

Reaction to the UNFPA Country Representative to Uganda on her speech against refugees in the name of Pope's message which she made on Thursday December 3rd, 2015 during a public Conference at Imperial Royal Hotel Kampala: UN Officials have always failed to be the voice of refugees in Uganda.

During this public Conference the UNFP country Representative praised Uganda for "*giving refugees a dignified shelter*" especially in Rwamwanja refugee camp. She argued that she was not the only one who has praised Uganda but also the Pope who was here recently.

As we may be aware, His Holiness Pope Francis visited Uganda in November 27th, 2015 and his first speech at the State House in Uganda he mentioned refugees as I cite "*Here in East Africa, Uganda has shown outstanding concern for welcoming refugees, enabling them to rebuild their lives in security and to sense the dignity which comes from earning one's livelihood through honest labour. Our world, caught up in wars, violence, and various forms of injustice, is witnessing an unprecedented movement of peoples. How we deal with them is a test of our humanity, our respect for human dignity, and above all our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need.*" Pope Francis 27/11/15 Entebbe, Uganda".

Pope's message is not a credit or a praise to Uganda on responses towards refugees but a call for efforts, for an evaluation, a reminder that Uganda has obligations both legal and moral towards refugees, a call for actions thus the necessity of the wordings which are contained in the message. The Pope reminded Uganda of her obligation to treat refugees in dignity which is the measure for Ugandans to be qualified as human beings, and the first step is through livelihood and honest labour, and lastly ironically the Pope poses the question on how we deal with refugees is a measure of how human we are.

As the Pope was the first highly placed personality to speak on behalf of refugees and to call upon others to imitate him, still the UN Agencies in Uganda cannot get advantage of the Pope's message in order to address the political barriers affecting the lives of refugees in Uganda. We are all aware of the human logics and reasons which have argued on why refugees should be handled in dignity, and this move is headed by powerful hands on individuals.

The Pope denounced wars and yet we are much aware that Uganda has forced Congolese to leave their country since 1996 up to now, Uganda has contributed and forced Rwandan to leave their country since 1994 up to now, Uganda has forced South Sudanese to leave their country since 1992 up to now, and Uganda has contributed to the displacement of Somalis since 2010 up to now. The UN Agencies cannot fully look at the refugees crossing the borders without paying attention to this background, and yet the Pope has given us the courage to denounce these wars.

On the other hand the Pope is much aware of the challenges faced by some refugees to get refugee status in Uganda such as Rwandan among others who despite their efforts to seek for protection they are still victims of political calculations between states, this cannot be ignored when the UN Agencies who are mandated to ensure the protection of refugees make public statements which are one among the venues to address this,

Much as Uganda claims giving refugees better services and a warm welcome, the realities on ground lead us to a total indifference towards people who need service from the country. The inhuman shelter for refugees, the lack of basic needs such as food, medical care, primary education, access to employment and other livelihood, the lack of security for all refugees are echoing in Pope's ears.

Does the UNFPA Country representative forget that according to different agencies working on Sexual and Gender Based Violence among refugee Communities, the root causes of this generalized phenomenon is poor shelter and lack of livelihoods among refugees, especially food. Recently we read from the New Vision that the WFP which is mandated to give food to refugees has decided to give refugees 8\$ USA as food ration per month. Basing on UNHCR statistics 4 out of 10 refugee children in Uganda are in primary school while country like D R Congo where these refugees came from 9 out of 10 children were in school before they run away.

Does the UNFPA Country Representative ignorant that there is no available information and we doubt if there are refugees who are formally employed here in Uganda, there is no even a single UN agency which has formally employed refugees apart from using them as cheap labour in the name of **volunteers**. Statistics from UNHCR indicate than more than 75% of refugees' women in camps here in Uganda are involved in survival sex and basing on our findings only 3 out of 10 refugees would seek medical treatment in the government hospital here in Uganda when they are sick.

Uganda has no single humanitarian service which we can say is offered to all refugees in Uganda but, services given to some at the expenses of others.

That is why His Holiness the Pope is so much concerned about the way refugees are being handled here in Uganda *"How we deal with them is a test of our humanity, our respect for human dignity, and above all our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need."* Pope Francis 27/11/15 Entebbe, Uganda.

We cannot exhaustively evaluate Uganda on how it deals with refugees without looking holistically at the causes of refugees' movement, the welcome process and the responses towards refugees needs.

Thanks

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