



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha KangRemarks to the specialized technical committee of the African Union on migration, refugees and displaced personsAddis Ababa, 19 November 2015*As delivered*

On behalf of UN OCHA, I am very honoured and pleased to address this distinguished committee and to your efforts in providing a common African position to the WHS.

At the outset, let me stress the important distinction between voluntary migrants on the one hand, i.e. those who voluntarily move to other countries in search of better economic opportunities or to reunite with their families; and refugees and other forcibly displaced people on the other.

In other words, people who are left with no choice but to flee, those who seek protection from conflict, violence or persecution or those who are forced to leave their homes due to the impact of climate change.

In reality, this distinction can be blurred and may appear arbitrary. People may be compelled to migrate because of a lack of economic prospects or recurrent droughts. Voluntary migrants may get caught up in circumstances beyond their choice or control and need help. In Libya in 2011, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, many from West Africa, found themselves stranded in the middle of a deadly conflict and needed assistance to be evacuated. Among those who try to cross the Mediterranean, we find minors separated from their parents, who are at great risk of abuses.

Then there are people who start out on the migration trail in search of better lives, only to find themselves in the grip of human traffickers and criminal gangs. These people may not be refugees but they nonetheless require assistance and protection. We must ensure they are treated with dignity and in accordance with human rights standards in all circumstances. We must provide them with humanitarian assistance when and where they need it.

That said, the majority of people who need protection and assistance are people who were forced to leave their homes, fearing for their lives, and are particularly vulnerable and need special protection.

So today I will focus my presentation on forced displacement, a pressing challenge that is at the heart of this Committee's mandate, as well as an on-going preoccupation for humanitarians.

Mr. Chair,

Forced displacement is indeed a defining challenge of our time. As of the end of 2014, an estimated 60 million people were forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence worldwide. These are figures not seen since World War II and Africa is one of the regions most affected. Conflicts in the CAR and South Sudan, as well as the Boko-Haram related violence have recently triggered heightened levels of displacement. Close to a million Central Africans, i.e. a quarter of the population, and an estimated 2.3 million South Sudanese and 2.3 million Nigerians have been forcibly displaced in their countries or to the neighbouring countries.

Armed conflict and the conduct of warfare in utter disregard of international humanitarian law and human rights remains a primary cause of displacement in Africa. In places like South Sudan or Nigeria, we hear every day of civilians being killed, maimed or abducted. For many people in these regions, the only choice is to “flee or die.”

And for those who manage to flee, displacement is often just the beginning of a long ordeal. Far from home, having left everything behind, displaced people become easy targets for abuse and exploitation. Women and children are particularly vulnerable; displacement increases the risk of sexual violence and forced recruitment.

Alongside conflicts and violence, climate change has also become a major trigger of displacement. More severe droughts and more frequent natural disasters increasingly drive people from their homes. Last year alone, at least 800,000 people were displaced due to disasters on the African continent.

The link between climate change and displacement has been highlighted by the Nansen Initiative, and will also feature prominently in the upcoming COP21 discussions in Paris and at the World Humanitarian Summit in May next year.

The vast majority of those who flee violence or natural disasters do not find refuge in other countries. They remain in their own country. Over 11 million Africans are currently internally displaced; compared with the 3.7 million refugees in Africa. Only a small portion of people displaced leave the African continent, to seek refuge in Europe or in the United States.

Mr. Chair,

Forced displacement is growing worldwide and patterns of displacement are changing. We must adapt and change the way work to address the new challenges.

First, with conflicts lasting longer and an increasing number of people displaced, humanitarian needs are growing rapidly.

While donors have been providing more, fast rising needs are outpacing available resources. The funding gap is growing. The average level of funding for humanitarian appeals, many of them for African countries, has been decreasing, and is less than 50 per cent (47 per cent) this year.

We must review the way humanitarian action is funded and financed. The Secretary-General’s high level panel on humanitarian financing and the World Humanitarian Summit next year will

offer opportunities that we must seize with the support and active contribution of the AU and African countries.

Secondly, protracted displacement has become the new normal.

Most IDPs and refugees spend 10 or even 20 years in camps or slums, with little prospect for sustainable solution or livelihood. Moreover, humanitarian assistance often creates parallel systems for delivery, which undermine local capacity and ignore local expertise.

The link with development actors is often weak and does not enable the displaced to get out of the emergency situation they are in.

This is a lose/lose/lose situation for the displaced, the concerned governments and the affected communities. This needs to change.

We must offer displaced people the chance to rebuild their life and contribute to the prosperity of communities hosting them. As the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson, said during the recent Valetta Summit on migration, displaced people “are not merely victims who need charity. They are productive human beings with human rights, which are to be protected.”

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), next year’s World Humanitarian Summit convened by the Secretary-General and his initiatives on mixed migration and refugees provide an opportunity to develop a new approach to addressing protracted displacement that truly “leaves no one behind.”

This approach must promote a shared vision between affected governments, humanitarian and development actors and international financial institutions to foster collective outcomes rather than perpetuate disjointed action. This approach must also seek to recognize and build on the public good provided by communities and countries hosting IDPs and refugees.

Third, we need stronger legal frameworks.

A wide range of consultations with stakeholders in Africa and other regions have taken place in the lead up to the WHS. I would like to thank the governments of Cote d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and South Africa for chairing the regional consultations. They have been extremely valuable, particularly in relation to forced displacement.

Consultations have highlighted the importance of the Kampala Convention on IDPs, as an essential framework to ensure that States have systems in place to respond to displacement.

We very much hope that the AU will continue to encourage its members to make further progress in the implementation of the Convention. We will also count on AU leadership to champion the adoption of similar conventions by other regions.

Mr. Chair,

Allow me to conclude by stressing that our approach to forced displacement must be supported by concrete steps to ensure greater respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. This is critical to protect communities affected by conflicts and prevent

displacement. It is also essential to ensure that people forcibly displaced, either by conflict or climate change, are protected during their displacement.

Equally important, we need to change the overall narrative on migration and displacement.

We must dispel the hostility and hate speech that target refugees, displaced people and migrants at every turn. We must overcome the xenophobia - the fear of the other - that divides humanity. History has shown the potential of refugees to contribute to the prosperity of their country of adoption. There are also benefits of migration for both countries of origin and arrivals. Several studies show how migrants contribute positively to the economy of countries of arrival.

As for remittances, they constitute one of the most important sources of income for a number of countries, such as Somalia. Indeed, the Sustainable Development Goals has made the reduction of transaction costs for remittances a priority.

I look forward to hear more about the work of the Technical Committee, and to discuss further how we can ensure that the World Humanitarian Summit marks a step change in how we address the challenge of forced displacement.

In closing, I would like to thank for your contribution and support to the WHS. The success of the Summit will be a milestone and turning point for the future of humanitarian action.

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