

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Jessica Therkelsen

Global Policy Director, Asylum Access

Mobile: 805-448-1398

Email: [policy@asylumaccess.org](mailto:policy@asylumaccess.org)

**Kenya's Forced Encampment of Refugees Violates Human Rights and Quashes Self-Reliance**

The Kenyan government's decision this week to force all refugees to leave urban centers and report to camps violates human rights and represents a backslide in the government's approach to urban refugees.

Host to nearly 700,000 refugees, Kenya has since 2006 implemented laws and policies that increasingly improve compliance with international human rights standards. Urban refugees have enjoyed legal status, access to employment, opportunity, and services outside of camps. Following recent attacks in Nairobi attributed to al-Shabaab, a Somali militant group, Kenya is now citing national security in its decision to send nearly 100,000 people to overcrowded and dangerous camps.

Under the new measure, these refugees will be forced to leave their rebuilt lives for internment in a camp with no access to freedom of movement and serious security risks.

To enforce the new policy, the Kenyan government has stopped all registration of refugees and asylum seekers outside of camps and warned stakeholders to withhold aid from those in urban centers. This approach threatens refugees' right to access asylum, protection from refoulement, and right to work. Kenya is effectively cutting urban refugees off from aid, assistance and self-reliance opportunities – a practice that has been described as inhuman or degrading and in violation of international law.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of internment -- or forced encampment -- itself violates refugees' right to freedom of movement. In this instance, it also places refugees at risk of violent attack including rape.

Rerouting refugees to internment camps is not an adequate solution to national security concerns. In late June 2012, [4 aid workers were kidnapped](#) from the Dadaab region allegedly by al-Shabaab, the same group

---

<sup>1</sup>*Regina v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant), ex parte Limbuela (FC) (Respondent)*, [2005] UKHL 66, United Kingdom: House of Lords (Judicial Committee), 3 November 2005, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/43fc2d1a0.html> [accessed 22 December 2012].

thought to be responsible for the recent attacks in Nairobi. Uprooting refugees who are rebuilding their lives in urban centers and placing them in unstable refugee camps where militias have already attacked civilians has the potential to further unrest and violence.

The Dadaab refugee camp is host to nearly 500,000 people already – which is nearly five times larger than intended when it was built 20 years ago. In 2011, Dadaab [came under international scrutiny](#) as nearly 150,000 Somalis fleeing famine and violence found themselves housed in overcrowded and under-resourced camps with inadequate sanitation and security. Reports of rape and attempted rape increased dramatically with few resources or response mechanisms for victims. [UNHCR notes](#) that basic needs are not being met in the camp. Pushing thousands more refugees into the area will cause further concerns over sanitation and safety.

Asylum Access urges Kenya to retract its forced encampment policy in favor of a more comprehensive solution that does not exploit the rights of refugees in the name of national security.

For more information, contact Asylum Access Global Policy Director Jessica Therkelsen at 805-448-1398 (mobile) or [policy@asylumaccess.org](mailto:policy@asylumaccess.org).

