

Humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa

Initial proceedings

At its 5677th meeting, on 21 May 2007, the Council included in its agenda the item entitled “Humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa”. The Council heard a briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. All Council members made statements during the meeting.

The Under-Secretary-General reported on his recent visits to Somalia and Uganda, and outlined the humanitarian situation in those two countries. He noted that the recent massive displacement of people in the Somali capital of Mogadishu had further compounded one of the most difficult humanitarian situations in the world. In this context, he stated that conflict, harassment of humanitarian workers and piracy continued to impede humanitarian access to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Turning to Uganda, he stated that although the situation remained fragile and humanitarian needs were still significant, the international community now had the opportunity, through supporting the political process in Juba and continued humanitarian- and recovery assistance, to resolve one of Africa’s major humanitarian emergencies. He indicated that a large number of people were still affected by the humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda, including 1.6 million still living in camps, and that the complex situation would require a highly flexible and coordinated approach. Important issues like land rights; the continued demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and the fate of extremely vulnerable groups also needed to be taken into account.

While stressing that the success of the peace process was the immediate key to the humanitarian situation, the Under-Secretary-General noted the Juba talks, with the mediation of the Government of Southern Sudan and the facilitation of President Chissano, were beginning to produce some results. At the same time, the process was fragile, and the issue of International Criminal Court warrants would have to be addressed in a way that satisfied the requirements of both peace and justice.¹

¹ S/PV.5677, pp. 2-6.

Council members voiced concern at the deteriorating political and humanitarian situation in Somalia. They were unanimous in stressing the importance of promoting a genuine political dialogue in order to improve the humanitarian situation. According to some representatives, the key to an inclusive political process was a successful convening of the proposed Congress of National Reconciliation scheduled for June.

Council members urged the Somali authorities to recognize the scale of the crisis and extend full cooperation to the United Nations and other aid agencies, including unhindered humanitarian access. The representative of France called upon the Somali Transitional Federal Government, the Ethiopian forces and the armed groups to respect international humanitarian law.² The representative of the United States voiced concern at the violence by extremist elements, including the use of explosive devices.³ Several representatives welcomed the planned visit by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) to Somalia to investigate alleged human rights violations.⁴

A number of representatives reaffirmed support for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and called for its full deployment.⁵ The United States reiterated support for a robust contingency planning by the Secretariat for transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation.⁶

Council members welcomed the improved situation in Northern Uganda, but emphasized the need for the donor community to stay engaged as 1.6 million IDPs still remained in the camps.

While welcoming the Juba peace talks, a number of delegations underlined the need to ensure justice vis-à-vis the Lord Resistance Army (LRA). The representative of Panama maintained that any agreement with LRA should be consistent with international law and that no amnesty should be given to those who had committed serious human rights violations.⁷ Similarly, the representative of Belgium argued that any form of “alternative justice” to the International Criminal Court must meet the minimum

² Ibid., pp. 10- 11.

³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 8-10 (United Kingdom); pp. 18-19 (United States) pp. 10-11 (France); pp. 13-14 (Italy); and pp. 16-18 (Peru).

⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10 (Indonesia); pp. 10-11 (France); pp. 12-13 (Russian Federation); pp. 13-14 (Italy); pp. 15-16 (Panama) and pp. 17-18 (Belgium).

⁶ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁷ Ibid., p. 15-16.

international standards.⁸ The representative of Peru urged LRA to free non-combatants who were being held hostage. In the context of disarmament operations in the Karamoja region, France called on the Government of Uganda to refrain from using force.⁹

Responding to questions, the Under-Secretary-General recognized the Council's support for his analysis of the severity and size of the displacement problem as well as for the proposed actions, including the visit by OHCHR. He stressed the need for the Somali authorities to respect the impartiality of humanitarian agencies, and for the Central Government to disseminate instructions that humanitarian access must be facilitated. He underlined that the key to addressing the humanitarian crisis would be to move towards an inclusive political dialogue. He expressed the hope that in future statements, the Council would include a call for full humanitarian access. Adding that piracy remained a major impediment to World Food Program deliveries to Somalia, he also urged the international community to take a stance on that issue and undertake efforts to stop it.

In relation to children and armed conflict, the Under-Secretary-General observed that all parties in the two countries had been guilty of recruiting and using child-soldiers, underscoring that this must come to an end. Noting that LRA was still holding a number of hostages, he appealed for their immediate release, adding that any agreement resulting from the Juba talks must include the return of all hostages. Finally, he stated that the need to avoid impunity was being addressed in the context of the Juba talks.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁹ S/PV. 5677, p. 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-21.