



## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

### IOM and UNHCR Concerned by Deaths of 27 Ethiopian Migrants in Zambia

**Pretoria, 14 December 2022** – The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Southern Africa are deeply shocked and alarmed by the discovery of the bodies of 27 Ethiopian nationals, found abandoned in Chongwe Ngwerere, Zambia.

This tragedy comes less than two months after the bodies of 30 Ethiopian migrants were discovered in a mass grave in neighbouring Malawi, and two years after 64 Ethiopian men were found dead, asphyxiated, in a sealed shipping container in Mozambique. These tragedies are compounded with the disappearance of 22 families of migrants and 41 deaths in Zimbabwe between 2020 and 2021 as well as the disappearance of 78 migrants in 2021 and 2022 in the Indian Ocean.

Irregular migration along the “Southern Route” is often facilitated by an intricate network of smugglers and traffickers engaging in aggravated smuggling or trafficking—aggressive attempts to avoid detection by authorities that put migrants’ lives in danger.

Aggravated smuggling or trafficking increases migrants and asylum seekers’ risks on a route that already includes natural hazards, utilization of unsafe means of transportation, exploitation, and other abuses. Migrants and asylum seekers on this route are often subject to detention, violence, human trafficking and even death. This latest tragedy on the outskirts of the Zambian capital Lusaka, highlights the urgent need to address the challenges of irregular migration including through a transnational response to smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons along the ‘Southern Route’, which runs from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa.

It also highlights the need for the pursuit by countries in the region of sustainable solutions for migrants and asylum seekers, in line with the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees.

According to IOM’s [Missing Migrants Project](#), more than 900 Ethiopians have died on migration routes since 2014, including this latest incident. Africa is the second-deadliest region for people on the move, with more than 9,000 deaths during migration documented on the continent since 2014. Regional household surveys indicate that these figures are a vast undercount.

UNHCR indicates that some 6,000 migrants were intercepted in 2021 on the Indian Ocean Sea while attempting to reach Mayotte Island, which is a French territory. In addition to people in search of asylum who are moving together with migrants, more than 9,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers have been moving within, outside and towards the Southern Africa region since 2017.

Comoros is the largest second transit country in the region from South-East Tanzania to Mayotte via Anjouan Island (Comoros).

Migrants and asylum-seekers are often subjected to arbitrary detention, violence, exploitation, abuse, and as in this latest case demonstrates, death.

IOM and UNHCR offer their condolences to the families of the deceased and calls on the authorities to ensure a dignified recovery, identification and transfer of the remains of the deceased migrants, and appropriately notifying and assisting their families.

IOM and UNHCR also calls on governments along the route to enhance regional cooperation to ensure the safety and protection of migrants and refugees, regardless of their status and across all stages of their journeys.

Preventing migrant and asylum-seeker deaths starts with creating and strengthening possibilities for safe and regular migration in a manner that upholds the right to family life. It should also respond to the needs of migrants and asylum-seekers in a situation of vulnerability, as well as practices for admission and stay, based on compassionate, humanitarian or other considerations for migrants compelled to leave their countries of origin.

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