



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

BY

HON. ENG. HILARY ONEK (MP)

MINISTER FOR RELIEF, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

AND REFUGEES

TO THE 74TH EXCOM IN GENEVA

9TH – 13TH OCTOBER, 2023

Thank you, Chairperson!

Mr. High Commissioner

Honorable Ministers and Distinguished Delegates.

Uganda Aligns with the African Group Statement delivered by the Honorable Minister of the Congo

We thank the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the ExCom Bureau for organizing this 74th Session and your commitment to support an important segment of our global family.

At the end of last year 2022, 108.4 million people, about 1.2% of the world population, were forcibly displaced from their homes. Today, UNHCR estimates that the number will rise to 117.2 million by the end of this year. An increase of almost 10 million.

Today, Uganda is hosting a record number of refugees. There are over 1.5 million refugees, more than at any time in our history. Of this number 7,122 are new arrivals. Global figures and our own numbers speak volumes.

My government has continued to leave its doors open to refugees because we firmly believe when people seek safety and security, they deserve to live in peace and dignity. Our open-door policy is anchored in our ideological foundation of Pan-Africanism and builds on relevant national, regional, and international instruments amidst several challenges.

Refugees in Uganda access national services and progress has been made to integrate them in the national planning and service delivery systems. To facilitate and inform a meaningful response to the needs of the refugees, the verification of refugee numbers on our territory should remain a regular exercise for transparency and collation of credible data.

Chair,

With thousands of refugees continuing to flee to Uganda, the needs grow larger. The government of Uganda is investing significant domestic resources despite its own resource constraints. From USD 800 Million in 2020, we are now investing approximately USD 1.2Billion annually in hosting refugees. We appreciate the role and support of international partners. However, humanitarian support is chronically underfunded and is on a downward spiral. This is affecting efforts to protect and assist refugees.

The question one may ask is, why are we here? In this situation?

First, underfunding is worsened by the growing trend of earmarking funds to a specific region or country or programs of interest. Earmarking funds in our view undermines the humanitarian response and negatively affects the timely and needs-based response by the UNHCR. Whereas a partner can earmark funds, my government is not earmarking who to host in this refugee influx.

Of the US\$ 343.4 million budgeted for the 2023 Uganda Country Program 2023, it is absurd, to say the least, that only 32% has been funded. This has left a huge deficit of 68% as of September 2023. This downward trend has been consistent since 2015 when our country's budget was funded with USD 240 Million, in 202-202 it dropped to \$160 Million, and next year funding is now estimated at on \$ 120 Million, this figure includes both administrative and operations costs.

This dire decrease in humanitarian funding coupled with further food cuts by the World Food Program (WFP) of 70% has caused unimaginable suffering, pendular, and onward movement of refugees, causing grave protection problems.

The consequence, in the last five months, we have rescued a total of over 2,242 refugees, who had crossed to other countries but were sent back to Uganda. We now know, over 5,000 refugees are on their way back to Uganda after failing to get asylum and meet their humanitarian assistance expectations elsewhere.

Secondly, experience has taught us that voluntary repatriation remains the most durable solution for our region, as resettlement to third countries remains low. It is therefore important that we support and fund repatriation programs. We expect that the 2nd GRF will realize durable solutions, especially for protracted caseloads like Uganda.

Thirdly, millions of people are being uprooted from their homes due to natural disasters and extreme weather conditions. There is a close nexus between climate change and human displacement. Climate change and financing are clearly matters deserving of attention. We need to address them and support mitigation measures to address the adverse effects of climate change in refugee settings.

Chair,

As a principle, Uganda is committed to building consensus and balance in our work as reflected in outcome documents. As stated in the African Group Statement, my delegation is concerned by recent unilateral steps by UNHCR to amend the report on the program budget of 2024 after it had been considered and led to a consensual decision at the 88th Standing Committee.

It is regrettable that the voices of many, especially hosting countries, on sensitive matters that concern our respective principles and laws, were ignored. We urge the UNHCR to employ transparent and impartial methods of work in all circumstances in its work.

Finally, as one of the co-convenors of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, we remain committed to our international obligations and responsibilities. We call on all international partners to commit to the same. We hope that this second GRF will raise the quality and quantifiable pledges to lessen the burden on host countries, such as mine.

We therefore count on all partners to make and match our pledges at the upcoming GRF.

I Thank You!