

UNHCR and the International Refugee Protection: An Analysis of Its Actions in Protecting Mozambican Refugees in Malawi

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Abstract : The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and to seek permanent solutions to their situation. To fulfil this mandate, the agency works in collaboration with its partners and governments. This paper aims to analyse the agency's actions to protect and provide assistance to Mozambican refugees in Malawi. Since July 2015, approximately 12.000 people have fled Mozambique to neighbouring Malawi due to the political-military conflict between the government of Mozambique and RENAMO (the country's largest opposition party). This led to a series of military clashes between the two parties and the consequent flight of some Mozambicans to Malawi, in search of asylum. Most arrived from the province of Tete, in the central region of Mozambique, and, to a lesser extent, from the province of Zambezia. The asylum seekers arrived in small groups and settled in the village of Kapise in the Mwanza district of Thambani, as well as in Chikwawa and Nsanje districts in Malawi. UNHCR led an interinstitutional response action to manage the flow of Mozambican asylum seekers to Malawi. In view of these aspects and the ongoing challenge of protecting refugees and finding permanent solutions to their situation, UNHCR remains an indispensable international organization. However, there are significant gaps in the international refugee protection regime, and there have been many occasions when UNHCR has failed to fulfill its mandate. The analysis was carried out through qualitative research methods and techniques based essentially on consultation of books, newspapers and scientific articles, television and journalistic reports and interviews with the people who were involved in the process. From the data obtained, it was concluded that UNHCR worked in coordination with its partners and the government of Malawi to provide protection and emergency assistance to the refugees. However, existing funds covered only the immediate needs of refugees, more funds had to be allocated. That was made through an interinstitutional appeal. Although the funds allocated were not sufficient, they allowed the agency to protect and assist the refugees until a permanent solution was found. UNHCR also worked in coordination with the governments of Malawi and Mozambique so that a tripartite agreement was signed between the parties for the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees, since security conditions were guaranteed and the refugees had expressed their willingness to return to their country of origin. UNHCR's actions to protect Mozambican refugees in Malawi have enabled humanitarian conditions to be respected and the rights of refugees to be guaranteed. Cooperation with the different actors involved in the response has allowed UNHCR to fulfil its mandate.

Keywords : assistance , cooperation, international protection, refugees

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