

Ministerial Meeting on the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Rwandan Refugees

Joint Communiqué

On 30 September 2016, a Ministerial meeting was convened at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva to discuss the state of implementation of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Rwandan Refugees and to review key issues and the way forward in bringing the strategy to its conclusion.

Ministerial delegations from the main countries hosting Rwandan refugees (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, the Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and the country of origin (Rwanda), the African Union and UNHCR (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa) participated in the meeting and concluded as follows:

1. The Participants recall the conclusions of the Ministerial meeting on the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Rwandan Refugees held in Geneva, Switzerland on 2 October 2015. They reconfirm their commitment and determination to bring an orderly and humane closure to the protracted situation of Rwandan refugees who fled their country before 31 December 1998;
2. The Participants are committed to ensuring that Rwandan refugees, falling within the remit of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy, can, making an informed choice, freely and voluntarily avail themselves of either the option of voluntary repatriation or local integration without undue influence being exerted on them;
3. UNHCR is committed to continue to be operationally involved in the provision of assistance and support to Rwandan refugees, falling within the remit of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy, until 31 December 2017. Given the complexity of the situation and significant numbers involved, a special effort will be made in the Democratic Republic of Congo by UNHCR to achieve the participants' collective objectives within this strategy;

On Voluntary Repatriation

4. The Participants agree to expedite the voluntary repatriation process for Rwandan refugees in safety and dignity, including through intensified counselling, information campaigns and go and see visits in line with the established tripartite agreements. The UNHCR facilitated voluntary repatriation process will continue until 31 December 2017. To this end, UNHCR will endeavor to mobilize resources from the international community to enhance the current voluntary repatriation support package to assist returning refugees to sustainably reintegrate in their country of origin;

On Local Integration

5. The Participants agree to explore the identification of local integration and alternative solutions for Rwandan refugees who have lived in asylum countries for many years. The provision of legal residency to persons no longer in need of international protection or the naturalization of long staying refugees were reaffirmed as viable options that will be made available. In the interim, asylum countries agree to allow Rwandans, who remain on their territory after December 2017, to exercise their rights and engage in activities that strengthen local socio-economic integration to the benefit of both the refugee and host communities. UNHCR underlines its commitment to support this process as appropriate;

6. The Participants agree to enhance the information campaign to inform refugees of the option of local integration, to avail themselves of this opportunity, especially in countries that have invoked the cessation clause;
7. The Participants underline that in those countries that have embarked on local integration the provision of passports to Rwandan nationals, living abroad, will continue to be facilitated, as this is an important document to present to authorities in countries where they intend to integrate, in order to meet legal requirements for the issuance of permanent residence permits. To this end, Rwandan refugees, falling within the remit of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy, should be encouraged to apply for passports or alternative identity documents either through the on-line application procedure or Rwandan Embassies;
8. The participants agree to intensify counselling services to Rwandan refugees covered by the strategy on the options that are available with regard to voluntary repatriation, local integration and procedures for exemption from the application of the cessation clauses. The counselling will stress the obligation on refugees to co-operate with the authorities and avail themselves of one of these options;
9. The Participants recognize that local integration is a multifaceted process, best achieved through facilitating the socio-economic integration of Rwandan refugees while working on the granting of permanent legal residency or naturalization. It was underlined that refugees who meet legal requirements for naturalization should be encouraged to apply for citizenship, like any other eligible foreigners lawfully resident in the concerned country;

On Exemption Issues

10. The Participants unanimously affirmed that exemption procedures need not be overly elaborate as what is important is the full respect of international refugee and human rights law, including due process rights. UNHCR is available to assist States in developing and implementing exemption procedures that are both fair and efficient;
11. For those persons who are determined to be no longer in need of international protection, it was agreed that they are to be informed that UNHCR facilitated assistance will no longer be available as of 31 December 2017. In recognition of this fact, all Rwandan refugees affected by the application of the "ceased circumstance" cessation clause are to regularize their stay in the country of current residence as soon as possible;
12. For those found to be in continued need of international protection, their refugee status will remain intact while durable solutions are pursued;

Conclusion

13. The Participants agreed to expedite the implementation of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy in the spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding.

Geneva

30 September 2016