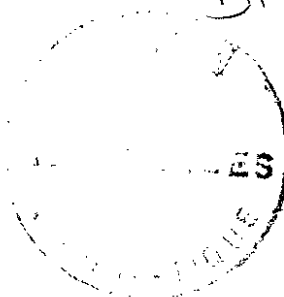


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Meeting of the Representatives of
the OAU Secretariat and the
Secretariats of the United Nations
System

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DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCERTED APPROACH IN DEALING
WITH THE AFRICAN REFUGEE SITUATION AND NATURAL DISASTERS

Discussion paper

Jointly prepared by the Secretariats of the UN Economic Commission
for Africa and the Organization of African Unity

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DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCERTED APPROACH IN DEALING
WITH THE AFRICAN REFUGEE SITUATION AND NATURAL DISASTERS

I. Refugees

1. Two major meetings have, in recent years, dwelt on refugee problems in Africa: the 1979 Arusha Conference on the situation of Refugees in Africa, and the 1981 International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA). Both events raised hopes and focussed attention on the plight of five million up-rooted Africans; both were also followed by attempts to improve the general conditions of the African refugees. Actions taken, inter alia, by UNHCR and OAU, to follow-up on the recommendations of the Arusha Conference or to gear ICARA pledges to productive results, if duly reviewed, might put this paper out of focus 1/. What still remains is that the refugee situation in Africa requires a curative as well as a preventive approach. Refugee protection and assistance are remedial activities, but what could and should be done to prevent the refugee situation from further deteriorating, if the present trend cannot be reversed, is a longer-term prospect that requires a subtle approach and a careful consideration.

2. The conceptualization of a concerted approach to the African refugee situation should be based on the three basic aspects of the problem: the political, the humanitarian and the developmental.

- a. While the OAU is the regional organization that assumes the major responsibility for the political aspects of the refugee problem, and approves the policies and strategies to be followed, it cannot be expected to do so in vacuum, i.e. without the technical data and assistance that can help in evolving appropriate policies and reaching sound political decisions. This technical basis is to be contributed by the UN competent institutions and by the NGOs involved in refugee work in Africa.
- b. Similarly, the humanitarian aspect of refugee work will not be commensurate with the magnitude, complexity and urgency of the problems obtaining, unless it is related to a realistic assessment of the socio-economic situation of the countries of asylum, which, in turn, calls for a co-ordinated contribution from the UN bodies and the voluntary agencies concerned.
- c. The developmental dimension of refugee work in Africa requires (i) a sensitization of the international community to the direct needs of African refugees, (ii) the strengthening of

1/ OAU and UNHCR endeavours to follow-up on both events are the subject matter of resolutions, reports and programme activities that could be secured from the organizations concerned.

the capacities of the countries of asylum to cope with the refugee situation which strain their fragile economies and infrastructures, and (iii) the implementation of additional assistance programmes leading to durable solutions. 1/

3. Because the three basic aspects of the refugee problem in Africa are obviously intertwined, a number of resolutions adopted since 1979 reflect OAU's concern for a concerted inter-agency approach to refugee issues, and called for the assistance and co-operation of the UN and its specialized agencies. 2/ However joint endeavours were not forthcoming as the resolutions did not, and in fact could not, identify areas of activities or concrete action proposals. The following short-, medium- and long-term proposals are therefore submitted for consideration. They entail active co-operation among UN agencies and also with other refugee-serving bodies (mainly NGOs).

- i) Participation in the technical preparations for ICARA II.
- ii) Participation in ad-hoc inter-agency missions and task forces to identify, promote and/or evaluate refugee assistance programmes and projects having developmental potentialities with a view to ensuring their continuation once humanitarian relief assistance by IGOs and/or NGOs is phased out.
- iii) Consideration of the establishment of an African Fund for Refugee Assistance which could cater for refugee education and scholarship-granting, funding self-help projects and income-generating activities, extending assistance, technical and financial, to settlement/resettlement endeavours, launching and monitoring technical research work and studies on the developmental dimension of refugee assistance, on the translation into viable projects of the principle of burden - sharing, on the identification and implementation of durable solutions to refugee situations in Africa.
- iv) Establishment of a Centre for the dissemination of information on refugee problems, on refugee and humanitarian laws and on human rights in Africa for awareness-building and for the enforcement of the principles of human and people's rights. Such activities are likely to bring to bear on evolving durable solutions.
- v) Review of refugee/returnee settlement/resettlement past endeavours in African countries with a view to identifying problem areas and recommending development-oriented refugee/

1/ Cf. UN Secretary General's recent statement to the meeting of donor countries concerning the 1984 Conference on Refugees in Africa, UNECA Press Release No. 2725 of 25 February 1983.

2/ Cf. OAU resolution CM/Res.727 (XXXIII) of July 1979, CM/Res.814 (XXXV) of June 1980, CM/Res.826 (XXXVI) of February 1981 and CM/Res.868 (XXXVII) of June 1981

returnee settlement/resettlement policies, strategies and programmes which could be conducive to efficient rehabilitation and productive integration of refugees/returnees in their countries of asylum/origin.

- vi) In-depth study of the root-causes of asylum-seeking in Africa and dissemination, through official channels and, as appropriate, through mass media activities, of its findings, conclusions and recommendations, with a view (a) to bringing about the enactment, at the national level, of laws and regulations that guarantee the rights of the individual, protect the family, safeguard the freedom of ideas and the right to socio-economic development, (b) to preventing the refugee situation from further worsening, and (c) to paving the way, in the long-run, for a halt to the rising tide of asylum-seekers.

4. The agencies within the UN system as well as under OAU may wish to examine the forthcoming activities with which they would like to be associated, and also to commit themselves to the implementation of those activities.

II. Natural disasters

5. The man-made events that provoke population movements in Africa cannot be considered in isolation from natural disasters whose occurrence, not to mention recurrence, causes similar phenomena, represents heavy constraints on already debilitated economies and poor infrastructures, contributes to impeding or disrupting socio-economic development, and calls for emergency assistance and subsequently for relief, rehabilitation and integration activities.

6. OAU has established since 1974 1/ an Ad-Hoc Committee on drought control in Africa and an Emergency Relief Fund for assistance to drought-stricken countries. This Fund became in 1976 an OAU Fund for Assistance and Co-operation 2/ which enabled the Organization to contribute to the emergency assistance to the countries exposed to natural disasters. To-date, the Organization has contributed an amount of U.S. \$780,600 to disaster-stricken countries. Concurrently, the Secretary General of the OAU negotiated with BADEA to set aside a fund of 15 million dollars which is open for lending, on soft loan basis, to African countries exposed to natural disasters. The FAO is the executing agency for the projects evolving under this loan fund. The Secretariat of the OAU has also established, since 1977, a Drought and Natural Disaster Section which is responsible for reporting on the emergency needs of the disaster-stricken countries to the above mentioned Ad-Hoc Committee, and for liaising with UNDRO, FAO, WMO, WHO, UNEP, CILSS and other disaster-relief organizations.

1/ Cf. Resolution CM/Res. 336 (XXIII)

2/ Cf. Resolution CM/Res. 479 (XXVII)

7. Intervention in cases of emergency by the UN and its specialized agencies mainly UNDR0 and the relief-related organizations within the system need not be recalled in this context. What remains to be defined and/or strengthened towards evolving a concerted approach to natural disasters in Africa is for each organization and agency to specify the role it could assume towards the implementation of the activities which the following proposals entail:

- a. Appeals for emergency assistance to be presented, as far as feasible, with enough details on the socio-economic impact of the natural disaster(s) that has (have) occurred, so that relief-related agencies could define the sector and scope of their intervention, while development-oriented agencies could determine the medium - and long-term rehabilitation and integration activities with which they intend to be associated.
- b. Constitution, at the national as well as at the sub-regional and regional levels, of buffer food stocks that could be used in cases of emergency.
- c. Review of natural disaster prevention and preparedness arrangements in Africa with a view to evolving an African plan of action to monitor natural phenomena, to suggest all possible disaster prevention and control measures, and hence to contribute to preparing an inventory of the geo-physical pre-requisites of development planning and plan implementation in disaster-prone African countries, and to set up the machinery(ies) for the implementation of the Plan of Action for Natural Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and for its follow-up.