

SPEECH

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AT

**THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM-2023**

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On behalf of the Government of Uganda, one of the five Co-conveners of the Global Refugee Forum-2023 and on my own behalf, I wish to thank the Government of Switzerland and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for hosting this big Forum.

This international gathering on refugees, has been convened at an opportune moment. I know that millions of people, on every continent, are optimistic about the resolutions, which will emerge from the deliberations, at this Forum. Our experience, in the modern time, has proved that no Country, big or small, rich or poor, weak or powerful, is immune to the ravaging effects of the refugee crisis. This crisis continues to grow in magnitude and intensity. It is, therefore, symptomatic of a troubled World. We must learn to prioritize our common interests above the

superficial differences, in colour, tribe, gender, religion, political affiliations, etc.

Human conflicts remain a major trigger in precipitating the phenomenon of Refugees and Internally Displaced People. According to the UNHCR, over 100 million people have been forcefully uprooted from their native lands, on account of armed conflicts. This translates into dire humanitarian crises such as famine, outbreaks of communicable diseases, etc.

Addressing you from the standpoint of Uganda's unique experience, in grappling with these challenges of refugees and Internally Displaced People, I wish to inform you that in 1986, when the NRM Government came to power, 500,000 Ugandans had fled to Sudan and Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). They had run away for fear of reprisals from the then Army; they were said to be Idi Amin's sympathizers. They all came from West Nile, Amin's home place. Uganda was

number four in the export of refugees after Afghanistan, Cambodia and Ethiopia. As you all know, Uganda has become a shining example of what is possible when we prioritize humanity over fear, compassion over division and solidarity over indifference.

One may, therefore, ask: “How did Uganda move from being the fourth world exporter of refugees, to now the fourth, in the world, as a Refugee Hosting Country and the first in Africa? How did the last become the first?”

The lesson from Uganda’s experience is that the solution to the refugee problem is democracy and creating stable living conditions, in every Country. Establishing conditions of security, peace and democracy is the cure to the Global Refugee Crisis. Only this can remove the phenomenon of refugees. Our ideology of emphasizing interests instead of

identity of religion or tribes, enabled our People to know what is primary and what is peripheral.

When the NRM took over power, in Uganda, we went out and persuaded all Ugandans in exile to return home and even helped them to settle down. We had to do this. It was not a privilege we were extending to them. We were obliged to bring them home and remove their fears. Therefore, we should stabilize political conditions in most of our countries, so that there is no need for anybody to be a refugee, on account of politics. Poverty and natural disasters also create desperate conditions that force people to flee their homelands.

Uganda is, currently, a host to 1.6 million refugees, majority of whom are from South Sudan (917,280); Democratic Republic of Congo (505,075); Somalia (51,721); Burundi (42,207), Eritrea (40,123), among others. As you may observe, these are our African

brothers and sisters, who find themselves victims of sectarian conflicts, occasioned by the ideological disorientation of some groups relying on indisciplined and criminal Armies or Militias. Accepting African refugees, is part of the solidarity with our African brothers and sisters. However, it is also a component of our Pan-Africanist strategy to work for the unity of Africa, in order to ensure our prosperity and the prosperity of our African brothers and sisters. Therefore, Uganda caring for the African refugees that are brought here by adversity, is not just charity. It is also a good strategy. Uganda's open-door policy is not merely a policy. It is a reflection of our people's unwavering commitment to the principle of "*Ubuntu*" or Humanity.

I, however, wish to point out that in our willingness to host refugees, we face resource constraints, when it comes to looking after their welfare, within our

borders. Enormous strain has been placed on our meagre economic resources. The refugees come with understandable human needs for feeding, clothing, shelter, clean water and water for production, education and skills, etc. These are critical needs that must be addressed by all the concerned stakeholders. They should not be left to the host countries. Therefore, we call upon all partners to join hands in upholding the human rights of refugees. We need comprehensive and coordinated efforts that prioritize humanity above politics, that value compassion over indifference.

It is also crucial that we prioritize programs geared towards empowering the refugees to be self-reliant. We must help them to turn their time in exile into an advantage, by learning a skill that can transform them into productive members of society.

Therefore, Uganda has prioritized these five pledges that we believe will be transformative in our refugee response;

1. Increasing Resilience and self-reliance;

2. addressing Environment, climate change and Energy;

3. localizing the Refugee response;

4. securing durable solutions for refugees; and

5. ensuring a coordinated and phased transition planning and management of developments with our partners

As we strive to create self-reliance in the area of agriculture, however, we should avoid creating conflict with the indigenous People of Uganda over the diminishing land. Therefore, the refugees can only

use the small plots of land in the refugee settlements, around their houses, to grow small quantities of seasonal crops and vegetables, preferably using irrigation. Refugees do not own land, so they cannot engage in growing perennial crops such as coffee because those would give a durability that could provoke the locals into hostility. we encourage local production and purchases from Uganda. local purchases of food, are more budget-friendly than previous practices of importing such supplies from outside.

Still on self reliance, the imparting of knowledge and skills – i.e. School and University education and skills training is crucial. Education and skills can be availed to the refugees without conflicting so much with the Locals as rural agriculture would do. Yes, you need more teachers in schools and technical colleges, which means more budget resources that

create more pressures; but it is not as conflict-laden as rural land for agriculture.

On the side of damaging the environment, the International Community should work with us to enable the refugees to use solar power, bio-gas from sources that can be reared in such a squeezed area. Grid electricity may be too expensive but other forms of energy-clean ones moreover - are the right solution.

**The International Community to help us!**

on localizing the refugee respons, it is clear enough and will be done, but, preferably, with consultations with the local Peoples.

Regarding durable solution for refugees, the durable solution for them is to go back to their countries of origin. We normally discuss with countries of origin together with the international community to enable voluntary returns

Lastly, it is critical, especially on the African continent, that we accelerate the process of political and economic integration. Most of the new and old conflicts, that continue to exacerbate the refugee crisis, are occasioned by opportunists and parasites, exploiting weaknesses in governance. These weaknesses can be wiped out, once we form a strong supranational Government, which is able to counter all threats against our sovereignty and economic interests. Therefore, I appeal to my African brothers and sisters to take full responsibility for their situations by constructing a powerful political unit capable of eliminating cracks of weakness. It should not be fashionable for Africa to be a theatre of humanitarian crises, one after another. We have a potent cure to the misery and suffering of our people.

Additionally, economic integration is the answer to aspirations for greater wealth and prosperity. The

Americans, Asians and Europeans have effectively utilized the principle of unity, despite the great disparities which exist among them, to build powerful economic and political entities. Our chief interest should be to secure the survival and prosperity of our children and their children. There is no better guarantee for their future than working towards the political and economic integration of Africa. It ensures our strategic security and prosperity, the latter through integration of markets.

It is disturbing to observe a proud and ancient group of people-the Africans- maintain a status of helplessness and surviving on the whims and mercy of other people, in the form of charity and aid.

Therefore, let us resolve to strengthen our political and economic posture through integration. This will eliminate the senseless cycle of conflicts, which churn out refugees on our continent.

I thank you.