

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

95TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING

24–26 MARCH 2026

Regional Update for East and Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes, and Southern Africa

NGO Collective Statement – Oral Version

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

This statement was developed through consultations with NGOs, including those led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Across Africa, the policies and frameworks designed to protect the most vulnerable are facing a perfect storm. Brutal conflict, climate shocks, and the steepest decline in humanitarian funding in a decade are pushing responses to breaking point. More than 35 million forcibly displaced and stateless people are living in profound uncertainty, while humanitarian action remains trapped in a reactive cycle that too often fails to safeguard basic rights and dignity.

Turning first to East Africa, which has become the global epicentre of displacement:

- Sudan is now the world's largest displacement crisis. Nearly 14 million uprooted, yet last year's response received only a quarter of required funding. Famine conditions have taken hold. Neighbouring countries are absorbing unprecedented displacement while confronting their own climate catastrophes.
- In Somalia, nearly 4 million people are internally displaced. Drought and floods have forced over a million from their homes since 2022.
- We are gravely concerned by drought alerts across Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Sudan for 2026. These threaten livelihoods, and state stability itself.

In the Great Lakes, the situation is equally alarming:

- Intensified fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo is destroying the very displacement sites hosting 5.8 million internally displaced Congolese, forcing families into unsafe areas without assistance. This also impacts the region, with 1.2 million Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries.
- We are concerned by premature pressure for the repatriation of Burundian refugees from neighboring countries, despite ongoing instability in the country, leaving thousands in precarious and dangerous situations.

Moving to Southern Africa, we see overlapping crises and a growing legal limbo for displaced people:

- The insurgency in Cabo Delgado continues to drive displacement, pushing new arrivals into Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe.
- In South Africa, while we welcome the non-encampment approach, NGOs note a significant documentation backlog has left those seeking protection exposed to risks. We also flag a worrying structural shift: the blurring of mandates between UNHCR and IOM. It is essential the focus remains on rights-based protection not migration management.

Amid these challenges, there are genuine signs of hope:

- Kenya's Shirika Plan and Ethiopia's Makatet Roadmap represent visionary shifts — from encampment toward socioeconomic inclusion and self-reliance. But global aid cuts are putting these initiatives on the line. Without predictable, long-term support, these hard-won gains will collapse.

To break the cycle of crisis, we must genuinely shift power to those on the front lines. Localisation is not a buzzword — it is a necessity. Refugee-led and local organisations remain present when international systems withdraw. They must no longer be chronically underfunded.

We call on UNHCR and Member States to take these concrete steps:

1. Urgently resource responses for Sudan, the DRC, and the Horn of Africa.
2. Provide technical support to address asylum backlogs.
3. Ensure funding reaches local and refugee-led organisations through flexible, multi-year partnerships.
4. Support local inclusion and meaningful refugee participation in the design, governance and implementation of plans such as the Shirika and Makatet plans.
5. Resist pressure to prioritise migration control over refugee protection and asylum.
6. Strengthen regional frameworks for climate mobility and mixed movements.

Distinguished delegates, the NGO community stands ready to support decisive action grounded in shared responsibility.

We must invest in livelihoods, uphold the right to work, and firmly reject externalisation arrangements that shift asylum responsibilities onto already overstretched regions.

Protection and dignity must remain at the heart of the African response.

I thank you.