

34th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council

*Theme: Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced
Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement
in Africa*

Statement

By

Vera Songwe

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Africa (ECA)

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His Excellency, Mr. Richard Sezibera, Chairperson of the Executive Council,

His Excellency, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Honorable Ministers,

His Excellency, Ambassador Kwesi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Excellencies, African Union Commissioners,

Heads of Regional Economic Communities,

Ambassadors and Heads of Mission,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great honor, that I address the 34th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council.

It is also with a great sense of humility that I stand before you today to tackle a subject so contemporary in its definition, a subject which questions not one of us but all of us as a Union since it speaks to a deep human fracture in our collective effort to build a prosperous Africa.

It is the theme, *‘Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa’*.

My conviction for the cause may mask the complexity of the issue, but have we not created complexity as an alternative to leadership?

To talk about internally displaced persons and refugees, we need to put a human face to it.

My story is of a young girl, she is 16 years old, we have all met her. As is often still the case she is the first to go to college in her family. She is the pride of the village and the leader of her student council. Call her Fatima, call her Hirut, call her Zainab, call her Denise.

Her story brings this grave subject to live.

One morning she woke up to gunshots across her village, screams of people rushing out as the invaders torched the huts and raped the women, in these acts, daughters, mothers, and grandmothers are violated with the same senseless inhumanity that we all are now too familiar with.

She was able to get away with just a book in hand. And the clothes on her back.

Zainab now lives in a camp with strangers like her. She is 24 years old today, has three kids. They also live in a camp with strangers.

This is the story of many young girls turned women on our continent today.

When she fled the village she was not of voting age, so she could never have influenced an election.

Today old enough to vote she has no identity. She is a member of the invisible Africa.

No politician visits her. The camps are not a political constituency.

Excellencies,

Today in our union we have 14.7 million internally displaced people and 7.3million refugees. That is a total of 22 million people who all share a variant of this story.

In the first six months of 2018 only, 2 million new people were displaced, mainly from 5 countries – Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

Women are often the hardest hit. The female proportion of refugees in Chad and Togo was 56 percent in 2017.

Africa has the second highest burden of displacement, hosting about 37 percent of the world's 19.6 million refugees and 39.1 million internally displaced people. Together Asia and Africa host about 97 percent of the world refugee population and three-quarters of the world's internally displaced population.

The moral question:

How do we as a Union create the Africa we want if without shame or humiliation we let our youth, our young women lament in camps?

How do we as a Union raise our voices with indignation about the treatment of our youth as they flee the continent and are rejected on foreign shores if without conscience or creed we deprive them of peaceful residence in their own countries? The basic right of every citizen.

How do we as a Union command moral authority to build just, equitable and inclusive societies when segments of our populations are reduced to camp dwellers for decades?

This is the question before us. How many Zainabs, Fatimas, and Denise do we need to see and for how long before we realize the corrosive impact of this phenomenon on our ambitions of a prosperous Africa, the Africa we want?

Nelson Mandela once said and I quote:

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children

At 16 we let Zainab down. And we continue to let her kids down.

Today, Children and young people suffer disproportionately as IDPs and refugees

They are excluded from schools and opportunities for productive employment.

In 2017, children below the age of 18 constituted more than 60 percent of the refugee populations in Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, DRC, South Sudan and Uganda.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates show that refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children.

Such exclusions are in response to fears by host communities of displaced people taking available jobs, of broader destabilization in often fragile political situations,

and concerns that the provision of economic opportunities would attract more displaced people in search of safety and livelihoods.

These perceptions reinforce the politics of anger, distrust, condemnation and exclusion, accentuating a vicious cycle that does little to stimulate productive approaches to engaging in a future likely to include a large, quasi-permanent, global population of displaced people.

Excellencies,

Africa is struggling to recover its growth path.

Latest estimates for growth show that the continent grew at 3.2% in 2018. The prediction for 2019 remains below the 4 percent growth mark. These levels of growth fall far short of what is needed to deliver an emerging Africa, Agenda 2030 or agenda 2063.

The global economy is facing a confluence of risks, which could severely disrupt economic activity and inflict significant damage on longer-term development prospects. These risks include an escalation of trade disputes, an abrupt tightening of global financial conditions, and intensifying climate risks.

For a continent desperate for growth, we cannot afford to marginalize a considerable share of our population.

If we are to put the numbers into perspective, 22 million refugees represent twice the population of Tunisia, it is close to the population of Ivory Coast. The GDP of

Tunisia today is about \$40 billion dollars, twice that is 80 billion dollars, the GDP of Ivory Coast is \$40 billion.

Or if the populations could be as productive as some of our most productive societies like Mauritius whose GDP is 12 billion with a population of slightly over 1.2 million people, these means with only a third of our refugee and IDP populations we could add another \$42 billion to Africa's GDP. We cannot afford to let the \$80 billion dollars of Africa's economy go to waste in camps. The benefits of the CFTA must benefit those people too. They must have an identity and they must be able to engage.

This, Excellences, is the economic cost of the forgone education of Zainab, a leader is lost and a society is poorer.

An Africa in search of growth cannot afford the luxury of camps of unproductivity.

An Africa needing to embrace the fourth industrial revolution cannot keep its kids out of schools.

An Africa in search peace cannot exist alongside recruitment camps for violence.

An Africa that wishes to value its women and kids cannot keep hundreds in a state on entrapment.

As the Chairperson said, the key cause of displacement and keeping children in camps is governance.

Governance... institutions, a broken social contract and leadership are the root causes of displacement in Africa today. Protracted conflicts account for the majority of the displacements on the continent.

The largest proportion of African refugees and internally displaced people are in Eastern Africa. The continuing civil war in South Sudan caused the new

displacement of over half a million South Sudanese refugees, mostly to Sudan and Uganda, in the first half of 2017.

Central Africa has a total of about 1.4 million refugees and nearly 1.5 million in refugee like situation.

Other countries in the Central and Eastern Africa where armed conflict and human rights abuses have led to significant increases in forced displacements include Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon.

It is also saddening to note that the situation of displaced persons is slowly normalizing. Only 7% of the refugees and 9% of the internally displaced persons have been resettled or returned.

Governance remains at the heart of it.

According to the 2018 Mo Ibrahim Index Safety & Rule of Law (-2.5) on the continent continues to deteriorate, driven down by the continued decline in Personal Safety, which displays the largest African average decline (-6.1) of the 14 sub-categories in the IIAG over the decade, and increasing rate of decline in National Security (-4.4). The 2017 African average scores for Personal Safety (46.2) and National Security (75.1) are the lowest in the decade.

It is becoming a scourge. The largest declines appear in the indicators on Absence of Social Unrest (-14.8) and Perception of Personal Safety (-10.8), Absence of Government Involvement in Armed Conflict (-13.2) and Absence of Violence against Civilians by Non-state Actors (-11.9). These four indicators are among Africa's ten most deteriorated between 2008 and 2017.

Although violence appears to be the main driving force behind the rising numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), correlations are also found with Promotion of Environmental Sustainability ($r=+0.64$), Environmental Policies ($r=+0.63$) as well as with Welfare Policies & Services ($r=+0.62$). The influence of the environment on internal displacement is underlined by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's 2018 Global Report which states that the creation of 2.6 million new IDPs in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2017 was driven by natural disasters.

Despite the progress made, and we want to congratulate the Union for picking corruption and governance, a lot of opportunities remain to ensure that corruption can be reduced so that we can also tackle the problem of internally displaced persons.

At ECA, we focused on the human side and an alternative approach to corruption, launching the **#HonestService Campaign**, **#HudumaHalisi**, which is about the citizens celebrating the delivery of public services free of corruption.

Kenya became the first country to rollout this continent-wide campaign, leverage ongoing efforts to improve on the Kenya Public Service, under the Huduma Halisi ('Real Service') umbrella.

By tackling corruption and governance, we hope we will prevent the problem of internally displaced persons and refugees on the continent.

By tackling corruption, we will prevent the problem but in the mean time we must deal with the stock.

Opportunities in Digital Identification, digital trade and digital economy

Displaced persons are part of an estimated 500 million African who do not have legal identity. The lack of legal identity has been recognized by all as a barrier to

inclusive development, hence the inclusion of “legal identity for all by 2030 as one of the targets of the SDGs.

In countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which have a high proportion of their population without legal identity, we also see a high levels of displaced people. Displaced persons are unlikely to have identity documents and hence cannot access services because they cannot identify themselves to service providers, nor actively participate in the productive process of the economy. Further, without legal identity, it has been difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance to them and to repatriate them to their communities and countries following the cessation of hostilities.

Several countries in Africa today are taking advantage of rapid advances in digital technology to address existing challenges with the provision of legal identity establish through digital ID systems, and this must be encouraged. However, there is need to ensure that digital ID systems are not only secure and robust, but also, especially in the case for displaced persons and are responsiveness to security risks posed to them.

Digitalization has opened opportunities to labour markets to enable Africans use both the process of digitization and the free movement of people and services to ensure that we can reinsert internally displaced and refugees back into our communities so they can be able contributors.

To be able to fully maximize this potential, there is a lot we need to do as continent. This is why the ECA has recently established a center of excellence for Digital ID, digital trade and Digital Economy, working with the World Bank, African Union Commission and the United Nations. We are working together to

develop principles for good ID to ensure that every African within a decade is counted, has a name and is recognized.

Let me conclude with some remarks on the downstream approach towards a durable solution.

The Chairperson just spoke of the good news in the Central African Republic. Work with other United Nations families is underway in other parts of the continent to ensure that we can tackle the stock of the problem. The UN family has made working on the three pillars of development, peace and security an important objective led by no less than the Secretary-General himself, who believes that we cannot deal with the issues of peace and security without development. The SG is unrelenting in his desire to see these three pillars work together.

It is heartening to see in Rwanda, a programme to integrate refugees began in 2016 and has worked with 3,300 urban refugees. In 2017, 809 refugee entrepreneurs were trained in cities and in camps, resulting in the creation of 2600 new jobs country wide.

Ethiopia, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Abiy Mohamed, recently passed a historic new refugee law which will now allow refugees to obtain work permits, access primary education, obtain drivers' licenses, legally register life events such as births and marriages and open up access to national financial services, such as banking. At the heart of Ethiopia's innovative new refugee framework is a more comprehensive response to displacement in which refugees are included in national services. It also focuses on ensuring refugees have the opportunity to be self-reliant and can contribute to local economies.

Other successful integration programmes have been implemented in Uganda and Morocco. It goes without saying, that our ability to replicate these programs will

harness the economic potential of displaced persons and ECA is ready to support member State implement the CRRF.

We also must not overlook the important conventions and frameworks as we celebrate achievements of the CFTA and how close we are. Also in the space of the internally displaced we have the Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, adopted in 2009. To date, only 28 of our members have signed the convention. We urge that all the member States sign the Kampala Convention to ensure that, should there be any more displacements, we can ensure that each one of us and each one of our citizens in the Union will be safe and free.

Notable, more recently, the Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment in January 2018, will also aid to ensure that internally displaced people are no longer called internally displaced people but can, easily and simply, insert into new communities for economic and productive activities.

This, Excellences, is the plea that we make as we represent the internally displaced and the refugees, young men and women across the continent who seek nothing but to contribute to economic activities on the continent.

I wish to conclude by reiterating ECA's commitment, in particular, and the UN in general to all the member States and the African Union Commission that we will work tirelessly to ensure that the Kampala Convention is signed by all member States and that we will continue to work on the right of free movement and residence in the Union.

Thank you.