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## **African Regional Parliamentary Conference on “Comprehensive Responses to Refugee Situations - Effective Parliamentary Approaches”**

**Midrand (South Africa), 11-13 November, 2019**

Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and hosted by the Pan-African Parliament

### **MIDRAND DECLARATION**

We, members of parliament representing 15 African parliaments, and the Pan-African Parliament, assembled at the African Regional Parliamentary Conference, "Comprehensive Responses to Refugee Situations – Effective Parliamentary Approaches", in Midrand, South Africa, from 11 to 13 November 2019, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and hosted by the Pan-African Parliament (PAP),

*Gathered* to discuss how to develop and implement comprehensive responses to benefit refugees and affected host populations, with a focus on the importance of developing comprehensive, inclusive and effective responses to refugee situations, tackling key challenges and solutions linked to inclusion of refugees and internally displaced and stateless persons, and discussing strategies to better assist, protect and find solutions to the situations of refugees in countries across Africa,

*Welcoming* the timing of the Conference, which contributes to marking the 2019 theme launched by the African Union as the "Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa",

*Recalling* that Africa is the continent most affected by refugee flows and forced displacement, hosting some 26.4 million displaced persons; recalling and saluting the traditional strong hospitality of African countries, which have provided protection and solutions to refugees over the decades in spite of limited resources,

*Commit*, in all of our actions, to never forget that refugees are first and foremost human beings – women and men, girls and boys – who are forced to leave their homes, whether because of conflict, human rights violations, or persecution and violence; human beings whose lives are turned upside down and who have left behind everything – home, family and community; human beings who as a result, find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability in the face of heightened risks of exploitation and abuse. This is the daily reality of millions of refugees and internally displaced and stateless persons around the world;

*Stress* that more than 80 per cent of those fleeing their countries as refugees find protection in neighbouring countries whose people and governments are, in turn, often struggling to manage their own development with limited resources and the impact of neighbouring conflicts; *recall* that the majority of host countries are developing countries, and that the impact of forced displacement within and beyond countries is far-reaching and touches a wide range of actors – those fleeing and those hosting and protecting;

*Also stress* that solutions must therefore address both refugees and the countries and communities that host them; a comprehensive response is required;

*Welcome* the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, and reaffirm our commitment to support national efforts to take practical steps towards comprehensive refugee responses guided by the New York Declaration and the GCR and its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and set out in the Nairobi Declaration;

*Recognize* the whole-of-society approach embedded in the GCR and, hence, the multi-stakeholder partnership approach and the increasing involvement of a wide range of actors, from the humanitarian and development sectors to the private sector and civil society, in efforts to find comprehensive responses to refugee situations by assisting refugees, returnees and host communities;

*Welcome* the holding of the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva on 17 and 18 December 2019, note that this will be an opportunity to take stock of progress made on comprehensive refugee response frameworks, to make pledges towards implementation of the GCR, and to share good practices, and note with appreciation that such ministerial-level meetings will be held every four years to enable continued stocktaking on progress on sharing responsibilities to better protect refugees;

*Believe* it is important that parliaments contribute to and take part in this review; and *commit* to following up nationally with our governments regarding their pledges to the GRF and the implementation thereof;

*Commit* to supporting pledges made at the GRF by our respective national governments by taking follow-up action as parliamentarians, such as reviewing national laws in our respective parliaments and committees and advocating for legislative reforms that address identified gaps or challenges in national refugee and other laws (as appropriate), specifically with regard to protection and inclusion of refugees in national systems to facilitate self-reliance and access to basic services (e.g. education, health, livelihoods, water and sanitation), and ensuring their inclusion in as well as contribution to creating socio-economic opportunities together with host communities;

*Recall* that refugee protection includes not only legal and physical protection, but also the ability to lead a meaningful and dignified life while in exile; emphasize that refugees have skills and capacity to positively contribute to their host communities if given the opportunity and therefore call on supporting the empowerment of refugees to become self-reliant;

*Call for* solutions to target both refugee and host communities, welcome the more equitable burden-sharing approach anchored in the GCR, and call for greater mobilization of resources and support to benefit countries that host refugees;

*Call upon* inter-governmental organizations, national, regional and international humanitarian and development partners and financial institutions, the private sector, civil society and States to redouble their efforts to ease the pressure on refugee hosting communities, support countries of asylum to facilitate refugees' self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, improve conditions in countries of origin so people can return in safety and dignity, and further strengthen international burden-sharing;

*Acknowledge and stress* that durable solutions entail tackling the root causes of displacement, stress the need for more effective preventive measures at national, regional and international levels to strengthen peace and reconciliation processes, and highlight the growing impact of climate change and terrorism as root causes of displacement – dimensions that will need to be taken into account in designing durable solutions and tackling root causes;

*Agree* to support the strengthening of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts with a view to addressing the root causes of displacement through the work of relevant committees in our national parliaments, with a particular focus on women's roles and inclusion, and involving forcibly displaced women and youth to effectively contribute to these processes in countries of refuge and/or return; recall the importance of implementing UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security;

*Recognize* that good governance, observance of the rule of law and respect for human rights are the best forms of prevention of conflict and forced displacement, while also contributing to peace, stability and economic development;

*Commit* to increased advocacy efforts in the fight against xenophobia and stereotypes, with a view to fostering social cohesion between refugees and host communities and enhancing peaceful co-existence, and acknowledge that parliamentarians have a particular responsibility as opinion leaders to bridge gaps and avoid the politicization of humanitarian space, needs and issues;

*Agree* to advocate for a resolution to existing situations of statelessness in our countries and regions, by reviewing our national legislation to ensure its compliance with international standards on prevention and elimination of statelessness and removing any discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or gender that may cause statelessness;

*Commit* to raising further awareness of UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign, the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024, and global and regional legal frameworks that address statelessness;

*Also commit*, as participants of this Conference, to establishing an informal platform through the PAP and the IPU to share good parliamentary practices and legislative reforms by our parliaments and to disseminate these among the parliamentary community;

*Call upon* all international, regional and sub-regional parliaments and national parliamentary assemblies across the African continent to accelerate efforts to support the creation of alliances to advance the points agreed in this Declaration;

*Also call upon* the PAP, the IPU and UNHCR and other relevant organizations to facilitate a wide-ranging debate on aligning national legislation with the GCR, and on relevant practices and situations that require our attention, and encourage support for the IPU's pledges to the GRF and for the work of the PAP in follow-up to the 2019 African Year focusing on refugees and displacement;

*Commit* to disseminate and to discuss the present Declaration in our respective parliaments;

*Also request the PAP*, the IPU and UNHCR to widely disseminate this Declaration with a view to facilitating its follow-up, and call on them to support national action to facilitate implementation of the commitments made at this Conference;

*Undertake* to report back in the various IPU and PAP platforms on concrete action taken.