



UNHCR appeals to Kenya over decision to end refugee hosting

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On Friday of last week (May 6th), the Government of Kenya announced that it intended to end the hosting of refugees, citing economic, security and environmental burdens. A statement issued by the Ministry of Interior, said the Government had disbanded its Department of Refugee Affairs and was working on a mechanism for the closure of Kenya's refugee camps – a move that could affect as many as 600,000 lives.

It is with profound concern that UNHCR takes note of this announcement. For almost a quarter of a century Kenya has played a vital role in East Africa and the Horn of Africa in providing asylum to people forced to flee persecution and war. The safety of hundreds of thousands of Somalis, South Sudanese and others has hinged on Kenya's generosity and its willingness to be a leading beacon in the region for international protection. Tragically, the situations in Somalia and South Sudan that cause people to flee are still unresolved today.

UNHCR has been, and will continue to be, in touch with the Kenyan Government to fully understand the implications of its statement. We recognize that Kenya has played an extraordinary role over many years as one of the world's frontline major refugee hosting nations, and that inevitably this has had many consequences for the country and its population. It is for these reasons, that UNHCR has been a prominent advocate for robust international support for Kenya, including support for host communities and a careful listening to their concerns.

In today's global context of some 60 million people forcibly displaced, it is more important than ever that international asylum obligations prevail and are properly supported. In light of this, and because of the potentially devastating consequences for hundreds of thousands of people that premature ending of refugee hosting would have, UNHCR is calling on the Government of Kenya to reconsider its decision and to avoid taking any action that might be at odds with its international obligations towards people needing sanctuary from danger and persecution.

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