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STATEMENT BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ILEKA ATOKI
AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

**ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY**

ON

**AGENDA ITEM: 44
REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH
COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS
RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND
DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN
QUESTIONS**

**AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE
OF THE 62ND SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

NEW YORK, 08 NOVEMBER 2007

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to address the committee on item 44 entitled: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions, on behalf of the states members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely : Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe and my own, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

SADC welcomes the important work undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner for refugees and its executive committee during the course of the year and wishes to express its gratitude to the High Commissioner for refugees for his work as contained in the report on the activities of his office. Our gratitude is also directed toward all the other speakers for the very informative reports submitted in compliance with GA resolutions.

Mr. Chairman,

The number of refugees is still increasing. There are more than ten million refugees in the world today, that is up from 8.4 million in 2006, people subjected to violence fleeing what is familiar, hoping to rebuild their lives in a new country, while living in tents in crowded camps, where food, water, healthcare, and education are unavailable, and in many places, violence and fighting continue to threaten their lives, even in exile.

The same situation is true for the internally displaced persons (IDP's) who are forced to leave their homes, in search of shelter in more secure parts of their own countries. They, too, are vulnerable to extreme poverty. However, they are often beyond the reach of international humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding consolidation of peace processes, humanitarian operations remain a major challenge as some parts of Africa are facing a great deal of instability, with a number of new, renewed or intensified crisis still producing more and more refugees and other displaced persons.

Among refugees, returnees and internally displaced peoples, women and children are the majority of those affected by conflict and are victims of atrocities and other consequences of conflict. They are particularly exposed and have particular protection needs.

Children separated from their parents are even more exposed to abuses and potential violations of their rights, which is the reason why SADC advocates reunification as a priority for protection agencies.

Violence against women is a major concern as well. Governments, the United Nations entities and partners have taken various forms of action to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence. SADC wishes to acknowledge the UNHCR Executive Committee for its adoption of a conclusion on women and girls at risk, as a framework for preventing specific protection risks.

Comprehensive sexual and gender based violence programs involving identification and treatment of survivors, including fistula repairs, psychosocial counseling, as well as ensuring women's participation in all program planning are also key to facilitating their reintegration within their communities. Moreover combating the spread of HIV/AIDS needs to remain a high priority for UN entities and partners.

Mr. Chairman,

SADC considers that the protection of refugees is primarily the responsibility of states, whose full and effective cooperation, action and political resolve are required to enable the Office of the High Commissioner to fulfill its mandated functions and continue to play its catalytic role in mobilizing assistance to address the root causes as well as the economic, environment and social impact of large-scale refugee populations in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries.

In this regard it is also important that all States and relevant non-governmental and other organizations, in a spirit of international solidarity and burden-and responsibility sharing, gather in cooperating and mobilizing resources aimed to enhance the capacity of and reduce the heavy burden borne by, countries that have received large numbers of refugees.

Mr. Chairman,

Our sub-region is facing increasing mixed flows of refugees and economic migrants who are putting a strain on the asylum regime and have led to tighter border controls in some countries.

In this regard, SADC acknowledge efforts deployed by the UNHCR in ensuring that Governments have effective mechanism in place and the necessary capacity to identify people in need of international protection.

SADC notes with satisfaction that, since its introduction in late 2005, the cluster approach has helped to strengthen efforts to address the needs of internally displaced persons at both global and field levels with clarification of areas of responsibilities.

The global cluster have further provided staff deployments, training and technical support to strengthen the capacity of Governments, the United Nations and non governmental organizations partners to address the protection and assistance needs of IDP's.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, SADC wishes to express its appreciation for the leadership shown by the Office of the High Commissioner for refugees, and commands the Office for its ongoing efforts, with the support to international community, to assist African countries of asylum and to respond to the protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa and for its support and cooperation for his work on behalf of the refugees everywhere.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman