

Addis Ababa, 25 March 2020

Statement by UNHCR on the COVID-19 crisis

As part of the measures to protect against the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Ethiopia on 23 March 2020, announced a series of additional measures, including instructing the National Defense Forces “...to halt the movement of people along all borders, with the exception of incoming goods to the country”.

These are necessary measures in times of crisis. UNHCR appeals to the Government, in the implementation of these measures, to take into consideration the protection needs of asylum seekers as outlined in the following statement by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees:

“With the world mobilizing to combat the spread of COVID-19, many countries are rightly adopting exceptional measures, limiting air travel and cross-border movements.

And for many people around the world, everyday life has come to a standstill, or is being transformed in ways that we had never envisaged.

But wars and persecution have not stopped – and today, across the globe, people are continuing to flee their homes in search of safety. I am increasingly worried by measures adopted by some countries that could block altogether the right to seek asylum.

All states must manage their borders in the context of this unique crisis as they see fit. But these measures should not result in closure of avenues to asylum, or of forcing people to return to situations of danger.

Solutions exist. If health risks are identified, screening arrangements can be put in place, together with testing, quarantine and other measures. These will enable authorities to manage the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in a safe manner, while respecting international refugee protection standards designed to save lives.

In these challenging times, let us not forget those who are fleeing war and persecution. They need - we all need - solidarity and compassion now more than ever before.”

UNHCR recognizes Ethiopia’s long-standing open-door and progressive refugee policies. We are closely monitoring the situation of the coronavirus and are working with the Government of Ethiopia to implement preventative measures in refugee camps. UNHCR Ethiopia stands ready to support any measures that can enhance the arrival of asylum-seekers and refugees in a safe manner while compliant with health instructions of the Ministry of Health and WHO.