

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
OPENING REMARKS TO
THE UGANDA SOLIDARITY SUMMIT ON REFUGEES
Kampala, 22 June 2017

Your Excellency President Museveni,
Excellencies,
All protocol observed,

Twelve years ago I became on the 15th of June High Commissioner for Refugees. On the 18th of June caught a plane to fly to Uganda to visit South Sudanese refugees to celebrate with them World Refugee Day.

This was a moment during in which the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was being established and peace between north and south was finally being achieved.

There was enormous hope in the refugees I met. There was singing and dancing with the perspective of going back home. And, indeed, in the following years UNHRC helped about half a million South Sudanese return home, full of hope in the future of their country.

Now, seven years after the independence, yesterday I returned to the same place in the northern part of Uganda, I witnessed what has been the biggest exodus of refugees in Africa since the Rwandan genocide.

This is what we are facing today: the biggest refugee exodus in African since the Rwandan genocide.

You can't imagine what it means for me, after also having been in South Sudan, as High Commissioner for Refugees, two or three years ago and meeting people who came to see me to say: "we saw you in northern Uganda and now we are displaced again" and yesterday feeling the same despair.

The first conclusion is obvious: everything must be done to end the war in South Sudan.

I want to express my deep appreciation for the efforts that you, Mr. President [Yuweri Museveni of Uganda], are making in order to create the conditions for those who in the past were united in the liberation movement of the country [South Sudan] to come back again into unity and to be able to establish peace in the country.

At the same time, it is important to underline that Uganda that, in the past, received these South Sudanese refugees and I had the opportunity when visiting the same area that I visited yesterday, to see that they were not in camps but in so-called settlements that are in reality villages, like villages of the Ugandese people. This allows them to farm the land, allows them to go to the same schools, the same health centers, to have jobs, to allow them to have normal lives, to live in dignity.

It is necessary for the international community to recognize that Uganda has had an exemplary refugee policy in the past and, even today faced with the largest refugee in-flow of the past year, Uganda remains a symbol of the integrity of the refugee protection regime that unfortunately is not being respected everywhere in the world.

I have seen Uganda's borders open, I have seen the doors of Uganda's people open, I have seen the hearts of the Ugandan people open.

But not all doors are open in the world. Not all refugees are accepted, some are rejected, and sometimes in countries much richer than Uganda. So it's also necessary to look into this example and to say clearly that the international

community must come together and re-establish the integrity of the refugee protection regime everywhere in the world.

And, at the same time, the international community needs to step up and needs to give to the Ugandan people and to the refugees hosted by the Ugandan people the kind of support that is absolutely needed because the circumstances in which these sacrifices are being made are extremely extremely challenging.

I have seen a situation in which 160 students only have one teacher, health centres where people sleep on the ground because there are not enough beds.

The World Food Programme is struggling to be able to feed the refugee population and, unfortunately, is not able to provide the quantity that is necessary for a healthy development, namely for children.

At the same time, we see the impact on the environment of the local communities. We see how difficult it is to for many of the members of these communities to find a job when the labour market is overwhelmed by such a dramatic presence of refugees.

On the other hand, climate change is also impacting on Uganda. Drought is being severe. Uganda is facing its own problem in relation to drought and in relation food security in several areas.

International solidarity with Uganda is not a matter of generosity, it's a matter of justice. International solidarity is absolutely crucial at the present

An appeal for all those present here to step up to our common responsibility to support refugees and to our common responsibility to recognize the enormous sacrifice the Ugandan people are making and to support this country in this very challenging moment.

I must say that the cooperation between the Uganda government and the Uganda [UN] country team is exemplary.

New instruments, namely innovative financial instruments are being created to allow for a perfect articulation of these efforts.

I do believe that we have in Uganda an example that, from the point of view of UN reform can be extremely helpful to give us clear indication on how we can work together with other governments, in other parts of the world, in order to make sure that the Sustainable Development Goals are met and no one is left behind.

In this moment, it is absolutely essential to recognize this enormous effort and not to let Ugandan people down.

Your solidarity today is a must because without that solidarity this effort is not sustainable and, if this effort is not sustainable, the impact on the stability of the region will be absolutely dramatic.

Its time for us all to assume our responsibilities and I count on your commitment and your solidarity.

Thank you very much.