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**AFRICA MUST INCLUDE DISPLACED POPULATIONS IN COVID-19  
RESPONSE PLANS:**

***STATEMENT BY AFRICA HUMANITARIAN ACTION (AHA)***

With over 868,000 cases confirmed as of 01 April 2020, the novel coronavirus global pandemic continues to overwhelm the world. Africa's first confirmed case of COVID-19 surfaced in Egypt on 15 February, followed by the first known sub-Saharan case in Nigeria on 28 February. According to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), there are currently 5,786 confirmed cases in 49 AU Member States with 196 deaths and 412 recoveries.

As governments in the continent look inward to roll out robust national response measures, Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA) urges that these responses include refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, stateless people, returnees and internally displaced populations. The response to COVID-19 must serve as yet another opportunity for African states to stand as examples of global solidarity and cooperation now more than ever. We call on African nations to build on the 2019 African Union Theme of the Year, which called on Member States to reinforce commitments towards durable solutions to forced displacement.

While AHA recognizes the sovereignty of nations to ensure the safety of their citizens, we urge that sweeping measures such as sealing borders should not apply to refugees fleeing conflict and persecutions. Exceptions should be put in place to facilitate the safe entry and processing of asylum applications. Denying asylum proceedings, which are guaranteed under international and African legal instruments, threatens the wellbeing and safety of thousands seeking protection.

Forcibly displaced populations worldwide are among the most vulnerable to be impacted by the pandemic. The case in Africa, home to more than 17.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 6.3 million refugees, is no different. Refugees and IDPs – whether in camps, settlements or densely populated urban settings – tend to live in overcrowded households. They have limitations to access basic services, and often do not have access to reliable information communication networks. These conditions are further exacerbated in countries already tackling other forms of instability caused by conflict, climate change, locust swarms and food insecurity.

The experience from AHA's joint response with the African Union during the West Africa Ebola epidemic shows that vulnerable and marginalized populations, regardless of their place of origin, stand to bear the worst of a virus outbreak. COVID-19 does not respect borders, nor discriminate the citizens of one nation over the other. Thus, AHA calls on African nations to encompass the most vulnerable in their response plans and to reject discriminatory actions and xenophobic tendencies in their countries.



We urge public health and national security officials across the continent to go the extra mile to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable – citizens and neighbors alike – in the fight against this global pandemic. Adopting a whole-of-community approach is in the self-interest of all governments.

This week, setting a good example of blending humanitarianism in domestic public policy, Portugal temporarily granted migrants and asylum seekers “full citizenship rights,” allowing them access to health services as the outbreak of the novel coronavirus escalates in the country. These type of inclusive national policies recognize that failure to combat the virus in the communities most in need will likely pave the way for its return to the mainstream.

Multiple humanitarian appeals have been launched by national governments. Last week, African ministers of finance called for a coordinated COVID-19 response underscoring the need for both immediate frontline health response, and calling for an emergency economic stimulus of USD 100 billion. Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) urged G-20 leaders to help Africa cope with the pandemic by facilitating debt relief and providing \$150 billion in emergency funding. The U.N. is seeking USD 2.01 billion to fight the virus in the world’s poorest countries, including some 22 African nations.

As these and other resources are allocated to COVID-19 response efforts, AHA urges African policymakers to be guided by the virtues of humanity and compassion. We call on nations to continue to uphold their commitments to receive, protect and assist the continent’s forcibly displaced populations, especially now.

We are all in it together.