

THE KEY TO STOPPING REFUGEE CRISIS IN AFRICA IS IN OUR HANDS

By Asiimwe Godfrey (16th March 2020)

Refugee Convention of 1951 in Geneva, defined a Refugee as “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and who, on account of that fear is unwilling to return to their country of origin”.

As of today, according to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) an unprecedented **70.8 million** people around the world have been forced from their homes, where **41.3 million** people are internally displaced, **25.9 million** are refugees while **3.5 million** are asylum seekers. It is very sad that half of the world’s Refugees are children under the age of 18 years and *South Sudan* was cited as the largest refugee crisis hit Nation in the world as of 2019, behind Afghanistan and Syria.

I will concentrate on refugee crisis that has continued to hit Africa hard. Uganda stands tall among the leading countries in the world hosting refugees standing at position one in Africa according to Amnesty International report of 2019. This is mainly because Uganda has ‘generous refugee laws and policy regime’ as cited by then UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Mr. Volker Türk. Among others Uganda also grants refugees free movement, employment opportunities and land for building new homes or farming

In a recent UNHCR Refugees and Asylum-Seekers report on Uganda dated 29 February 2020, a total of **1,411,098** of refugees and asylum seekers are hosted in Uganda across her 14 refugee settlements with Bidibidi in Yumbe District being the largest hosting **232,109** refugees. In the same UNHCR report, most of refugees hosted in Uganda are from South Sudan at 873,741(61.9%) followed by DRC at 409,882 (29%).

Refugee crisis in South Sudan

According to a recent UNHCR Refugees and Asylum-Seekers report on South Sudan updated on 29 February 2020, South Sudan has majority number of refugees and asylum seekers in Africa accounting for **2,236,176** people who have fled their homeland to other Countries with Uganda

hosting many of these. Of these South Sudanese refugees, Uganda hosts 873,741, Sudan 815,052, Ethiopia 337,031, Kenya 121,476 and DRC 88,876.

South Sudan which is the world's youngest independent country has a troubled history of prolonged conflicts due to different political beliefs and ethnicities. Climate change leading to desertification. All these forces have resulted in continued violence and famine forcing many people to seek refuge outside their country's borders.

Major causes of refugees

1. Persecutions

Persecution which takes many forms such as religious, social, racial and political has been a greatest factor leading to people leaving their countries to seek for refugee in other countries. For example according to Pew, Refugees who came to the USA in 2016, Muslim were 46%, Christians 44% while 10% were either Hindus, Buddhists and Jews. Religious refugees are everywhere in the world notably Muslims persecuted in Myanmar to Christians in the Central African Republic to Hindus in Pakistan.

2. Wars

History shows that war has been the greatest contributor of refugees in the world either directly or indirectly. Today large groups of refugees in the world are fleeing civil conflict in Syria, which has been raging since 2011 and reportedly killed 400,000 Syrians and displaced 6.3 million internally and it is also reported that another 5 million people have left the country entirely. In Africa several political instabilities in South Sudan, DRC, Somalia, Burundi have been a factor why these countries have majority of her nations leaving their countries to others seeking refuge.

3. Hunger

It's estimated that 20 million people in some of North and Middle Eastern countries of Africa including Somalia, South Sudan, among others have been forced to leave their homelands to become refugees in search of stable food resources.

4. Climate Change

It's estimated that in the next 83 years, a stunning 13 million coastal dwellers could be displaced by climate change, Today's harsh human activities on the environment is

continuing to breed bad results like extreme droughts, floods, landslides. These activities have equally led to high increase in refugees in Africa.

Life in a Refugee Resettlement

In my recent visit in some of the Refugee settlements in Gambela-Ethiopia, Kakuma-Northern Kenya and Bidibidi in West Nile-Uganda, I was moved by the challenges faced by refugees especially women and children. These challenges are very well known to us but among many of them, they are exposed to sexual abuse, get married at a tender age, are forced to leave school, sanitation challenges where most of them live under poor hygiene and are exposed to its associated communicable and non-communicable diseases, in some instances some are harassed and killed by host communities. Most of these refugees have lost hope completely since they have either lost their loved ones on flight or their properties and jobs. They live on the mercy of donations from humanitarian organizations, agencies and well-wishers for their survival yet these organizations and agencies are often faced with funding deficits as witnessed by UNHCR report of 2019, where a total of **\$1,365,963,860** was needed to fund Refugee related activities but only **\$495,398,721** was received leaving a gap of **\$870,565,139**.

Is the Key to stopping Refugee crisis in our hands?

Yes the key is in our hands.

As discussed and widely known, causes of refugees can be stopped and completely since most of them are created by us. Our political leaders have a greatest task to ensure that the people they lead are safe in their countries; ask yourself, whom will you lead if people flee their homelands to other countries? Why wars? These wars are created by us people, they are destructive! We can always resolve our differences amicably. Religious differences will always be there at all times just as different races and tribes. Why should we then persecute each other because of these differences? Can't we live harmoniously together? Just as the Bible says in I Corinthians 1:10 *"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and*

purpose” (NLT). Religious leaders have a role of uniting the people they lead the same to cultural leaders.

Human activities leading to climate change, the key is also in our hands. We can stop environmental degradation that has led to floods, prolonged droughts that have forced our people to leave their home lands.

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