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UN hails first ratification of African pact to protect millions of displaced people



A group of IDPs in Uganda

19 February 2010 – The United Nations refugee agency today called on all African Union (AU) member countries to follow Uganda's example and ratify the first legally binding international treaty to provide legal protection and aid to millions of people displaced within their own countries by conflicts and natural calamities.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**) warmly welcomed Uganda's ratification of the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa, which was adopted in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, last October.

"This first ratification, coming within the first four month's of the Convention's adoption, is an important milestone," it **said**, noting that that 25 nations – or nearly half of AU Member States – had now signed the treaty, which needs 15 ratifications to come into force, a goal the AU has set for the end of this year.

At the beginning of last year, an estimated 11.6 million people were internally displaced by conflict in Africa, nearly 45 per cent of the world's internally displaced persons (IDPs)

The treaty's adoption "has come at a time when Africa is faced with complex and persistent internal displacement challenges affecting millions of people," UNHCR said. "When ratified and implemented, the Convention will provide a critically important legal framework for protecting, assisting and finding solutions for millions of IDPs in Africa, as well as for the prevention of future displacement by addressing the root causes."

At its adoption in October, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres said the convention served as a reminder that the responsibility to protect its own citizens is first and foremost an individual State responsibility but that where the State fails to do so, there is a collective African responsibility to act.

"This represents the concept of 'responsibility to protect' in action. It demonstrates that national sovereignty is fully compatible with the responsibility to protect," he told a news conference.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay called the treaty's adoption "a significant step forward in filling the unfortunate vacuum that has traditionally been the lot of internally displaced people..

"It is very good to see Africa taking a leadership role in creating the first legally-binding instrument to protect and assist internally displaced persons across the continent," she said.

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