



Opening Remarks at Emergency Town Hall Meeting

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UN Resident Representative Uganda
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Members of the UN Country Team

UN Colleagues

I would like to thank you all for coming to this Emergency Town Hall meeting on allegations on the comprehensive refugee response.

Overview

In light of the allegations in the comprehensive refugee response of gross mismanagement, malpractices in the registration of refugees, fraud, corruption, trafficking of girls and women, and threats to UN staff, it is imperative for all UN personnel to have a common understanding of the current situation.

As the United Nations System in Uganda we take these allegations very seriously. They are of extreme concern to the UN as they go against our core principles and values enshrined in the UN Charter.

These allegations are a serious matter of national concern they will be discussed by Parliament and Cabinet.

Chronology of events

Multiple reports of allegations were received by both UNCHR and WFP in country and at headquarters (inspectorate offices) over the past few months. The triangulation of the information indicated that there was a problem, which UNHCR and WFP attempted to address at their level. The allegations mainly irregularities in registrations stemming from the absence of biometrics in registration, which led to allegations of 'ghost refugees' and food recycling. UNHCR and WFP Representatives brought these allegations to the attention of their 3 biggest donors US, UK and EU ambassadors. Following the RC communication to the Prime Minister on 26th January, on 29th January UNHCR & WFP Representatives met with the Prime Minister, Minister of Refugees, Permanent Secretary of OPM and Commissioner for Refugees for 3 hours and discussed the issues. On 29th January UNHCR & WFP Representatives briefed High Commissioner of Refugees with US Ambassador. On 30th January the US, UK and EU ambassadors met with the Minister of Refugees and requested that Government use UNHCR biometric tools for registration of refugees. I updated the Local Development Partners Group (LDPG) and Partners Development Group (PDG) on developments. On the 8th February the National Partnership Forum (NPF) agreed to the Joint Plan for Action for Transparency and Accountability. WFP Inspectors were in the country for 2 weeks and established contact with Police

CID and they will decide whether return to inspect further or investigate. The IGG has been involved to investigate abuse of office while the Police will investigate criminal matters.

Security of UN personnel

Some UN personnel's lives were threatened because they were perceived as whistle blowers.

Any UN staff member, particularly based at field office, that receives threats of any nature from any person(s) including implementing partners or Government officials should immediately report the matter to UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). In event that UNDSS at field level does not take adequate action to protect the staff member; he or she should report the matter to the Resident Coordinator, who is also the Designated Official (DO) for safety and security for all UN personnel and their dependants in Uganda, and copy their Head of Agency.

Action taken by UNCT

The UN Country Team has taken action on accountability along with Government and development partners through the Joint Plan for Action for Transparency and Accountability, which was circulated to you by email this morning. I encourage you to read it.

As part of its measures, in 2017, the UN in Uganda prioritized strengthening of systems for reporting and responding to cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, not only among its

personnel, but also among its partner organizations and communities served by the UN, including refugee communities, particularly refugee women and girls. The system seeks to commit all UN staff and partners to a strict Code of Conduct with clear accountability mechanisms and timely grievance handling procedures.

Guidance Note

1. Abide by Code of Conduct – All UN staff should read the UN Staff Code of Conduct and ensure that they observe it.

2. Complete Mandatory online Courses –

- i. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of the Local Population (PSEA)
- ii. United Nations Course on Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority
- iii. UN Human Rights and Responsibilities

3. Security of UN Staff – Any UN staff member, particularly based at field office, that receives threats of any nature from any person(s) including implementing partners or Government officials should immediately report the matter to UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). In event that UNDSS at field level does not take adequate action to protect the staff member; he or she should report the matter to the Resident Coordinator, who is also the Designated Official (DO) for safety and security for all UN personnel and their dependants in Uganda, and copy their Head of Agency.

4. Report any irregularities - the UN System in Uganda has established mechanisms for reporting irregularities such as fraud, corruption, violation of human rights and abuses such as sexual exploitation including the alleged trafficking of girls and women. These mechanisms address abuses and violations that might have happened during UN operations whether they were carried out by staff, partners, contractors or suppliers. The allegations currently under investigation emerged from these mechanisms which include periodic reviews of the refugee response operation as well as hotlines for whistleblowers. In event that a staff member becomes aware of any violations, it is your duty to make them known to your superiors. If your superiors do not act swiftly it is your duty to inform their superiors, up to your Head of Agency and the Resident Coordinator (RC).

5. Communicating to stakeholders – Our key stake holders including donors, implementing partners and the public are aware about the investigations into the allegations in the refugee response by the Government in collaboration with investigations from UN agencies. As the UN System in Uganda our key message is that “we extremely concerned over allegations of fraud in refugee response; and welcome Government’s action to investigate and get to the bottom of all allegations. We are committed to ensuring that anyone found culpable is brought to justice.” It is my role as RC, to communicate to our stakeholders on this matter, assisted by the UN Country Team. In case you are asked questions from the media about the investigations into the allegations in the refugee response, please refer them to the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO). My office will be issuing regular

Briefing Notes and Press Statements on the refugee response. I encourage you to read these documents.

Next Steps – (Could come after AOB)

- All agencies to raise the bar and implement Joint Plan for Action for Transparency and Accountability
- The Task Team should include WFP, UNHCR, RCO and UNCT members should send inputs and comments on the Joint Plan of Action to Peter Ekayu at RCO so as submit consolidated feedback
- OMT to develop SOPs on Corporate Risk Management to guide UNCT in dealing with crises that put reputation of the UN at risk
- RC & Prime Minister to address joint press conferences to announce key milestones, beginning with the launch of the verification exercise scheduled for 1st March.
- The UN will put together an inter-agency team of SGBV/ SEA experts and offer to support Government to look into the allegations of SGBV and trafficking that have come up. It is important that we keep these allegations separate from the reported cases of SGBV that we handle through our programmes on a daily basis in the refugee settlements and host communities
- Joint UNCT & partners along with the UN Communication Group and media to the field visits to highlight the work being done there.

- RCO will regularly issue briefing notes and media statements on the refugee response. The briefing notes will be circulated to government and all agency principals at headquarters and donors. They will highlight the ongoing humanitarian and development work by the UN for the refugees and host communities. I encourage you to read them.