The scale of the current forced displacement crisis is unprecedented. According to UNHCR's 2018 Global Trends Report, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million in 2018; of which 41.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 25.9 million were refugees, and 3.5 million were asylum seekers. This is the highest level in the last 70 years, double the level of 20 years ago, and 2.3 million more than just a year ago.

While forced displacement is a global phenomenon, Africa continues to be disproportionately impacted. The continent accounts for one-third of refugees globally, with the bulk of African refugee movements happening within Africa. According to the Global Trends Report, half of the ten countries with the highest refugee population relative to national population are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Forced displacement is driven by a myriad of complex and often overlapping factors. Conflict, terrorism, violence, climate change, natural disasters and health emergencies are amongst the main drivers. The protracted nature of today's conflicts and the resulting uncertainty, insecurity and instability, leads to prolonged displacement experiences, which do not only affect the forcibly displaced, but also host communities and countries.

As highlighted by the United Nations Secretary General and the African Union Chairperson, there are no humanitarian stand-alone, only political and developmental, solutions to humanitarian crises, including forced displacement. In other words, there is a need for a comprehensive and integrated response to forced displacement; one that addresses root causes to prevent further displacement, as well as provide durable solutions for the many millions already displaced.

The last few years have witnessed the beginnings of the evolution of such a framework. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda recognized IDPs and refugees as vulnerable populations, and resolved to take "actions in conformity with international law, to remove obstacles and constraints, strengthen support and meet the special needs of people living in areas affected by humanitarian complex emergencies, and in areas affected by terrorism." The 2030 agenda further highlights the need for cooperation to strengthen resilience of host communities and to ensure "safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect of human rights and humane treatment of migrants, regardless of migration status, of refugees and of displaced persons."

In Africa, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Roadmap (2016-2020) emphasized that "migration and refugee issues relate to all strategic priorities of the Roadmap," and that during the implementation of the Roadmap, "efforts must be undertaken to address the relationship between displacement, migration and peace and security." The Master Roadmap on Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by 2020, went a step further, highlighting the importance of "addressing the plight of internally displaced people and refugees and eliminating the root causes of this phenomenon by fully implementing continental and universal frameworks."

Inspired by the vision and aspirations of "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want", the AU adopted a Common African Position on Humanitarian Effectiveness (CAP) in 2016. While defining
Africa’s new humanitarian architecture, including the creation of the African Humanitarian Agency, the CAP also emphasized the imperative of addressing the root causes of forced displacement and achieving durable solutions. Last year, the AU also adopted a CAP on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Humane Migration (GCM).

On the national level, 46 out of the AU’s member states ratified the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, and 28 AU member states ratified the Kampala Convention. Several African countries have piloted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which resulted in the adoption of progressive laws and policies. Africa also showed strong support to the Global Compact for Refugees.

The above notwithstanding, and despite the commendable efforts of African nations, responses remain largely of an ad hoc nature (providing relief, shelter and aid, etc.), while not being part of longer-term plans for transitions to more durable solutions and often times lacking the necessary resources needed to strengthen the resilience of both host communities and displaced populations. Moreover, protection needs – especially of women, children and other vulnerable groups - often go undetected or unmet, increasing therefore the risks of exploitation, trafficking, migrant smuggling, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), arbitrary detention, radicalization, and forced recruitment into terrorist and criminal organizations, all breaching further instability and unrest in communities, states and regions.

While the sheer size and the protracted nature of forced displacement in Africa have put enormous pressures on host communities and countries, lack of opportunities and the protracted uncertainty about the future pushes many of the forcibly displaced to adopt dangerous survival strategies. Many also resort to circular movements as a coping strategy, right at the onset of a displacement, and after humanitarian assistance diminishes, or if it is difficult to reach, trapped in a limbo between places of origin and places of protection, often conditioned by the re-escalation of conflict or occurrence of violence.

In addition, experience has shown that peace agreements alone are not sufficient to ensure sustainable return of displaced persons. Forced displacement brings along a host of issues that are not necessarily considered in peace agreements. These include physical security of returnees, documentation, housing and land rights, access to education, employment opportunities, capital and justice, not to mention social tension, especially when return is not to communities of origin. Incorporating these issues in peace agreements and peacebuilding efforts will have a positive impact on the sustainability of peace interventions. Related to the above, peace operations play important roles in dealing with forced displacement (protection of civilians, support to the extension of state authority, peacebuilding efforts, etc.), that would require closer collaboration with humanitarian and developmental actors.

All of the above challenges point to the imperative of shifting from “ad hoc responses” to more “durable solutions”, one that establishes synergies and achieves better coordination across the peace-development-humanitarian continuum in Africa, including through the adoption of comprehensive development-oriented approaches and conflict-sensitive and human rights-based measures in governance of forced displacement. Predictable international solidarity will also be necessary. Equally important is identifying the implications of the evolving sustainable development and sustaining peace agendas on the extensive body of legal and normative, continental and regional, frameworks and instruments, with a view to informing the evolution and
operationalization of the African Humanitarian Architecture. And given the scale and protracted nature of the problem of forced displacement, there is also a need for a new focus on partnerships and burden-sharing.

The Expert Workshop

To bring global visibility to forced displacement in Africa, African heads of States and Governments declared 2019 as the “Year of Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced Persons.” This coincides with the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU Refugee Convention), and the 10th Anniversary of the 2009 AU Convention for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (The Kampala Convention). While an important opportunity to celebrate and recommit to the values and standards enshrined in these legal instruments, the commemoration also presents a unique platform to take stock of the implementation of these instruments and the operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees, while advancing a shift from ad hoc responses to durable solutions to forced displacement.

Upon assuming the Chairmanship of the African Union in February 2019, Egypt announced the launch of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, as a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform to examine the interlinkages between the “sustaining peace” and “sustainable development” agendas. In his speech before the AU Summit, President Abdelfattah el-Sisi highlighted that “the spread of conflicts, brutality of terrorism, barbarity of extremism, climate change, severity of poverty, water scarcity and drought, combined are factors that force people to leave their homes. This urges us to adopt a development approach, that includes mega continental and regional projects to provide job opportunities and innovative reconstruction programs to bring back the displaced to their homes.”

Acting in its capacity as the Secretariat of the Aswan Forum, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), is organizing an Expert Workshop in Cairo, Egypt on 28-29 August 2019, titled:

Africa’s Forcibly Displaced: From Ad Hoc Responses to Durable Solutions

The workshop will bring humanitarian, development, and peace and security actors, together with officials from African countries, the African Union Commission, including from the Departments for Political Affairs and Peace and Security, the AU Special Rapporteur on Refugees, IDPs, and Migrants, representatives of Regional Economic Committees, regional and continental actors, and partner countries to share views on challenges and opportunities for preventing conflict and promoting sustainable development and peace, with a view to address forced displacement of Africans in and out of Africa. Specifically, the workshop deliberations will aim to:

- Identify the challenges faced by African origin, transit and host states in preventing, mitigating and responding to forced displacement, including protection, in a manner consistent with their obligations under relevant regional and international legal and normative frameworks;
- Develop recommendations to update and enhance the implementation of relevant international and regional normative and legal frameworks and instruments (Global Compact on Refugees, Global Compact on Migration, the Sustainable Development Agenda, the Sustaining Peace Resolutions, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the Kampala Convention).
- Inform the ongoing deliberations concerning the operationalization of the African Humanitarian Architecture, including the African Humanitarian Agency, and the integration and coordination of its work with that of other relevant AU Departments (peace and security, developmental, etc.), so as to provide an integrated response to forced displacement;
- Inform the design, implementation and evaluation of new and innovative programs and interventions aimed at addressing the root causes of forced displacement and responding to the needs of the forcibly displaced, as well as source and host nations and communities;
- Enhancing regional cooperation in preventing, mitigating and responding to forced displacement.

**Outcome**

A report summarizing the key findings and recommendations of the workshop will be generated. The report will provide inputs for the Aswan Report on Sustainable Peace and Development and will be discussed during the Aswan Forum on Sustainable Peace and Development. It will also be shared with African countries and the AU in order to contribute to and inform the ongoing activities to implement the AU 2019 theme of the year.