meeting.

**Addis Ababa, 9 February 2019**