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IGAD Ministers to discuss refugees in the wider context of displacement

Ministers of the Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will convene a regional Conference on refugees in Nairobi, Kenya from 20-21 February 2006.

Jointly organized by IGAD Secretariat and the Addis Ababa-based UNHCR Regional Liaison Office for Africa, the Conference will discuss the problems of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the IGAD region, review the humanitarian crises confronted by the region, share experiences and come up with a policy/strategy and a regional plan of action to respond to challenges in protection and assistance for persons affected by displacement.

The IGAD Region whose member states include Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda, has generated a total of 1.3 million refugees, a large portion of whom (695,000) are hosted in Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti, Central African Republic and Egypt. In addition to refugees from within the region, the IGAD Member States do also offer asylum to refugees from outside the region, bringing to over 750,000 the total number of refugees hosted in the seven countries of IGAD.

Moreover, the protracted conflicts in Sudan, including Darfur, Northern Uganda as well as in Somalia have generated nearly 7 million internally displaced persons, constituting the largest population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) on the African continent and almost 30% of the worlds' IDP caseload.

Because refugee, returnee and IDP issues are closely interlinked in the wider context of displacement, the Conference will represent a unique opportunity for Member States to take stock of the displacement situation in various countries of the IGAD region, and to anticipate and address challenges arising in particular from the return and reintegration of millions of IDPs, alongside with refugees, following the peace accord in South Sudan as well as encouraging developments in Somalia and Northern Uganda.

This Conference, which will be preceded by an Experts' Meeting from 14-17 February 2006, will not only gather the IGAD Member States but also



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various regional institutions as well as agencies and partners involved with refugee, IDP and returnee issues, joining forces in facing these challenges and designing a way forward in the form of concrete activities. It should also adopt an action plan supported by a regional mechanism responsible to oversee its implementation, including proper partnership for expertise and resource mobilisation.

The Conference is taking place pursuant to the October 2003 decision of the IGAD Council of Ministers to convene a Regional Ministerial Conference on refugees, and instructing the IGAD Secretariat to implement the decision.

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