

## **Address the conflict drivers to end refugee crisis in Africa**



Uganda ranks among the top three refugee hosting countries in the world, with an estimated 1.2 million refugees currently being hosted – and more arriving by the day. This influx of refugees presents a challenge to Uganda, its neighbours in the region and the international community. Despite very generous donor efforts to raise funds to address the humanitarian emergency as well as development needs arising from displacement, available funds remain insufficient.

The annual UN humanitarian budget has since 2011 more than doubled from about US\$7 billion to about US\$17 billion currently. Uganda recently projected its annual requirement to shoulder the huge refugee burden at about US\$2 Billion annually for 4 years. However, the June, 2017 Refugee Solidarity Summit in Kampala, Uganda raised in pledges less than 20% of the annual target.

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the European Delegation in Uganda in partnership with the Uganda National NGO Forum held an EU-CSO structured dialogue on the Uganda Refugee Situation and Civil Society Response. The dialogue attracted 50 participants from both international and national NGOs, member states of European Union in Uganda and other development partners. Below are the highlights of the discussion that ensued.

### **Address the political root causes of the region's refugee crisis**

In his opening remarks, Mr Godber Tumushabe a seasoned governance analyst noted that the redress to the refugee crisis in the region lies in addressing the political root causes. He decried the narrowing democratic space coupled with the breakdown of state institutions that have exacerbated the refugee situation in the region.

Lastly he emphasized the need to address the question of democratic consolidation which requires reciprocal commitments from both the leaders and the citizens to change their attitudes towards constitutional democracy. Leaders must commit to operate an open, transparent and accountable government that respects the rule of law. Citizens, on their part, must fully participate in the democratic processes by alienating themselves from the current culture that engenders apathy and disinterest.

### **The African Union and South Sudan Crisis**

Speaking at the dialogue, the European Union Head of Delegation in Uganda H.E. Kristian Schmidt raised concerns about the failing regional efforts to address the regional crisis. The African Union, IGAD and other partners should push to put an end to the ongoing violence and revive discussions on securing lasting peace in South Sudan.

Ambassador Kristian Schmidt also hinted on the lukewarm response of the EAC to the crisis in Burundi and South Sudan. Noting that the current situation in the member states have put the EAC solidarity at risk. He urged countries to move beyond their nationalistic efforts as they address the refugee crisis in the region.

### **Amplify the voice of South Sudan CSOs**

The space of Civil Society in South Sudan has been steadily shrinking over the recent years exacerbated by the civil conflict. Many civil society activists have migrated from South Sudan to Uganda and Kenya to flee from persecution. CSOs also remain largely divided along political and ethnic lines thus revert to an agenda that serves the government and not the people of South Sudan. Owing to the above, CSOs in South Sudan have not effectively participated in the peace building process. From the meeting it was agreed that Uganda Civil Society amplify the voices of CSOs in South Sudan in order to draw attention to the crisis in South Sudan.

### **Protect the dignity of women and girls**

Sharing gender perspectives on the refugee crisis in Uganda, Ms. Helen Kezie-Nwoha-Executive Director ISIS-WICCE, condemned the deplorable state of women and girls in the refugee camps. She noted Sexual and Gender Based Violence in refugee camps, remains a key concern for vulnerable women with justified fears of rape and other forms of GBV, early and forced marriages and inaccessibility to social amenities-education, maternal care, mental health & sanitary pads among others. She therefore appealed to the humanitarian community to prioritize the needs of women and girls so that they can live their lives with security and dignity.

### **Local actors/CSO Participation: Critical for the sustainability of humanitarian interventions**

Discussing on behalf of local actors, Mr. Francis Iwa, Executive Director CAFOMI was concerned about the limited participation of local actors at all levels of the humanitarian response chain. While this has been attributed to lack of capacity of the local actors, he noted that there is a wealth of individual capacities that can be tapped into by both the UN agencies, development partners and International NGOs. He also added that local actors need to be supported to take up the space in humanitarian response work.

### **Involve Local Government in Refugee Management**

Given the lack of resources and clarity of mandate of refugee management between Office of the Prime Minister, the District Local Governments and other relevant Ministries, the local district government's role and capacity to offer leadership and assistance in this area is curtailed. The coordination and technical structures are already present at the refugee hosting districts, and therefore it would only be efficient for them to play a more prominent role in refugee management. Similarly, the district budgets need to urgently match the needs on the ground. Currently, the districts' budgets are based the populations from the 2014 national census, therefore overlooking the number of refugees in the districts.

### **Improve refugee –host communities relations**

Speaking on behalf of International NGOs, Mr. David Othieno-Africa Fundarising and Programme Development Manager noted that while the refugee policy in Uganda has been applauded as progressive, it has not taken into account the interests of the host communities. Increasingly tensions are building up as refugees and locals compete for services and natural resources. Moving forward focus should be on long term needs related to resilience, coherence, and building long-term between refugees and host communities.

All in all, the refugee situation should not be taken as a humanitarian response but a development discourse and therefore handled holistically in order to address the root causes.

