

**Testimony of U.S Department of State
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House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

"Africa's Displaced People"

July 9, 2015

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee for this opportunity to describe what the U.S. government, and in particular the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration is doing to protect and assist African refugees and other persons of concern on the continent.

As you probably know given your interest in African affairs, today, July 9, happens to be South Sudan's independence day. It is a fitting day for this hearing, although unfortunately not in celebration of a long civil war resolved, but because South Sudan has rapidly gone from being the world's newest country full of hope to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in Africa today. There are now more new South Sudanese refugees – 592,700 – than there were when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed 10 years ago.

On World Refugee Day last month the UN High Commissioner for Refugees released his annual Global Trends report showing that the number of uprooted people is at the highest levels ever recorded, and accelerating rapidly. What does this mean for Africa? At the end of 2014, sub-Saharan Africa had 3.7 million refugees and 11.4 million internally displaced persons, 4.5 million of whom were newly displaced over the course of the year. Burundi is the latest crisis in this troubling trend, where more than 150,000 new refugees have fled political violence and intimidation as fears grow that the mass atrocities we have worked hard over the last few years to prevent could still take place. Burundi is the newest emergency, but the list of countries in crisis in Africa remains long: Nigeria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Libya. And for each of these countries embroiled in war or chronic instability, there are two, three, even four or more neighboring countries affected by streams of refugees; and sometimes the violence that caused them to flee seeps across borders as well.

Almost nine out of every ten refugees in the world are in countries – and regions of those countries – considered less economically developed. This is especially apparent in Africa and creates myriad challenges in even simply reaching refugees in remote areas with life-saving assistance and help to move out of harm's way. At the same time, more and more refugees are living in urban settings, requiring a new set of tools and strategies. Moreover, we have seen a substantial increase in out-migration from the continent, facilitated in significant part by lawlessness in Libya and a growing industry in human smuggling.

As an example of these phenomena, Ethiopia hosts refugees from nearly all of its neighbors -- Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. It replaced Kenya last year as the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, and is the fifth largest worldwide. Ethiopia is also a significant origin and transit country for onward migration; refugees fleeing violence and persecution mix with economic migrants seeking a better future. They leave Ethiopia for Sudan, en route to Libya and eventually Europe, while others continue to cross into Djibouti en route to Yemen and Gulf States beyond. In the other direction, South Africa is another important destination. The tragedies that befall migrants from across Africa on these dangerous journeys are terrible and known – falling victim to traffickers and xenophobic violence, being kidnapped for ransom, even dying of dehydration in the desert or drowning at sea – but people continue to seek alternatives for themselves and their families despite the perils.

In terms of the M in PRM, we support governments to better manage migration through programs that build upon the expertise of the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR to enhance regional dialogues among States, build the capacity of government officials, and promote protection screening and assistance for the most vulnerable migrants. To complement these efforts, PRM launched an initiative with several other States last year called “Migrants in Countries in Crisis” to address situations like that of the Central African Republic, where people from many countries found themselves caught up in someone else's conflict.

The brutality of conflict, the growing gap between needs and resources, and the protracted nature of displacement in Africa all mean more human suffering; this is undeniable. The human and financial resources of the humanitarian organizations upon which we rely, including UNHCR, ICRC, IOM, and other international and non-governmental organizations, are stretched incredibly thin in responding to new emergencies on top of persistent crises. But I would stress that even in the most trying circumstances, the committed staff of these organizations continue their heroic work, standing up for humanitarian principles even in the face of flagrant

disregard by warring parties, and consistently seeking new and creative ways to help. U.S. humanitarian leadership in supporting these organizations both financially and diplomatically is extraordinarily important.

The scale of need has pushed everyone in the humanitarian community to more urgently explore new ways of doing business, such as UNHCR's "alternative to camps" approach. We continue to support our partners to innovate and seek efficiencies in the delivery of humanitarian assistance – for example, the implementation of biometric registration and the use of vouchers and cash transfers. Partnerships with the private sector have helped connect students and teachers in remote refugee camps to the internet, making e-learning possible for the first time. At PRM we have maintained our long-standing focus on protection, especially of women and girls, from gender based violence. Under the joint State Department and USAID initiative, "*Safe from the Start*" we have invested resources in the institutional changes – policies, staffing, training – necessary for our primary partners to ensure that the safety of women and girls is prioritized in every humanitarian response.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to visit Niger, which offers a rich picture of some of these displacement and migration challenges, as well as some of the innovative responses undertaken with U.S. support. One of the countries in Africa ranked lowest on the Human Development Index, Niger hosts refugees from both Nigeria and Mali. It is also an historic crossroads for primarily economic migration from West Africa northward. IOM predicts that 100,000 migrants will transit through the northern desert town of Agadez this year on their way to Libya and Europe, and has warned of growing signs of trafficking of young women and girls within the overall smuggling of migrants.

Boko Haram violence has forced more than 100,000 Nigerian refugees plus Nigerien migrants who had long lived in Nigeria to seek safety in Niger. Attacks by Boko Haram inside Niger have resulted in an additional 50,000 Nigerien internally displaced persons. Most refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons are living dispersed across numerous villages with Nigerien hosts who are themselves impoverished and facing food insecurity. Humanitarian access has been restricted by insecurity and ongoing military operations. But agencies are endeavoring to work within these constraints, employing creative responses such as mobile protection monitors, and cash transfers and vouchers in lieu of direct distribution of food and other household supplies. While UNHCR has set up two camps for refugees and IDPs, transfer to the camps is voluntary. Aid is also provided outside of camps for all those in need, based on vulnerability. This model

agreed among aid agencies and with the government is a sensible approach that should be replicated elsewhere in mixed settings.

For those Malian refugees with a traditional pastoralist lifestyle, Niger has also adopted an alternative to camps, setting aside an extensive area where they can move with their animals. The “zone” model has been very successful in promoting relative self-sufficiency and independence for refugees. Investments by the international community in additional water points, a clinic, and a school that has become the largest in the region have benefited both the local population and the refugee community, contributing simultaneously to local development and peaceful co-existence.

While this general strategy to include host populations in some of the basic assistance provided to refugees has been in place for quite a while, we do see that in some of the more protracted situations, fatigue in hosting refugees has nonetheless set in. The situation of Somali refugees in Kenya is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples, and a place where we have invested considerable diplomatic effort to preserve their ability to maintain asylum there despite some claims that refugees are connected to domestic terrorism threats. A pilot voluntary return program to several areas in Somalia is underway, but conditions are not yet ripe for large-scale returns.

Every protracted refugee situation has unique characteristics. Darfuris in Chad and Sahrawis in Algeria are two additional long-staying populations for which UNHCR faces context-specific obstacles to finding solutions. In Chad self-sufficiency efforts are constrained by the dearth of development actors, while continued insecurity prevents the voluntary return of refugees to Darfur. In Tindouf, Sahrawis remain victims of a political stalemate where open conflict is in hiatus but the international community has not addressed the root causes. Both refugee communities are situated in harsh desert environments, frustrating efforts to at least promote greater self-reliance. Another refugee situation that should be resolved, but has been repeatedly delayed, is the voluntary return of Ivoirian refugees from Liberia, initially put on hold by the Ivoirian government because of fears of the spread of Ebola.

While examples of durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons can seem few and far between, there are bright spots of which we should not lose sight. Both Tanzania and Zambia have in the last few years made significant progress pursuing pragmatic durable solutions, offering pathways to local integration through permanent residency and in some cases naturalization for

refugees who have now lived in their countries for generations. UNHCR is pursuing renewed and strengthened partnerships with development agencies and other development actors to promote interim and sustainable solutions. Following a recent World Bank-UNHCR joint study on the development effects of refugees, returned refugees, and IDPs in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the governments of Tanzania, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have approved loans for longer-term projects benefiting displaced persons and hosting communities in their countries.

While only 126,800 refugees returned to their country of origin with UNHCR assistance last year – the lowest number recorded since 1983 – the majority of these voluntary returns were in Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Angola, Sudan, Côte d’Ivoire and Rwanda). And despite the low overall numbers, the opportunity to finally return home is obviously of great significance to those individuals and families able to do so.

Furthermore, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is resettling African refugees of at least 29 nationalities, providing an important durable solution to some of the most vulnerable refugees without other alternatives. As part of this program, a major effort is underway to resettle longtime Congolese refugees to the United States. The U.S. will admit some 19,000 refugees from Africa in FY2015.

In all of these situations – whether new or protracted – we work closely with our USAID colleagues on humanitarian assistance. We work closely with our diplomatic colleagues to push for an end to the persecution and conflict that produce displacement across the continent. While the search for political solutions continues, we aim to ensure that there is a safe place of refuge and that basic material aid reaches internationally-accepted minimum standards. We are working with our USAID colleagues as well to develop greater coherence between relief and development assistance, particularly for protracted crises. Last year, the U.S. government provided nearly \$2.5 billion in humanitarian assistance in Africa -- of which PRM obligated more than \$780 million. Given the rise in needs, PRM expects to program nearly \$800 million across the continent of Africa in FY 2015. Even with this record amount, we cannot claim to be meeting all of the needs, even at the most basic level. But thanks to the generosity of Congress, we can confidently say that we are saving many lives and assisting millions of people to live in greater dignity and with more hope for a better future.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. I would be happy to answer questions you may have.