



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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African Ministers Adopt Historic draft IDP Convention

African ministers in charge of forced displacement matters in the continent Tuesday (11 November) adopted an historic draft African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa.

The ground-breaking draft will have to be endorsed by the Special Summit of African Heads of State and Government, scheduled for April next year, to become the first ever legally binding instrument for the protection of IDPs.

UNHCR's Regional Liaison Representative for Africa Mr. Ilunga Ngandu described the move as another pioneering initiative by the continental body in the direction of addressing the challenges of forced displacement in Africa. He said: "Almost four decades after the truly historic adoption of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, African leaders are now in the final phase of registering another pioneering achievement by endorsing the first ever legally binding IDPs convention anywhere in the world".

Mr. Ngandu expressed UNHCR's hope that the adoption of the draft Convention will send an important signal to the rest of the world about the seriousness with which Africa, home to around half of the global total of IDPs, considers the issue.

Of the global total of around 25 million IDPs, Africa is home to approximately 12 million of them.

Unlike refugees, who fall under the protection of international instruments such as the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, there are no comparable legally binding instruments to safeguard the rights of IDPs. Their own state is often unable or unwilling to assist and protect them and the international community is often unable or unwilling to intervene.

Governments, humanitarian and development agencies employ what are referred to as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to guide their interventions with regard to IDPs. These Principles, which are based upon existing international humanitarian law and human rights instruments, serve as an international standard to guide concerned bodies in providing assistance and protection to IDPs

The November 10-11 Ministerial Meeting, which was preceded by two Experts



Meetings, was attended by Ministers in charge of forced displacement matters representing 42 countries.

The Ministerial Meeting also adopted the draft Declaration that will now go for adoption for the Kampala, Uganda, Summit to be held on 2-3 April 2009. The Special Summit is the first and only such Summit of Heads of States and Government so far to be fully devoted to addressing the challenges of forced displacement in Africa. It will deliberate on such issues as prevention of forced displacement, effective protection of victims of forced displacement; meeting the specific needs of displaced women and children; meeting the specific needs of displaced victims of natural disasters, and forging partnerships in addressing forced displacement in Africa.

In addition to reaffirming their commitment to the basic principles of protecting, assisting and finding durable solutions for victims of forced displacement, the leaders are expected to pass important decisions that will help Africa progressively eliminate the phenomenon of large scale forced population displacement caused by conflicts as well as reduce the sufferings to the displaced victims of natural disasters.

UNHCR has been supporting efforts to incorporate the Guiding Principles into regional documents and legal instruments. It is fully supporting the efforts of the African Union both in adopting this historic convention and in organizing the Special Summit on the issue of forced displacement in Africa.

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