

This World Humanitarian Day, let us continue providing a home for those fleeing conflict

By Rosa Malango

UN Resident Coordinator | UNDP Resident Representative.

Every three seconds, somewhere in the world, someone is forced to flee their home because of war, violence or persecution.

War and conflict does not, and will never, define Africa however, like certain corners around the world, our beautiful continent continues to struggle with turmoil, instability and fear forcing millions of innocent civilians to run for their lives.

In addition to civilians from host nations, many humanitarian workers, providing critical life-saving and key basic services to victims of war, face immense risks, including to their lives. Our shared humanity enables thousands of people from around the world to dedicate their lives to humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and enhancing peace.

It's for this reason that the United Nations commemorates World Humanitarian Day every 19 August. Designated in 2008, through a General Assembly resolution, the day rallies us that to advocate for the safety and security of humanitarian workers, and for the dignified survival and well-being of people affected by crises.

This year, we focus on civilians caught up in conflicts. With the theme, '***civilians are not a target,***' it calls for leaders everywhere to do everything in their power to protect civilians caught in armed conflict.

With its open-door policy in welcoming fleeing refugees, Uganda continues to lead Africa and has set a global best practice for the international community, including Uganda's neighbours, to heed.

Described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, as a symbol of integrity in refugee protection, Uganda's progressive policy sees refugees settled in communities, amongst Ugandans as opposed to camps. This dignified approach where refugees are provided a small piece of land for shelter and cultivation sets an example based on humanity. In addition, refugees enjoy freedom of movement and can seek employment, go to school or start a business in the areas they are settled. This provides refugees with the some of the best opportunities found, almost anywhere in the world, to utilize their skills and talents to build a dignified life and contribute to the host country's development.

The generosity and investments of the Ugandan government and people in maintaining an open-door, transformative policy, is unique, particularly at a time when the asylum space is shrinking across the world and Uganda remains committed to achieving its development goals becoming a middle income country.

A recent UNDP study found that the Government and local communities spent over US\$ 323 million in 2016/17 on the protection and management of refugees and the provision of essential services, which is equivalent to 46 percent of the education budget or 62 percent of the health budget.

The Government of Uganda and the United Nations system are committed to delivering as one. At the heart of this commitment is the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which is fully aligned to the Government's second National Development Plan, and includes how the rights and needs of displaced persons must be understood not only as "humanitarian" in nature, but equally as development challenges to be addressed in concert with the needs of host communities and local institutions.

Since 2015, the United Nations and World Bank in Uganda have supported the Government's Settlement Transformative Agenda through the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategy: ReHoPE. This strategy supports Uganda in building resilience and self-reliance of refugees as well as their host communities. ReHoPE contributes to bridging the humanitarian-development divide in Uganda, which is line with the 'New Way of Working', aiming to not only meet humanitarian needs, but also reduce them over time through development-oriented approaches and private sector investments.

Uganda's refugee-hosting model is an inspiration regionally and globally. Uganda has invested significantly in making this possible. However, for the model to be sustained, it needs our support.

In June this year, the world came to Uganda to celebrate this model as well as commit to supporting it during the Uganda Solidarity Summit for refugees. Funds totalling over US\$ 350 million were pledged by various countries, development agencies and private sector entities to support efforts towards supporting over 1.3 million refugees and some 502,000 people in host communities in 12 districts in Uganda.

Many of the refugees are from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, among others. This support will go a long way in providing some of the most vulnerable people in society with healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and livelihoods. It will also be used to provide them with skills that they can use to improve their lives while they wait for peace to return in their home countries. It will enable women and children heading households to have a chance of dignified quality of life for their families after having lost it all.

Apart from supporting refugees, Uganda also deserves tremendous praise for the hundreds of humanitarian workers she sends into conflict zones across the world, to provide services to those affected by crises. Ugandan doctors and health workers were amongst some of the first deployed to support the World Health Organisation (WHO) to fight the deadly Ebola virus in Liberia in 2014. Their support to Liberia

and other West African countries in fighting Ebola is still lauded today. Ugandans are also present as aid workers in South Sudan, Somalia and various other parts of the globe supporting those caught up in crisis. Uganda has also invested significantly for a developing nation in supporting mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as part of its conviction of the need to invest in durable solutions for those requiring humanitarian aid today. Several Ugandans have lost their lives in these processes. Ugandans who survived the end of a long insurgency in its northern region, today are robust advocates for humanitarian principles, action and response. Several young Ugandan leaders serve today as SDG Ambassadors conveying messages on conflict prevention and transformation as well as on humanitarian and development needs.

These examples clearly demonstrate the dedication of Uganda's people and government to serving humanity. I invite each one of us to applaud the Government and people of Uganda for their dedication to humanitarian affairs and the values associated with providing dignified assistance. I invite Ugandans to share this knowledge with future generations to help nurture this national commitment to protect lives and livelihoods.

As we commemorate World Humanitarian Day today, let us remember those who have lost their lives in the service of humanity, and let us re-commit to ensuring those that serve at the frontlines of conflict are provided the safety, dignity and respect they deserve. Let today be a day of service in our communities, homes and places of work. Every life matters and every one of us can help protect and nurture a life.