

OPENING REMARKS

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

ON

UGANDA SOLIDARITY SUMMIT ON REFUGEES

23rd June, 2017

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SPEAK RESORT MUNYONYO

- Your Excellencies, Heads of States and Governments,
- The Secretary General of the United Nations, H.E. Antonio Guterres,
- The United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees, H.E. Filippo Grandi,
- Rt. Hon. Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament,
- The Chief Justice,
- Their Excellencies the Heads of Delegations,
- Rt. Hon. Prime Minister,
- Hon. Ministers,
- Hon. MPs,
- District Leaders,
- Refugee Leaders Present,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I greet you and welcome you to Uganda. We are happy that you decided to hold this big Conference on Refugees here in Uganda.

We the indigenous people of the Great Lakes, have been dealing with refugees (*empuungyi, abashuhuukyi, etc.*), for millennia. Our concept of refugees was dynamic, not static like the concept we hear about today.

When there was a bad ruler (king or chief), portions of the population could *kumwimuura* (withdraw allegiance from a ruler) and they would *okwehongyera* (pledge allegiance to a new ruler). Thereafter, they would become citizens of the new area. Sometimes, there would be civil wars or wars of succession. The losing party would flee to another kingdom where they would be secure. To give example, in one of our kingdoms, Buganda, there was a succession war between two princes: Semakokiro and Jjunju, in the year, 1797. The faction that lost scattered all over East Africa and became citizens of the new areas. There are now six districts in the East African countries of today where the Diaspora of that conflict are now resident. They are no longer referred to as Baganda. In Kamwengye district, they are called Batagweenda with a Parliamentary constituency. In Ibaanda, they are again, called Batagweenda with a Parliamentary constituency. In Kamwengye they are part of the Batooro people. In Ibaanda, they are part of the Banyankore people. In Rubirizi district, where they are part of the Banyankore people, they are called Banyaruguru or Bakuunta (the ones who came with rugs).

The word Batagweenda means the ones that could not continue travelling (fleeing – *kugyeenda*). Banyaruguru refers to those who could run more and more (fleeing).

The Diaspora of the Jjunju – Semakokiro war did not end in Western Uganda. Some are in Kayunga, which was not part of Buganda at that time. Others are in Pallisa. In these two districts, they are called Bakenyi (originally Bagyenyi). Two other branches went to Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya, they have a whole district to themselves known as Suba district. In Tanzania, they are part of the Musoma-Kuria groups. They are called Basuba in both countries. This is a corruption of the Luganda word: “Abasubwa” – the ones who “missed” – meaning the ones who missed the throne. In all the direction of their dispersal, these Baganda became the citizens of the new kingdoms.

Occasionally, the refugees could go back to their countries of origin. Prince Bacwa of Ankole, a great commander, accidentally, killed a person and was exiled to Rwanda. Later, the Rwanda kings, on some suspicion, killed him; but he left a son, Bikwatsi.

Bikwatsi was invited back to Ankole and his people are still around. These refugees would bring new skills – bark-cloth making, medical skills, etc, etc. This was our concept of managing refugees before the onset of colonialism.

Moreover, it is not that difficult to absorb or to co-exist with the refugee groups because the entirety of the African population is comprised of only 4 linguistic groups. These are: the Niger-Congo group of languages, the Nilo-Saharan, the Afro-Asiatic and the Khoisan. These linguistic groups are either similar or linked. Given our Pan-Africanist ideological orientation and the history of our people already captured above, it is not such a difficult problem to absorb or co-exist with refugees from within Africa.

Nevertheless, the sudden large numbers of refugees present the following problems:

- (a) feeding them;
- (b) sheltering them;
- (c) providing energy for them (for cooking, lighting, etc), so that they do not destroy the environment by cutting trees;

- (d) water for household use and production;
- (e) allowances for clothing and other household needs;
- (f) education for knowledge and skills so that , having lost property in their home countries, especially for the children and the youth, do not lose time for knowledge and skills acquisition; and
- (g) health – immunization, treatment, etc.

If the International Community assists us to cope with these challenges, we shall manage as we have done in the past.

Currently, Uganda is hosting the following number of refugees:

1. 950,000 refugees from South Sudan;
2. 216,612 refugees from the Congo;
3. 3, 294 refugees from Sudan (Khartoum);
4. 36,278 refugees from Burundi;
5. 35,941 refugees from Somalia;
6. 14,899 refugees from Rwanda;
7. 12,654 refugees from Eritrea;
8. 3,080 refugees from Ethiopia; etc., etc.

As of today, there are 1,271,000 refugees in Uganda.

In terms of avoiding conflict with the rural populations of Uganda, we discourage the rural migration of refugees beyond the gazetted camps. However, when they have skills and capital, our African brethren that are unfortunate to be refugees, can locate to the urban centres and participate in the sectors of industry, services and ICT. The International Community should assist those who are able to acquire that mobility.

The hosting districts of Uganda should also be rewarded. Especially in the area of the road infrastructure, the government of Uganda is already doing most of the development required. On account of many demands, however, there are certain roads that over-night become of high demand because of the sudden big numbers in the area on account of the influx of refugees. There are, in particular, two roads that should be bituminized but the government is not yet able to take on. These are: Moyo-Yumbe-Koboko, in the neighbourhood of the famous Bidi Bidi camp in Yumbe district that is hosting 272,168 refugees today; and Kabiingo-Rugaaga-Magabi-Rakai that starts from the famous Nakivaale Refugee

Settlement camp that looked after the Rwanda refugees between 1960 and 1994 and is still hosting different waves of subsequent refugees.

The Uganda government will, eventually, do these roads. If, however, the International Community was to expedite that process and we informed our people in the areas, they would understand that their hospitality has not been in vain.

Finally, a word on the factors that cause refugees to flee their countries of birth. The poor African people either flee from bad governments or from criminal, terrorist groups or from both. Sometimes, of course, they may flee from drought which is easier to understand because it is not man-made. It is the man-made crises that are totally unnecessary and should be condemned. The regional mechanisms, if actively used, supported by the International Community can help resolve the man-made crises. Hence, the Great Lakes and the UN are supposed to handle the endless man-made crises in Congo, including the occupation of Eastern Congo by terrorists from Uganda, other East African countries, Congo itself and, I hear, even Somalia and the Middle East.

The ICGLR and the UN have been totally un-useful on this long-standing tragedy in that area. IGAD is trying to handle the problem in South Sudan. President Salva Kiir has additionally, mandated me to deal with certain aspects of that crisis. The EAC is handling the problem of Burundi. I appeal to the Government of Burundi to make our work easier than it has been. The Burundi-Arusha Agreement was guaranteed by the East African Governments. Any failure there will, in part, be our responsibility.

The problem of Somalia where we are, rests more with the Somali leaders. Otherwise, the IGAD, the AU and the International Community have done alot to save Somalia from the demonic groups that had overrun the country. If the Somali leaders could use the solidarity of the Africans and the World to revive the pillars of the Somali State (the army, the police, etc) and form patriotic parties, the terrorists could be defeated completely and Somalia's recovery would be irreversible.

Bad politics, utilizing the pseudo-ideology of opportunistically exploiting identity of religion or tribes is behind most of these crises.

The ideology of sectarianism in Africa must be condemned. Uganda suffered from those mistakes until we formed the Student Movement in the 1960s that rejected the pseudo-ideology of exploiting identity and emphasized the ideology of pushing for the legitimate interests of our people (development, peace, wealth creation, market access, education, health, etc). It is that Movement of patriotism as opposed to sectarianism and Pan-Africanism as opposed to parochialism that helped us to rescue Uganda.

The leaders, both in Government and Opposition, of the suffering countries have a very serious historic responsibility to end this haemorrhage and suffering of the poor African people affected.

I thank you for this Solidarity Conference. I wish the Conference success.

23rd June, 2017

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