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## **Africa's Refugee Crises: An Appraisal of their Causes, Effects and Prospects**

by

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aimed at evaluating the level of refugee crises in African, their causes, effects and possibility of early resolution. It used both the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 OAU definition of refugee as guide in the study. Data was derived from secondary sources such as UNHCR releases, online articles and newspaper articles. The paper postulates that the antagonistic behaviour of indigenous classes stem from example shown by colonial power when they used the pervasive state power for the twin purpose of suppressing indigenous classes and economic exploitation and repatriation of Africa's resources to metropolitan Europe. On taking over of state power at independence and thereafter, indigenous ruling classes replicated same by using state power as instrument to suppress opponents and also divert state's funds for their private use in order to establish their economic base. The paper x-rays the effects of the problem on the refugee producing and hosting states, the refugee population and the UNHCR as its coordinating body and concluded that the problem has had more negative than positive effects on them. The conclusion was that the problem needs concerted efforts of both in Africa and international community. It traced the persistence of the problem to inability of competing African classes to discipline themselves and curb their excessive and insatiable quest to control state power at all cost and also from Africa's inability to stop the current free flow of arms and ammunitions across international frontiers. Based on all these, it was recommended that African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) should be revisited and strengthened for it to curb the excesses of some African governments. It recommends that human rights bodies such as Amnesty International should investigate more and publicize bad governance. It also recommends more funding for UNHCR.*

### **1) Introduction**

Africa is regrettably becoming the refugees' capital of the world. In the pre-colonial times it was assumed that decolonization war was the cause of refugee problem in Africa. After independence the number and intensity of refugee crises assumed upward trajectory (Bassey, 2005). In 1996 for example, ten African states were refugees-

producing while 24 countries were hosting states but now almost all African states produce and at the same time host refugees with Mozambique (Akinkuotu, 1990) and Ethiopia (Tigre) being the latest states ([www.unhcr.org/africa](http://www.unhcr.org/africa)). According to United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people in the world as at the end of 2020, more than a quarter of this or 20.6 million were refugees. Of this number of world refugees 26% or 5.36 million were in Africa; mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa with the Horn of Africa and East Africa having the majority. Uganda is now hosting the largest number (1.4 million as of 2020), Sudan and Ethiopia are the second and third states respectively. Sudan has over one million refugees while Ethiopia has around 770 thousand ([www.unhcr.news](http://www.unhcr.news) press). Of major worry to the authors of this article is that neither African Union (AU) nor individual African governments appears to understand the debilitating impacts of worsening refugee crises on the refugee population themselves and on their floundering economy. According to Blavo (1999) the consequences of these conflicts impede the social adjustment of refugees in their country of refuge and the development of host states because a great deal of material resources are put to waste in hosting refugees while their nationals and the refugees alike live in poverty (Blavo, 1999). How then can Africa achieve development when a large percentage of its population experience constant forced migration out of their ancestral homes to foreign lands where they idle about in refugee camps? It is unfortunate that the section of the population that suffers the greatest punishment are the poor and down-trodden, especially, women and children in rural areas. On crossing international boundary, they are welcomed by rural people who may be in worst socio-economic level than the incoming refugees themselves.

At this point, it is important to know those who are refugees. In this article we intend to be guided by the definition of Geneva Convention of 1951 and Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) definition of 1967 (now African Union (AU) which expanded it to suit Africa's environment. The Geneva Convention defines a refugee as a person who. "Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country".

Similarly, the OAU defined a refugee as "every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or events seriously disrupting public order, in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality" ([www.culturalsurvival.com](http://www.culturalsurvival.com)). The two definitions emphasize refugee resulting from man-made crises or conflicts and wars as against natural disasters such as flood, drought, famine and earthquake.

Two theories contend for adoption in analyzing refugee problem in Africa. They are migrational theory and conflict theory. Taking into consideration that a large number of refugees from Africa are not mere voluntary migrants that can be explained with migrational theory, conflict theory therefore has a better explanatory value.

Conflict theory captures the present situation because refugees from the continent are mostly people who have been forcefully uprooted from their natural habitat as a result of either conflict, war or terrorist violence or all of these combines. The theory posits that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. Being that power and other resources are differentially distributed in society, those with

wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by forcefully suppressing the poor and powerless. They do this by setting up systems of laws, traditions and other societal structures such as military force in order to strengthen their own dominance while preventing others from joining their ranks. This dynamic means that there is a constant struggle between those in charge and those being lorded over.

According to Hayes (2020) conflict theorists put forward four primary assumptions of the theory. They are competition, revolution, structural inequality and lastly, war. Conflict theorists argued that competition exists in all communities although in varying intensities. They traced the cause of competition to scarcity of resources such as money, property, appointments, development projects, inclusiveness etc. It is their view that conflict or competition between groups brings about change or revolution. For Karl Marx in particular this antagonistic competition is between social classes – the owners of capital (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat).

Conflict theorists also posit that human relationships and social structures all experience inequalities of power where some individuals and groups acquire more power and resources than others. According to them, those in advantage position tend to work hard to maintain their advantage position by resisting those fighting to join or displace them. They concluded that war results from accumulation or growth of sources conflicts which have not been addressed ([www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com)).

Conflicts theory has been used to analyse and explain various conflicting relationships such as landlord and his tenants, international financial crisis of 2008. It will be useful for explaining the refugee problem in Africa. However, the central thesis of Karl Marx concerning the theory: that the main antagonistic groups are the capitalists and the working class may be valid in advanced milieu but not in Africa in the post-colonial era. According to Esetang (1987) political leadership of the post-colonial era in Nigeria and by extension the entire African continent with the development of its capitalism at its infancy, were jointly composed of the petty-bourgeois and comprador bourgeois classes with the former in dominant control over the later but with the latter's ranks gradually swelling owing to former's gradual upward economic mobility. He argued that Nigeria (and other African) political leadership in the post-colonial era came into office as petty-bourgeoisie with no economic power but retire from office as comprador bourgeoisie after using their position of presiding over state's power and its apparatuses to amass enormous wealth for themselves, their groups and friends through corrupt means. Nnoli (1981) identified petty bourgeois class as those in the professions such as teaching, petty trading, the middle and upper ranks of the army, the petty contractors, businessmen, civil servants and independent artisans. Example of the petty bourgeois political leaders of that era who were in the professions were: Julius Nyerere (teaching), Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (teaching), Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (medical practice), Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (teaching), Jomo Kenyatta (municipal administration) and Sir Ahmadu Bello (teaching/administration). He also identified those in the comprador bourgeois class as those in export-import business, wholesale trade, and produce merchant and large-scale cash crop farmers. Their interests are constitutively linked to foreign imperialist capital and not to their native countries. Survival of their states and people are therefore not their concern.

Based on conflict theory, African refugees are therefore created by conflicts and competitions between factions and fractions of both the petty bourgeois and comprador bourgeois classes that inherited post-colonial states in Africa. As against Marx's thesis

that such conflicts are over relations of production, Africa's version is over control of post-colonial state. Control of state and its apparatuses became the prime prize of post-colonial leaders because it is the quickest means of amassing enormous wealth and property through corrupt means. Other excuses normally bandied for conflict such as lopsided appointments and developments, discrimination against outer groups, religious bigotry, lack of press freedom, human rights violations, lack of inclusiveness in governance, bad governance and so on are mere ruse design to conceal the prime prize of the conflict which is the seizure of state power in order to use it to establish their personal economic base and that of their groups and friends. To validate this thesis, for example, Yoweri Museveni and his rebel group, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) fought against the government of Idi Amin of Uganda on account of dictatorship, persecution of opponents, human rights violation, murder of opponents, anti-democratic practices, declaration of self as life president and Field Marshal and so on (Kamau and Cameron, 1979). When Museveni and his rebel group NRM, with the assistance of Tanzania, fought and removed Idi Amin from power in 1979 and Milton Obote in 1986, Museveni took over as President. He has been in power since then for over 34 years now. He has not only changed the constitution to perpetuate himself in power over Ugandans, he has also committed worst atrocities against Ugandans, than Idi Amin whom he opposed.

## **2) Objectives of the Study**

This study assessed the enormity of the refugee situation in Africa. It evaluates the explanatory tools employed over the years to discuss the causes of the problem and offer alternative perspective for better diagnosis. It also assessed the effects of the problem on the refugee producing and hosting states, the refugee population and on the UNHCR as its coordinating body. It evaluates the current socio-political and economic environment of the African continent to determine the possibility of having early solution to the problem.

## **3) Historical Evolution of Africa's Refugee Problem**

Base on this premise, all refugee producing conflicts we are going to discuss in this article (which are all man-made) should be seen in this light that is conflicts to perpetuate control or seize control of state power for self-aggrandizement and not for general welfare of their citizens as normally publicly espoused.

Africa's refugee problem first occurred during the period of decolonization war in some parts of Africa from late 1950s up to 1975. While some countries achieved decolonization peacefully, others had to fight to be free. Some countries like Kenya, Algeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and so on fought European colonizers who had settled firmly in their land. The Algeria's decolonization war of 1954 to 1962 for example, was the bloodiest in the nation's history with the following number and categories of refugees: one million fleeing Europeans, 200,000 fleeing Jews and 2 million displaced Algerians ([www.britannica.com>event](http://www.britannica.com/event)). That of Kenya broke out between 1952 and 1953 and created thousands of refugees who fled to neighbouring countries. In the same way war against Apartheid South Africa and Ian Smith's Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) created thousands of refugees that fled to many parts of Africa including Nigeria ([wwwrescue.org>article](http://www.rescue.org/article)). Ogundolapo avers that "initially African refugees consisted mainly of freedom fighters seeking independence for their countries from the British, French and Portuguese colonial

dominated territories. Others were produced as a result of the struggle against Apartheid South Africa” (Ogundolapo, 2000).

Table 1: Interstate and Civil Wars in Post-Colonial Africa

S/N	Name of War	State(s) Involved	Year of War
1.	Tuareg Rebellion	Mali/Niger	1962-1964
2.	Ethiopia-Somalia Border War	Ethiopia/Somalia	1964
3.	Rhodesia Bush War	Zimbabwe	1964-1979
4.	First Chadian Civil War	Chad	1965-1979
5.	South African Border War	South Africa/Namibia	1966-1989
6.	Nigerian Civil War	Nigeria	1967-1970
7.	Western Sahara Independence Conflict	Western Sahara	1970 to present
8.	Oromo Conflict	Ethiopia	1973-2018
9.	Ethiopian Civil War	Ethiopia	1974-1991
10.	Angolan Civil War	Angola	1975-2002
11.	Cabinda War	Namibia	1975
12.	Mozambican Civil War	Mozambique	1975
13.	Libyan-Egyptian War	Libya/Egypt	1977
14.	Ogadan War	Somalia Border	1977-1978
15.	Shaba I	D R Congo	1977
16.	Shaba II	D R Congo	1978
17.	Uganda-Tanzania War	Uganda	1978-1979
18.	Chadian-Libyan Conflict	Chad	1978-1987
19.	Second Eritrean Civil War	Eritrea	1980-1981
20.	Ugandan Bush War	Uganda	1980-1986
21.	Second Sudanese Civil War	Sudan	1983-2005
22.	Lord’s Resistance Army insurgency	Uganda	1987-present
23.	Mauritania/Senegal Border War	Senegal/Mauritania	1987-1991
24.	First Liberia Civil War	Liberia	1989-1997
25.	Rwandan Civil War	Rwanda	1990-1994
26.	Tuareg Rebellion	Mali/Niger	1990-1995
27.	Djiboutian Civil War	Djibouti	1991-1994
28.	Sierra Leone Civil War	Sierra Leone	1991-2002
29.	Algerian Civil War	Algeria	1991-2002
30.	Somali Civil War	Somalia	1991 to present
31.	Burundi Civil War	Burundi	1995
32.	Second Congo War	D R Congo	1998-2003
33.	Second Liberian Civil War	Liberia	1999-2003
34.	Islamic insurgency in the Magbreb	North Africa	2002 to present
35.	Nigerian sectarian violence of Fulani herdsman and farmers	Nigeria	2009 to present

Source: Compiled from online sites by these authors: (norwich.edu,wwwjstor.org andcco.ndu.edu)

In the post-colonial era the cause of refugee movements changed. It became either conflicts between states or struggle between factions and fractions of the then burgeoning political elites. It must be appreciated that such factors as drought, famine, flood and earthquake played important part in producing internally displaced persons (IDPS) which is outside the scope of this article. Recently highly deadly insecurity such as insurgency,

internal terrorism, farmers/herders clashes and communal clashes have seriously aggravated the displacement of persons in Africa.

#### **4) Conflicts Between States and Civil Wars**

Many post-colonial states in Africa experienced either inter-state clashes or civil wars resulting in refugee cases. While inter-state clashes were almost over colonially fixed boundaries between states, civil wars were either over demand for secession (Biafra and Katanga) or struggle to seize control of state power by rebel groups. Below are some of the inter-state and civil wars in post-colonial Africa.

The number of conflicts listed above is a fraction of the entire African cases. They however confirm two earlier postulations: first, that almost all African countries have at one time or the other created refugees. Secondly it confirms the enormity of the refugee problem in Africa since even a brief war creates refugees. It is necessary at this point to look at a few of the above cases in detail to understand why war had to be fought. Firstly, Shaba I (number 15 in the list) was a brief conflict fought in Zaire (now D R Congo) province of Shaba (now Katanga) in 1977. It was launched by Congolese National Liberation Front (FNLC) seeking to secede from Congo. The petty bourgeois rebel group reasoned that their control of the mineral-rich Katanga province could be of enormous economic benefit to them hence their attempt to wage a war of secession from the Congolese State. The war created between 50,000 to 70,000 refugees who fled to Angola and Zambia ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)>place). Secondly, Tanzania-Uganda war (number 17 in the list) and Ugandan Bush war (number 20 in the list) also known as Luwero war was a civil war launched by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) with strong assistance of neighbouring Tanzania to topple Field Marshal Idi Amin in 1979 and Milton Obote in 1986.

Museveni had accused Idi Amin of committing murder and other atrocities against Ugandan people, violating human rights, persecuting opponents and declaring himself life president (Kamau and Cameron, 1979). The war was won by NRM and Yoweri Museveni assumed power in 1986 as the President of Uganda. As earlier stated Museveni is still in power now 35 years after. The war however created over 250,000 refugees who fled to Sudan and Zaire (D R Congo) ([borgenproject.org](http://borgenproject.org)). Lastly, the second Liberian Civil War (number 33 in list) began in April 1999 when a rebel group known as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) with the support of neighbouring Guinea began a military offensive to topple the government of the then President Charles Taylor. This was another struggle to control the state and resources of Liberia by factions and fractions of the petty bourgeois classes. For example, Charles Taylor alone is speculated to have earned 400 million USD per year from trade in natural resources of Liberia (timber, diamond and iron ore) during the war between 1992 – 1996 (Ukeje, 2003).

The number of refugees created by the three case studies analysed above speaks volumes of the gravity of the problem when viewed against other war theatres in Africa which have not been discussed in detail here.

#### **5) Accusation of Human Rights Violation and Persecution of Some Citizens by Governments**

Some African States that emerged from colonialism with multi-party system soon after enacted new laws to institute one-party system to exclude opposing political groups

for example Kenya, Malawi and Guinea. Some of them that allowed multi-partism to operate soon after suffered from military take-overs owing to unethical competition and conflicts between political groups juggling for power. The emerging military junta quickly banned political parties and political activities for example Nigeria, Central African Republic, Ghana, D R Congo and Togo. Human rights abuse and violations characterized these two types of post-colonial states owing to intrinsic behaviour of the ruling classes in charge of these states. The two types of government were marked by politics of exclusion and marginalization of outer groups, lopsided appointments and development on ethnic or religious grounds. It is in very rare cases that such approach to governance fails to attract adverse reaction from the marginalized groups. In most cases it did. It came in the form of street demonstrations, adverse mass media criticism, vandalism of government assets and in extreme case, armed insurgency or coup d'état. The reaction of the government in most cases normally involve severe crack down on the dissenting groups leading to mass exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries. It should however be noted that the repressive actions of the ruling groups and the reactions of the opposition groups are all aimed at one goal, that, seizing control and maintaining of state power.

The states that best exemplify the above two types of regimes (the first one civilian and other one military) are Kenya and Central African Republic(CAR) According to Uwechue (1991) Kenya at independence from Britain in December 1963 had two main political parties, Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenyan Democratic Union (KADU). While KANU was composed mostly of the two major ethnic groups (Kikuyu and Luo) and unitary system of government for Kenya as its main pursuit, KADU, on the other hand, was formed by the remaining smaller ethnic groups with federal system of government for Kenya as its policy pursuit. A year after independence President Jomo Kenyatta freshly released from colonial prison banned other political parties except the ruling KANU party. Trade union powers were similarly curbed. According Uwechue Kenya thereafter became a state riddled with corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, detention of government critics, human rights violation and assassination of high profile opponents and critics. He listed some of the prominent Kenyans who were murdered as Pio Gama Pinto (1965), Tom Mboya (1969), Josiah Kariuki (1975), Horare Ongili Owiti (1985) Dr Robert Ouko (1990). Later when Daniel Arap Moi assumed power as president and leader of KANU party, he promulgated laws to oust opposition groups and their members from governance. For example, in 1966, he abolished the post of vice president occupied by his rival Oginga Odinga and barred him from joining the ruling KANU party. He officially declared Kenya a one- party state in 1974 and detained Odinga and deputy speaker John Seroney for criticizing the government. Similarly, all ethnic unions were banned. As the country became tense, Air Force officers staged a coup in August 1982 but was quickly put down by loyal troops. Massive arrest of Air Force officers ensued and the entire Air Force branch of the military was disbanded. Groups who feared persecution fled Kenya to neighbouring countries. Students protested against the government but were brutally quelled resulting in arrest of several students and other government opponents. He stated that this also created another round of refugee exodus to neighbouring countries. To consolidate his control of state power in the face of stiff opposition, the then President Moi in 1986 announced KANU party as having supremacy over both the parliament and the judiciary. In reaction, Catholic Bishops and other pastors in Kenya protested against totalitarian and repressive rule of President Moi.

Uwechue (1991) also informed us that in Central African Republic (CAR), the military government presented a similar tendency of persecution of citizens and human rights violation. According to him, at independence in August 1960, David Dacko was the president of the country. Four years later, Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokasa, a relation of Mr. Dacko staged a coup and overthrew Dacko's civilian government and assumed power. He executed his right-hand man, Lt. Col. Alexandre Banza for alleged plot in 1969. From then on government atrocities and reign of terror increased leading to escape of people to neighbouring countries. In 1972, Bokasa gained worldwide notoriety for ordering public mutilation of thieves while he personally beats up journalists in public. He exhibited absurd behaviour by wearing arrays of medals, declaring himself Field Marshal and Central African Republic as an Empire in 1976. Secondary school students staged massive public protest against his order for them to wear uniform made from factory owned by the emperor's family. Many protesting students were killed. Many who survived fled to Congo as refugees. A coalition of African heads of state set up panel of inquiry into the students' killings. Its report confirmed that between 50 and 200 protesting students were killed. Courageous CAR citizens who testified at the inquiry were later murdered on the order of the Emperor. According to Uwechue (1991) in 1979 a military coup supported by a foreign power overthrew Bokasa and David Dacko, a former president was installed as President. The new president struggled to institute genuine constitutional rule in CAR but was harassed by sporadic demonstrations organized by those who also wanted to assume control of the state. In September 1981, Dacko's government was overthrown by his military Chief of Staff, General Andre Kolingba. Further demonstrations organized by Ange Patasse, leader of MLPC party against Kolingba was suppressed. Similarly, coup d'état staged by Gen. Francios Bozize, another member of the military council in 1982 was put down. Following a surprise return to CAR from exile by Bokasa in 1987, he was arrested, tried and sentenced to death for atrocities and crimes of murder. The death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment by then President Kolingba. He died in November 1996.

Although the two cases studied above appear to show that reaction to repressive environment of the state is the main cause of conflicts, what is actually at stake is the state power. The ruling faction, in an attempt to perpetuate itself in power may have committed serious atrocities against their citizens as bandied by the opposition groups but what is the assurance that they can do better when all of them are in stiff competition to seize control and maintain state power for their self-aggrandizement. As above cases have clearly shown opposition faction that takes control of state power can even be more repressive than the one they have replaced. So far, what is at stake is the control of state power.

## **6) Effects of Refugee Crises on Africa**

The adverse effects of the problem of refugees on Africa and its people can be appreciated by categorizing them into effects on: producing states, hosting states, the refugee population themselves and lastly on the UNHCR as the managing body. We now take them one by one.

### *Effect on Refugees Producing States*

States that produce refugees hardly appreciate the fact that it has adverse effect on them too. They could suffer from loss of skilled manpower and farming workforce resulting in famine, foreign refugee camp becoming recruitment centres into rebel ranks



and criminally minded refugees becoming international embarrassment to producing states. Since refugees are created from violent activities of contending groups it can push the economy to the brink of total collapse through mass exodus of skilled man-power and farming workforce to foreign country. In the case of Sierra Leone, civil war (1991-2001) skilled manpower that manned medical, educational and social infrastructures in both rural and urban areas fled to foreign countries because apart from insecurity, they found their institutions and work place completely devastated and unsuitable for habitation (Gbla 2003: 198). Similarly, states having their refugees camping just across their borders stand the risk of having them as recruitment centres into rebels or insurgent ranks for constant cross border subversive activities. For example, in the first Liberian civil war of 1989, Charles Taylor recruited his National Patriotic Force of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group members from refugees camped in neighbouring Ivory Coast (Ukeje, 2003). In the second Liberian civil war (1999) the rebel group, Liberians United for Reconstruction and Democracy (LURD) led by Sekou Conneh drew its membership and supporters from refugees camped in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast (Gbla 2003: 170). Similarly, Ugandan Bush war waged by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) rebel group to toppled the government of Field Marshal Idi Amin and Milton Obote drew its membership from refugee camp located in neighbouring Tanzania (Kamau and Cameron, 1979). Indeed, in 1995 Lino Rol Deng, the Sudanese Secretary-General for High Council for Peace petitioned UNHCR to intervene to stop the rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) from recruiting its members from refugees' camp in neighbouring Kenya, Uganda and Eritrea. (AM News, August 22, 1995).

#### *Effect on Hosting Countries*

The impacts of refugees on hosting states are mix but the negative effect far outweighs positive ones. On the positive side some hosting states benefit from the highly trained and skilled elements among the refugees as well as cheap labours they provide. There is also the negative side. It has been shown to strain scarce resources and manpower of hosting states and can serve as lee-way for foreign penetration of a country, espionage and terrorism. According Oketunbi (1997), Nigerian government through Nigeria's National Commission for refugee made an annual contribution of \$ 25, 000 to the UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland towards refugee operations in the world Also the presence of refugees in any community often leads to environmental degradation of the area due to heavy refugee population. Some of them may also be involved in social ills like crimes, prostitution and alcohol abuse (Madzimure: 2018).

#### *Effects on the Refugee Population*

Refugees are unfortunate group of Africans whose livelihood have been disrupted by crises they know nothing about. A typical portrait of a refugee is that of agony, denials and abuse. He is usually a victim of power tussle among the elite, religious intolerance, greed and competition over scarce resources. Refugees suffer social dislocation, human rights abuses including sexual assault, they go through psychological trauma while some host communities look down on them. More worrisome is the composition of the refugee population. According Dr Mrs. Oko, a former Nigeria's Federal Commissioner for Refugees "it is the women that bear the greatest toll of this calamity from whatever angle it is examined. It is they who lose their sons and husbands to war. Or is it the unpleasant

role thrust upon them as the only provider in whatever family is left them?” (Oketunbi 1997:15). Indeed, the refugee problem in Africa without doubt affects women more. Statistics show that 30% of refugee families are headed by women as refugee movement split up nuclear families creating a dramatic increase in the percentage of women who must care for children and elderly relatives without assistance of their partners (Oketunbi, 1997). The suffering of women, and children in crises situations as explained above calls for urgent steps by international community to nip such looming smoke in the bud worldwide before they become fire.

#### *Effects on the United Nations Body (UNHCR)*

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office was set up by the Geneva Convention of 1951 to protect and provide assistance to refugees' worldwide. The office is currently headed by Mr. Filippo Grandi as its High Commissioner.

The burden of managing refugees worldwide including Africa has had profound impact on UNHCR in such areas like funding, powerlessness in enforcement of its convention, low interest by hosting states, absence of overarching institution to monitor and enforce states compliance, unpredictability of onset of refugee crisis, politics of donor nations and temporary nature of the refugee job. It is necessary to examine these impacts in detail.

Firstly, insufficient operational funding is a constant headache to UNHCR. In 2001 for example, it budgeted for a total of \$ 1.2 billion for its programmes worldwide but funds released fell short by \$ 150 million thus forcing the commission to cut down on its operations worldwide including Africa (Emeanua 2001). In 1990, the UNHCR spent a total of N26.24billion on refugee problems in Africa (Guardian August 7, 1990). In 2016, Mr. Grandi said funds available was US\$3. 76 billion just half of total funding. Secondly, the UNHCR is powerless in enforcing state's obligations to the commission which they freely acceded to in the refugee convention. It cannot penalize them for failure to carry out its commitments towards refugees' welfare (Emeanua, 2001:47). Thirdly, hosting states have interest in catering for the needs of its nationals first before considering the plight of refugees. When they choose do this, the released fund becomes meagre. For example, in 1996, refugee activities in Nigeria required N60 million but government approved the release of N15 million only (Emeanua, 2001). Fourthly, refugee convention has no monitoring mechanism that can gather reports and call on states to respond to certain queries. Implementation of refugee convention depends more on the voluntary will of states rather than on binding legally enforceable clause. Fifthly, emergence of refugees at any time and place is unpredictable. Nobody knows where and when violence or war will break out next. This makes it difficult for the commission to prepare advance budget for it. The UNHCR makes emergency appeals either directly to states or through the UN Secretary General to various governments, NGOs and Foundations for funds only when war breaks out. Ultimately, the amount that comes from such support determines the extent of the UNHCR's success. (Emeanua, 2001:47). Sixthly politics of donor nations contribute to disparities witnessed in the treatment of refugees worldwide. According to Finjab Njinga, a director in United Nations office, while refugees from Africa battle to get the attention of the international community, the ones in war zones in Europe receive donations on a platter of gold from the developed nations because of the interests of the donor nations to the issues at stake there (Emeanua, 2001). Lastly, the temporary nature of

refugee activities appears to dampen the morale of the workers and destroy the influence of the Commission in the eyes of state functionaries. Some governments feel that they can do away with the Commission. According to Emeanua, indeed signatories to the convention can denounce their signatures by simply writing to notify the Administrative Secretary of the convention to that effect (OAU Article Xiii) (Emeanua, 2001).

### **7) Prospect for End to Africa's Refugee Crises**

There is a general agreement among scholars and policy makers that increasing flow of refugees in Africa can be stemmed through such approaches as genuine democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and stoppage of the flow of small and heavy arms across international borders. Aderemi Oyewumi argued that "African states need to create an enabling environment conducive for peace. Good governance and observance of human rights would go a long way in reducing tension and conflicts on the continent" (Guardian, August 2, 1996). The general complaints by various marginalized and persecuted groups in the study in such countries as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda tend to support this assertion. This position may actually be valid if the political atmosphere put up by the ruling group support their effective operation. However, the African milieu shows little or nothing to cheer about in the present and future. The current socio-economic and political environment is uncongenial to peace and stability in the African continent. For instance, in terms of democracy in Africa, almost all states now operate multi-partism and practice periodic elections but are short of genuine democracy. Some ruling political actors subvert level playing ground for all contestants. They tamper with the constitution and change term of office to allow them stay in power indefinitely. Periodic election is therefore design to have a semblance of public endorsement to their continuous stay in office. This situation is typical of the present government in Uganda, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Cameroun, Tanzania, Egypt, Mali and so on. As genuine democracy is not allowed to thrive, good governance and respect for human rights cannot also thrive. In view of this, resistance and violence by persecuted groups cannot be ruled out. This is the reason that the prospect for reduced incidence of refugee problem in Africa is dim.

Another factor that has dampened the prospect of early resolution of refugee crises in Africa is the free flow of heavy and small arms all over Africa. Prior to the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya in 2011 the flow of arms of various categories used to be in tringles. After his regime ended and his armoury looted, weapons of assorted types became available to insurgent and criminal groups throughout Africa. That may explain the current upsurge in the number of violence cases (banditry), civil wars and insurgency in many parts of Africa such as Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Cameroon, Mozambique, Somalia and so on. As the number of such violent activities increases the number of refugees will also increase.

### **8) Conclusion and Recommendations**

The conclusion was that the refugee problem in Africa needs concerted efforts of both Africa and the international community. It traced the persistence of the problem to inability of competing African classes to discipline themselves and curb their excessive and insatiable quest to control state power at all cost and also from Africa's inability to stop the current free flow of arms and ammunitions across international frontiers. Based on these, the paper recommends that African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) should be

revisited and strengthened for it to work as it should be. According to Oluyemi-Kusa (2005), Peer Review Mechanism ensures that governments in Africa should foster and adopt minimum policy standards and practices that promote human rights, political stability and economic growth. States must not only accede and be committed to them but must actually practice them or face sanctions under APRM. We have however observed that African heads of state fail to take punitive actions against fellow heads of state when they violate these protocols (Uganda and Zimbabwe) but are quick to impose sanctions when their peers are toppled (Mali, Guinea). It is also recommended that the African Union and other sub-regional bodies should strengthen peer review mechanism and make it to work to curb the excesses of some African governments.

In addition, Amnesty International (AI) and other local human rights organizations should wake up to their responsibilities in investigating and publicizing bad governance in African states.

Lastly, UNHCR should be adequately funded both by United Nations and various states world-wide whether they have refugee problem within their borders or not. Rich foundations should step up their financial assistance to this refugee body also.

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