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African Union Revitalizes Coordinating Committee on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in effort to strengthen measures to address forced displacement in Africa

Members of the African Union Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced People (CCAR) yesterday adopted revised Rules of Procedure and Terms of Reference, in what participants saw as a significant step forward in revitalizing the long-inactive advisory body on the problem of forced displacement in the continent.

The CCAR was created way back in 1968 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) mainly to coordinate the interventions of humanitarian actors in the field. While it had accomplished many noteworthy activities at the time, it gradually failed to adapt to the changing situations, particularly the outbreak of numerous internal conflicts resulting in massive forced displacement, and lost its relevance in the process.

The newly revised and adopted Rules of Procedure envisage an enhanced structure and a broader and more representative membership, among other changes. These and other amendments in the Rules of Procedure and the Terms of Reference are believed to help in the transformation of the body into a pragmatic continental organ greatly assisting Africa to solving not only the outstanding challenges in the protection and assistance for refugees and internally displaced people, but also in finding lasting solutions to their problems.

UNHCR's Regional Liaison Representative, Mr. Ilunga Ngandu, who is also chairperson of the CCAR, described the move as yet another demonstration of commitment by the AU to addressing the problem of



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forced population displacement in the continent and its far-reaching repercussions.

He mentioned a series of major steps taken by the African Union including the convening of the Second AU Ministerial Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons last May in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and its crucial recommendations, as well as the decision to convene the first ever AU Summit on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons to be held in 2008, as milestones in Africa's drive to reduce and ultimately eliminate the phenomenon of forced displacement. "The recommendations and declarations of the Ministerial Conference as well as the decisions of the Banjul Summit [June 2006], when effectively implemented, could go a long way in improving the situation on the ground," the UNHCR Regional Representative said.

Convened at the AU headquarters meeting hall, yesterday's meeting was chaired by Ambassador Bruno N.Zidouemba, Ambassador of Burkina Faso to Ethiopia, in his capacity as the Chairperson of the AU Permanent Representatives' Committee, Sub-committee on Refugees.

According to the Rules of Procedure, the revitalized CCAR will have a bureau, consisting of a Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons, and a Rapporteur. It will also set up a Working Group, made up of Addis-based CCAR members, with the Secretariat to be provided by the Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees and Displaced Persons Division (HARDP) of the AU Commission.

Africa is host to more than 17 million refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, internally displaced people, and other displaced populations such as separated children, abductees and victims of trafficking and ex-child soldiers.

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