

Joint Press release by ARRA & UNHCR for immediate release

ARRA, UNHCR and humanitarian partners commemorate World Refugee Day against backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic

Addis Ababa/Ethiopia 19 June 2020: -The Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs, (ARRA) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, pay homage to refugees, their hosts and frontline humanitarian workers as they commemorate the World Refugee Day on 20 June 2020 against a backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The principals of the two agencies seized the opportunity to extend their gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Ethiopia, donors and partners for their continued support and solidarity during these uncertain times.

“The virus has stopped us from organizing physical events to commemorate World Refugee Day together with refugees, partners, donors and others. But it cannot prevent us from holding ‘virtual’ events to celebrate the indomitable spirits of refugees and humanitarian workers who are fighting the pandemic on the frontlines”, Said Addisu Kebelessa, Deputy Director General of ARRA.

Ato Addisu appreciated the support the Government is receiving from donors and close partners like UNHCR to mitigate the scourge of COVID-19 and to sustain the regular programmes. But he said resources are falling far short and appealed for more financial support to overcome the dire health and economic impacts of the virus.

Refugees and IDPs often live in overcrowded conditions where physical distancing is practically impossible. While there has been no large-scale outbreak amongst the refugee settings in Ethiopia so far, ARRA, UNHCR, the Regional Health Bureaus and partners are making concerted efforts to mitigate the transmission of the virus in the country’s 26 refugee camps and surrounding host community locations.

“As we mark World Refugee Day 2020, not only is the world grappling with the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has also seen record numbers of people who have fled their homes to find safety”, said Ann Encontre, the UNHCR Representative in Ethiopia. “Everyone of us can play our roles and make a difference in turning the tide of the devastation we are seeing now. Because every action counts.”

UNHCR’s Global Trends Report released on 18 June shows that an unprecedented 79.5 million people were displaced as of the end of 2019. This is more than the populations of the United Kingdom and Belgium combined.

Ms. Encontre echoed Ato Addisu in appealing for more support and solidarity, saying, “What started as a health crisis has expanded, and today refugees and other forcibly displaced people face serious economic challenges”.

Refugees are included in the national COVID-19 response plan which UNHCR highly appreciates. This is an extension of Ethiopia’s progressive refugee policy, promoting inclusion of refugees in national development plans.

ARRA and UNHCR have planned several online activities including releasing World Refugee Day greetings from refugees all over Ethiopia and statements by the leadership of the two agencies on their social media platforms, as well as a special performance by UNHCR

Goodwill Ambassador Betty G on her and UNHCR's social media channels. (FB: @UNHCREthio, Twitter: @UNHCREthiopia, FB: @Arra Addis Ababa, twitter: @ItsBettyG).

Ethiopia currently hosts over 763,000 registered and many more unregistered refugees and asylum seekers.

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