

AU Convention on Internally Displaced: "A beacon of hope for 12 million Africans," says UN Representative

NEW YORK / GENEVA (26 October 2009) – "I truly welcome the adoption of the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa", said today the Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Walter Kälin, said today on the occasion of his annual presentation to the United Nations General Assembly.

"This is a tremendous achievement and a beacon of hope for the over 12 million people in Africa internally displaced by conflict and the many more who are internally displaced by natural disasters or other causes," stressed the UN representative.

"The importance of this Convention cannot be underestimated," said Kälin about the instrument, which was adopted at the end of last week at the AU Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa.

"I commend the African Union for its leadership in developing this Convention and urge all African states to ratify it and implement its provisions," said the Representative of the UN Secretary General, further calling on the international community to seize this momentum to lend all support needed to its implementation.

Building on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa is the first legally binding IDP-specific treaty covering an entire continent.

Walter Kälin, Professor of law at the University of Bern (Switzerland), has been the Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced People since 2004.