



REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA
**Liberia Refugee Repatriation and
Resettlement Commission**



Statement By

Hon. Stephen Neufville

**Acting Minister of Internal affairs and Head of Delegation
Of the Republic of Liberia**

At the

68th Session of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR

Geneva, Switzerland

October 2-6, 2017

Excellences:

Madam Chairman, High Commissioner, Fellow Delegates, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am very grateful for the privilege accorded my Country to participate in this very important gathering which marks the 68th Session of the Executive Committee Meeting.

I bring you greetings from Her Excellency, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia and the peace loving people of Liberia as we approach our third successive democratic elections on October 10, 2017. The Liberian Delegation applauds you for organizing this 68th EXCOM.

We hereby recognize the numerous challenges of Humanitarian workers and the sacrificial services of UNHCR staff in hot zones.

The Liberian delegation joins other African countries to support the statement of H. E. the Ambassador of Togo on Behalf of the African Group.

Populations of concern

Madam Chairman,

Presently, the Total refugee and asylum seeker population in Liberia is 11, 986 individuals, of which 11,896 are Ivorian refugees. Also, there are 374 rejected Sierra Leoneans not included in that number:

A) Ivorian Refugee Population

Of the total population of Ivorian refugees, 76.3% reside in the 3 refugee camps; 22.5% in host communities and 1.1% live in the capital, Monrovia. The gender make-up of the population is 51% female and 49% male.

B) Rejected Sierra Leonean caseload (urban caseload in Montserrado County)

Sierra Leonean refugees enjoyed the protection of the Liberian Government for over 20 years. They started arriving in Liberia in 1991. Voluntary repatriation commenced in 1994 and stopped in 2004 with a residual population of 3,564.

The Cessation clause was invoked in 2008 and 375 exempted. The rest opted for local integration (residence permit and/or naturalization). Recently, a review of the exempted caseload was initiated by the Eligibility Committee to ascertain whether the previous condition for their continuous asylum still exists. Findings from the review process indicated that 374 were rejected.

C) Refugees of mixed nationalities and asylum seekers

Mixed nationality -63 and Asylum seekers – 27):

The refugees of mixed nationality countries of origin are: Sierra Leone, Guinea, Democratic Republic Congo, Algeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iraq, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan,

Palestine, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Togo and Uganda while the Asylum-seekers' countries of origin also include: the DRC, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Pakistan, Somalia, South Africa and Syria.

Operational priorities by caseloads

Durable Solutions with particular focus on voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees in Liberia was the major strategic priority of the Government of Liberia and UNHCR for the first semester of the year. The focus of the operation for the period July to December 2017 is the integration of refugee education and health services into the national system.

Ivorian refugees:

Voluntary repatriation

The 2014/2015 Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa led to the closure of the land border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, forcing UNHCR and its partners to suspend the repatriation operations in July 2014. The 2015 peaceful Presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire and the continued stable security situation provided conditions conducive for the resumption of the voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Liberia from 18 December 2015 using humanitarian corridors since the borders were officially closed. Since its resumption, 26,438 Ivorian refugees have returned home in safety and dignity: 1,114 in December 2015, 18,279 in 2016 and 6,595 in 2017. The target for 2017 is 13,000 refugees.

Challenges: The main challenge is organizing repatriation convoys during the rainy season (June to October) in both countries that results to muddy and slippery road conditions. Refugees are adopting a "wait and see" attitude before making the final decision to return home.

Local integration:

It was envisaged that by the end of June 2017, an estimated 5,000 Ivorian refugees would have opted to be integrated in the Liberian communities. But to date, a total of 11,896 Ivoirian refugees still remain. Refugees share strong cultural, language and occupational affinities with the host community members in the various counties where they reside. UNHCR proposes to adopt the Alternatives to Camps (ATC) policy using a community based approach to promote social cohesion among refugees and the host community, encourage the sharing of resources and infrastructure developed by UNHCR in a bid to promote cultural and socio-economic integration as a first step towards legal integration. In this context, the Representation has already embarked on the process of integrating refugee education and health services into the national structures. The health and educational facilities constructed by UNHCR will be handed over to the relevant ministries and incorporated in the national service delivery system. The former refugee schools have adopted the Liberian educational curriculum of the last academic year, 2016. The schools have been incorporated into the national Educational Information management System (EMIS). A total of 52 teachers have been hired and three Principals appointed.

On the health front, the running of the refugee health facility in Nimba County has been turned over to the Ministry of Health (MoH). UNHCR is continuing to support the ambulance service as

well as paying staff salaries till they are incorporated into the national budget in July 2018. In the refugee camps of Maryland and Grand Gedeh Counties, the health services delivery is envisaged to be turned over in October and December 2017 respectively. In order to engage in a fully informed local integration exercise, the operation has conducted a livelihood and self-reliance survey to establish available opportunities in the communities.

Furthermore, discussions are already underway with the Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare to recruit social workers to assist in addressing issues related to child protection and social welfare for the most vulnerable refugees.

Challenges:

1. Government in principle supports the local integration of refugees. However, gains made for the past 11 years were eroded due to the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease in 2014. This was further compounded by sharp decline in the prices of Liberia natural resources, such as rubber and iron ore that has put serious strain on government revenue. Government hopes to reduce the number of refugees to 5,000 or far below to trigger local integration and would need the full support of UHNCR to facilitate their socio economic, and legal integration.
2. The Government budget year runs from July to June, unless negotiated prior to the start of the financial year, the Government cannot absorb financial costs. . Consequently, the government cannot cover teachers and health staff salaries for the time being.
3. Due to financial constraints, government put a freeze on staff recruitments. Consequently, we appeal that UNHCR supports the government through the process by absorbing the cost of teachers and health workers salaries for the year. This will enable government to include the cost in the national budget as a priority by July 2018.

Rejected Sierra Leonean Refugees:

The objective is to find durable solutions like voluntary repatriation or local integration by 31 December 2017. The Representation is working with the government to review claims of the exempted refugees in order to propose applicable solutions i.e. repatriation or local integration. As at 31st August 2017 some 95 cases have been reviewed, all of which were denied refugee status. Most of the Sierra Leonean refugees have spent more than 20 years in Liberia and the political situation in the country of origin is stable.

Challenges:

Socio-economic integration remains bleak for the exempted refugees as a result of strained national economy.

Urban refugees

The Representation continues to assist the 63 refugees of mixed nationalities. Most of the refugees are protracted cases. Some have resided in the country for 25 or more years. The operation is exploring local integration for some of the refugees and voluntary repatriation opportunities for others.

Challenges:

The main challenge for this group is the discrimination in the nationality law of Liberia against people of non-negro descent. The Constitution forbids individuals who are not of Negro descent from acquiring Liberian nationality.

Statelessness

The Representation is also working with the Government of Liberia through the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) to amend the Alien and Nationality Law to allow Liberian females to pass on their nationality to their children as well as addressing other gaps in the law to prevent statelessness. Additionally, the Liberia Refugee Agency, LRRRC, is working with the Cabinet for its endorsement of the Draft Statelessness Action Plan.

Challenges:

Navigating from the normal refugee work to statelessness activities is very complicated due to the workload of UNHCR staff and Government focal point on statelessness. Therefore, there is a need to separately hire a consultant specifically on statelessness activities who will propel on daily activities and liaise with government Focus Point and UNHCR protection on their contribution to achieving the joint objective.

I like to conclude, Madam Chairman, that as was highlighted by his Excellency, the Ambassador of Togo, who spoke on behalf of the African group, Liberia strongly support the African Group position with regard to additional funding for refugee programs.

Recommendations:

- The need to support Peaceful coexistence Project for Host Communities to strengthen relationship for local integration;
- There is a need for additional budgetary support to assist the educational and health sectors in the local integration drive;
- That UNHCR revisit the Sierra Leonean caseloads both the residual caseload of refugees who opted for Local Integration and the RSD rejected caseload;
- That UNHCR support Government of Liberia in the development of database to help improve protection programming;
- That UNHCR make practical efforts to assist the Government of Liberia (LRRRC) to provide Machine Readable Travel Document (MR-CTDs) for refugees;
- The need to appoint a consultant specifically on statelessness activities who will propel daily activities and liaise with government Focus Point and UNHCR protection on their support to achieving the joint objective.
- That UNHCR provide support to the Domestication of the Kampala Convention; and
- That a clear and define policy, program and strategy be developed for Durable Solution for all categories of refugees in Liberia.

Thank You Madam Chairman.