



## PRESS RELEASE

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A mechanism geared towards the development of a regional policy that would respond to the overwhelming refugee and displacement situations has been put in motion at the first ever regional Conference on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the IGAD region, organised jointly by IGAD and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Ministers from the seven countries of the Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), meeting in Nairobi for the two-day conference, took the firm commitment to address the root causes of displacement, enhance their national institutions relating to refugees and displacement, develop the capacity of their asylum systems and increase their efforts to granting forcibly displaced persons access to the fundamental rights.

The alarming magnitude of forced displacement in the IGAD region is reflected in the staggering figure of over 11 million – 8% of the population of IGAD – that includes refugees, IDPs, returnees and other war affected populations. This represents 66 percent of Africa's IDPs population, or thirty percent of the world's internally displaced.

In their final declaration, they also called on the international community to fulfil their commitments, particularly in continuously providing assistance to large groups of displaced persons and supporting the process of peace building and reconstruction in post-conflict countries.

They also requested the development of a resource mobilisation strategy for Sudan and the creation of a consultative working group to look at the factors hindering the establishment of peace and support the return and reintegration of displaced populations in Somalia.

At the IGAD Secretariat level, the conference recommended the creation of a unit specifically dedicated to problems of forced displacement, which will support the efforts of Member States in adopting legal standards, mobilising resources and coordinating with partners. This unit will provide technical support in the implementation of the existing Disaster Risk Management Programme, adopted in 2003 by the IGAD Council of Ministers to address various natural and human-made disasters in the region.

The Ministers mandated the IGAD secretariat to come up with a Plan of Action within the next month, outlining the strategy adopted to put into action the comprehensive set of decisions adopted in Nairobi.

The conference, jointly organized by the IGAD Secretariat in Djibouti and the Addis Ababa based UNHCR Regional Liaison Office for Africa on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2006, was preceded by an Experts meeting, gathering displacement specialists from governmental institutions, the United Nations, the civil society and other humanitarian agencies. These Experts reviewed the situation and challenges in the region, prospects for durable solution and IDP situations, and came up with a comprehensive set of recommendations for the Ministers to adopt.

Opening the conference on Monday, Kenya's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon. Raphael Tuju challenged his colleagues to be courageous enough to address the root causes of forced displaced persons in their own countries and the region as a whole. These include ethnic conflicts and others based on religious, economic, social, political and cultural differences of our people.

The Deputy Director of UNHCR Africa Bureau, Mr. Oluseyi Bajulaiye, supported the efforts of IGAD Member States to exchange experiences and learn from each other, following similar regional initiatives in Africa. This comes in line, he said, with UNHCR's broader strategy in Africa, recognising the fact that displacement problems on the continent are closely interlinked. "Not only do the conflicts themselves have roots and causes that may run across borders, but displacement in essence is a cross-border challenge" he pointed out.

Speaking at the same occasion, IGAD Executive Secretary Dr. Attalla Bashir regretted that previous efforts to raise resources for implementation of recommendations adopted at the 2003 Khartoum IDP Conference had not received a positive response from the donor community, and expressed the wish that the future Plan of Action will attract the attention and support of development partners.

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