

OUTCOME DOCUMENT

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF REFUGEES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

7 March 2019, Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda

1. In line with the decision of the Ninth Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM) of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region, Ministers in charge of refugees of the PSC Framework Member States met in Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda, on 7 March 2019 to discuss the refugee situation in the Great Lakes region and agree on critical initiatives to advance comprehensive and durable solutions.
2. The Office of the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region (O/SESG-GL) and the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), co-organised the meeting hosted by the Government of the Republic of Uganda.
3. Ministers in charge of Refugees, or their representatives, from the following Members States attended the meeting: Uganda, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia.
4. The meeting was officially opened by H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda as current Chair of the ROM, and co-chaired by the Rt. Hon. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda, Mr. Said Djinnit, UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, and Mr. Zachary Muburi-Muita, Executive Secretary of the ICGLR. Also in attendance were Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Special Representative of the African Union (AU) and Head of the AU Liaison Office for the Great Lakes region, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of UN Agencies, other International Organizations, and civil society.
5. A two-day expert meeting on 5-6 March 2019 with representatives of Member States, the UN, the diplomatic community, and civil society preceded the Ministerial meeting.
6. Following the deliberations, the Ministers agreed on the following:

Situation of refugees in the Great Lakes region

7. With an estimated 4.4 million refugees and asylum seekers forcibly displaced, expressed concern over the scale and scope of the refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region. Recognized the disproportionate impact of displacement on women and children and reiterated the centrality of protection with special attention to vulnerable groups.

8. Commended the Governments and the people of the region for generously hosting refugees.
9. Appealed to national, regional, and international partners to ensure adequate financing, including appropriate amounts and quick disbursement mechanisms, to address unmet humanitarian and development requirements and to support the implementation of durable solutions.
10. Acknowledged that continued high levels of new forced displacement combined with the protracted presence of refugees in the region can be a source of tension within and between communities and neighbouring countries. Also recognised that the presence of refugees can present opportunities for local development that can benefit both refugee populations and host communities.
11. Agreed on the urgency to address the drivers and root causes of forced displacement in the region, including violence, armed conflict, human rights violations, natural disasters, and environmental degradation, among others.
12. Welcomed the peaceful transfer of power in the DRC, the revitalised Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in the South Sudan, and the Political Agreement for Peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic, which provide new prospects for peace and stability in the region. Encouraged their full implementation and appealed to the international community for their support.
13. Welcomed the AU theme for 2019 “The year of the refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons: towards durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa,” and committed to implement the decisions of Heads of State and Government during the 32nd Ordinary Session of AU Assembly.
14. Committed to promote efficient and effective resource management and to prevent corruption and fraud in the implementation of programs for refugees and host communities in line with the 2018 AU theme “Winning the Fight against Corruption: Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation” and the Global Compact on Refugees.
15. Urged Member States to domesticate and implement the ICGLR protocols, including the Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons.

Comprehensive and durable solutions

16. Recommended the implementation of durable solutions for refugees, either through their voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation, their resettlement to third countries, their local integration in the respective host countries, or through other local solutions. Agreed that this requires greater political commitment, regional and international cooperation, and responsibility sharing. This is in accordance to International Refugee Law, including the African Union Convention Governing the specific aspects of the refugee problems in Africa (1969) and applicable relevant national laws and policies.

17. Highlighted the need to consult with refugees to ensure that durable solutions pursued are inclusive and voluntary in nature.

18. Welcomed the affirmation in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly of the Global Compact on Refugees building on the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) to strengthen the operationalization of comprehensive responses. Recognised the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 as an opportunity to advance protection and solutions for refugees.

19. Commended Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia for having adopted the CRRF and for their forward-looking policies and programmes on refugee inclusion and integration, and encouraged other countries who are able to do so to follow suit.

20. Highlighted that voluntary return remains the preferred solution in the majority of refugee situations. In this regard, acknowledged the ongoing efforts and new commitments to establish Tripartite Commissions with the support of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Committed to respecting the voluntary nature of these returns and to invest in long-term efforts to ensure sustainable and dignified re-integration of returnees taking account of the needs of both returnees and of the communities to which they return.

21. Encouraged Member States to enhance their cooperation in pursuit resettlement options within the region to ease the pressure on countries, which host a large number of refugees, in line with the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Problems of Refugees (Art. 2). Called for greater resettlement and international responsibility-sharing in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees. Encouraged traditional resettlement countries to consider increasing their annual resettlement allocations.

22. Acknowledged that many cases of protracted refugees, as defined by UNHCR, may never be able to return to their countries of origin or be resettled. Further noted that many refugees were born in host countries. Recognized that for these cases local integration is a viable alternative, when coupled with financial support and investment. Commended the concrete steps taken by Member States in the Great Lakes region to enable local integration and encouraged other Member States to consider and pursue similar efforts.

23. Emphasized that successful local integration requires legal stay arrangements, freedom of movement of refugees on the national territory in conformity with the law of the host country, and inclusion of refugees in national services and systems such as education, health care, social welfare and protection services, community policing, and land management.

24. Recognizing that socio-economic inclusion of refugees does not presume but can contribute to local integration as a durable solution, recommended the development and financing, with the support of partners, of local socio-economic inclusion plans benefiting both refugee and host communities in

fulfilment of the SDGs and the AU 2063 Agenda. Highlighted that socio-economic inclusion needs to go hand in hand with efforts to promote peaceful co-existence targeting both communities, and with action aimed at preventing and addressing environmental degradation in refugee-hosting areas.

25. Acknowledged the growing number of urban refugees and underlined that special attention and greater investments, including through private sector involvement, are required for local integration strategies in those areas. Also acknowledged the challenge of local integration in remote rural areas, which requires specific measures.

26. Encouraged Member States who are willing and able to do so, to facilitate, with the support of partners, the naturalisation of refugees as a durable solution. In this regard, commended the action by Tanzania to naturalise Burundian refugees, and recognised similar efforts by other countries in the Great Lakes region. Called upon the international development partners to extend their support to enable a sustainable local integration.

27. Acknowledged that access to legal identity documentation, particularly birth registration, is critical to prevent and reduce statelessness, in line with the ICGLR Brazzaville Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness.

28. Commended the ICGLR Executive Secretariat for the ‘Displaced Persons and Host Communities in the Great Lakes Region’ initiative and called upon Member States to fully support this project. Use this project as a valuable additional collaborative vehicle to follow up on the commitments made at this meeting.

Towards a regional refugee strategy

29. Commending the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat for making progress in developing a Regional Refugee Management Policy and the good practice developed by IGAD and other partners on refugee solutions, recommended that ICGLR develops a Regional Strategy for Durable Solutions for the Great Lakes region and an action plan to implement this strategy.

Acknowledgements

30. Extended appreciation to H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the Government of Uganda for the hospitality in hosting the high-level Ministerial meeting on Refugees in the Great Lakes region.

31. Thanked the Member States and all the participants for their contributions and UNHCR for its continued support to Member States.

32. Thanked the O/SESG-GL, the ICGLR, and international partners for supporting the meeting.

End.