Co-ordinating Committee of the
UNHCR/Bureau for Refugees

Strategy for the implementation of the recommendations
of the 1979 Arusha Conference on the Situation of
Refugees in Africa
as approved by the Ad-Hoc Sub Committee
on Follow-up Strategy,
during its meeting of 12 December 1980.

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I. **Background and legislative authority**

1. In evolving a strategy for the implementation of the recommendations of the 1979 Arusha Conference on the situation of refugees in Africa, the following should be given careful consideration and taken into account:

   (a) that, since independence, i.e. from the early sixties, the situation of refugees in Africa has been progressively deteriorating;

   (b) that efforts contributed genuinely and generously to alleviate the sufferings of refugees and to find solutions to their problems have not so far been collectively conceptualized and therefore not undertaken in a co-ordinated manner;

   (c) that, although "granting of asylum is a peaceful and humanitarian act" and constitutes a principle enshrined in the OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa, its application has almost always been entangled with political considerations often leading to legalistic riddles and argumentations which prevent refugee assistance activities from yielding anticipated results;

   (d) that phasing-out of assistance has almost always been carried out on ad-hoc bases; and often to the detriment of the refugees themselves;

   (e) that assistance to asylum seekers before they are officially recognized as refugees is a problem area which is not given adequate attention.

2. In more specific terms, it should be noted that:

   (a) the problem of refugees in independent Africa should be viewed in the context of respect for human rights;

   (b) the initiatives taken to enact amnesty laws or to naturalize refugees have constituted, wherever they were enforced, positive approaches to durable if not final solutions.
Africa's refugee population has a role to play in the overall development process and should therefore be rapidly extracted from its predicament and stimulated to creatively participate in the development of the countries of the region.

The failure to bring about a co-ordinated approach to the conceptualization and implementation of refugee protection and assistance programmes has compounded the problems obtaining and in certain cases yielded negative results.

3. Besides these considerations, it should be borne in mind that the legislative authority for evolving a strategy for the implementation of the Arusha Conference recommendations emanates from the following sources:

(i) Arusha recommendation 15, para 5, which stipulates "that the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations of this Conference will be the primary responsibility of the OAU, working in cooperation with the UNHCR, ...";

(ii) the OAU Council of Ministers resolution CM/Res. 727 (XXXIII) on the situation of refugees in Africa and on prospective solutions to their problems in the 1930's; and

(iii) the UN General Assembly resolution 34/61 on the situation of African refugees.

II. Guiding Principles

4. Such a strategy should be based on the following guiding principles:

(a) Refugees are human beings who have their hopes, ambitions and limitations, and should be dealt with as such not as figures or as incidental social events;
(b) Refugees have the right to life and to rebuild dignity and should therefore be enabled to recreate their lives, through timely procurement of food, shelter, education and employment, so as to become self-reliant and to subsequently contribute to the development of their countries of asylum and, at a later stage, of their countries of origin, and thus to the overall development of Africa.

(c) Assistance to refugees is no charity, as the investment in refugees is a positive contribution to the growing African economies.

(d) African refugees are primarily an African problem that should be assumed first and foremost by Africa, which entails that they should be considered, where they are settled, as an additional component of national manpower and active population, and included in national development programmes.

(e) Refugees wherever they are settled should not be separated from local communities, but should rather be encouraged to merge with the latter, in order to avoid alienation attributable to separate social development, which in turn might deteriorate into marginality and even criminality.

(f) While protection and assistance are required and due, they should not reach a level beyond which refugees tend to become a privileged group within local communities. Social unrests that might develop from such situations should be avoided.

(g) "Granting of asylum is a peaceful and humanitarian act and shall not be regarded as an unfriendly act by any member States". This principle enunciated in the OAU Convention is repeated and emphasized, as it is the cornerstone to any policy or programme relating to refugees and their plight in Africa.

(h) Voluntary repatriation, when possible, has proved to be and still remains the best solution to all refugee problems.
(i) **Non-refoulement** is a basic principle of humanitarian law to which Africa is fully committed, in order to preclude the returning of any refugee to the country which he is fleeing, where he is likely to face death or persecution.

(j) Travel documents for refugees with liberal return clauses should be issued when needed, in the spirit of African solidarity and hospitality, in order to facilitate refugee movements in their quest for bettering their lot in life, through educational or employment placement.

(k) Awareness-building is one constructive way of bringing to bear on African Governments in support of the refugees victimized through injustice and oppression. Programmes related thereto should be conceived around the basic principles of African unity, of the uniqueness of the cultural values of African societies, of the common humanity that links the refugees to their kith and kin, and should be geared to all classes of the African society.

(l) **Burden-sharing** is another principle that needs to be reaffirmed, to become a reality and to concretely translate African solidarity in favour of the uprooted, if refugee problems in Africa are to be solved within Africa, and for the interest of Africa's developing economies.

### III. Objectives

5. **The broad objectives of the strategy should be two-fold:**

   (a) To define and work out ways and means of reaching temporary, semi-permanent and permanent solutions to the problems obtaining; and

   (b) To try and prevent asylum-seeking from becoming a permanent feature of the situation in independent Africa and, in as far as feasible, to stop and even revert the present trend which is bringing about more and more refugees to the African scenery almost every day.
6. The immediate objectives of such a strategy should be defined as follows:

(a) **At the national level**

(i) To have national refugee policies clearly defined, which should be in line with the broad principles laid down in existing international and regional covenants related to the issue of refugees;

(ii) To bring about co-ordination of all refugee activities at the national level, in such a way that refugees would become the sole beneficiaries of assistance contributed to alleviate their plight;

(iii) To stimulate general awareness of the impact of refugee problems on national development, with the ultimate view of sharing the burden on the one hand, and, on the other, of preventing asylum-seeking from becoming a recurrent feature of the African social situation, through moral pressure being brought to bear to that effect.

(b) **At the regional level**

(i) To evolve global protection and assistance policies intended to extricate refugee problems from being dealt with in isolation and to relate refugee situations to development endeavours;

(ii) To translate the principles of assistance towards self-reliance and of burden-sharing into applicable and action-oriented programmes;

(iii) To co-ordinate the strategies of all refugee-serving agencies active in Africa in such a way that short-, medium- and long-term action proposals for the solution of refugee refugee problems in Africa should evolve for the benefit of all concerned.

(iv) To ascertain that the "machinery" entrusted with the overall supervision of refugee activities in Africa is dynamic and efficient enough to actively follow-up the implementation of the programmes agreed upon, so that refugee problems are afforded appropriate and timely solutions.
(c) At the international level

(i) To ensure that international assistance is forthcoming, co-ordinated and timely channelled so as to maximize its efficiency, and that its phasing-out is always related to development programmes intended to absorb the refugees in the active population of their countries of asylum;

(ii) To bring about co-ordination of inter-agency action so as to ensure a constant two-way flow of information on refugee situations, to carry out any multidisciplinary inter-agency activities such situations may call for with a view to maximize the impact of assistance programmes and to harmoniously relate them to national development activities, and to sustain and increase the interest and contribution of donor agencies whose active assistance and co-operation are almost always needed and required.

IV. Plan of action

7. To fulfill these objectives and translate the strategy into a concrete and tangible programme of work, the following activities are suggested:

(a) At the national level

The following could be undertaken and implemented with the assistance, when deemed necessary, of regional and international competent organizations:

(i) Establishment, where it does not already exist, of a national refugee machinery whose mandate should include, inter alia, the activities defined in Sec. 15, para 3 of the Arusha Conference;

(ii) Study of the national manpower situation with long-term projections in order to articulate refugee educational and employment placement on sound and promising bases;

(iii) Survey of existing pre-service and in-service training facilities for refugee workers and counselling services with a view to contributing to a comprehensive regional survey intended to improve refugee counselling services in Africa.
(iv) Ad-hoc multidisciplinary studies to be undertaken for already existing or recently occurring refugee situations, with a view to relating assistance programmes to development-oriented activities envisaged, planned or being implemented in the areas of refugee settlement;

(v) Launching of awareness-building programmes intended to disseminate refugee law and concepts of basic human rights, and to ensure as wide a circulation as possible to the real causes for asylum-seeking in Africa.

(vi) Participation in subregional and regional programmes and/or activities intended to foster awareness, to instill the concept of human rights in the minds of the people, and to ensure that the burden is shared equitably both within and outside national boundaries;

(vii) Fund-raising activities meant to confirm the principle of self-reliance, and to encourage and supplement contributions from outside the country.

(viii) Accession to, and ratification of existing international covenants relating to refugees, including the UN 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol pertaining thereto, and more particularly the 1969 OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa.

(b) At the regional level

(i) Restructuring of the regional machinery entrusted with the implementation of and follow-up on the Arusha Conference recommendations, to diversify its activities and increase its efficiency, so that it becomes the think tank and coordinating body responsible for evolving policies and programmes commensurate to the magnitude of the problems obtaining, and in line with the principles enunciated above;

(ii) Setting-up ad hoc task forces to be entrusted with all the studies, fact-finding missions, research work... etc., which the implementation of the Arusha Conference recommendations calls for, in order to set the stage ready for well-conceived, positive, and co-ordinated assistance programmes;
(iii) Definition and periodical revision and/or adaptation of refugee protection and assistance policies which should enable refugee-serving agencies to reconsider and reshape their respective roles as the situation may warrant.

(iv) Consideration of all issues which might constitute problem areas in the field of refugee protection and assistance, and of possible ways of tackling those issues so that policy decisions could be reached in time, at the appropriate level.

(v) Co-ordination of refugee protection and assistance programmes to increase their efficiency and impact, and ensure that continuous flow of information on refugee issues in Africa is available to all parties concerned;

(vi) Advise on and assistance to educational and employment placement activities assumed by refugee-serving agencies;

(vii) Consideration of the possibility of establishing an African Fund for refugee assistance whose ultimate objective would be to transform refugees into self-supporting communities / individuals whose integration in the active economic life of their countries of asylum would therefore become possible and easier;

(viii) Organization of conferences and meetings on refugee issues, at the regional and subregional levels, to regularly monitor the changing refugee conditions, to evolve operational assistance programmes commensurate to these conditions, and to adopt pertinent decisions which could translate burden-sharing and awareness-building into actions having tangible results.

(ix) Fund-raising activities at the regional and sub-regional levels which should emphasize collective self-reliance as the cornerstone of refugee assistance activities in Africa.

(c) At the international level

(i) Sustaining and increasing co-ordinated assistance to refugee programmes in Africa;

(ii) Dissemination of information on refugee situations in Africa, with a view to sustaining the interest of all those concerned in the need to bring such situations under control;

(iii) Consideration of possible educational and employment opportunities for African refugees so as to efficiently contribute to the solution of their problems;
(iv) Contribution, on request, to ad hoc multidisciplinary task forces mounted to examine specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa.

(v) Fund-raising campaigns in favour of national, subregional and regional refugee programmes in Africa.

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The foregoing which constitutes a global African strategy for the implementation of the 1979 Arusha Conference recommendations should be considered as an introductory exercise, and should invite the attention of the Governments, the national voluntary agencies involved in refugee work, the international refugee-serving agencies having activities in the countries of Africa, the international, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations whose activities relate to refugee protection and assistance programmes, to the urgent need to evolve their own strategies, and to relate these specific strategies to the principles and plan of action laid down in the relevant parts of the present document as well as to the pertinent recommendations adopted by the Arusha Conference. Once these individual strategies have been conceived, co-ordination of refugee activities in Africa will become feasible, and will be carried out to benefit the refugees, first and foremost.