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**Date: Tuesday December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

The Democratic Party in Uganda (D.P),

The Forum for Democratic Change in Uganda (F.D.C),

The National Resistance Movement in Uganda (N.R.M),

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament in Uganda,

The Electoral Commission in Uganda (E.C),

The Office of Prime Minister Directorate of Refugees Uganda (OPM),

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Uganda (UNHCR),

The Citizen's Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU),

The NGO Forum in Uganda,

The Inter-Religious Council Uganda,

The Media and Press in Uganda,

*Dear Sir/ Madam,*

**Re: It is an individual and collective responsibility of all Ugandans to ensure the protection of refugees at all levels: The use of refugees for political calculations is high risk to their protection and safety in Uganda:**

Yesterday Tuesday December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 we followed through different media the press conference of the Democratic Party president Hon. Nibert Mao who alleged that refugees were on the national voter's list. This was not the first time as some months back the former Intelligence Chief known as Mr. Sejusa also claimed that refugees were registered for the National Identification Cards in order to vote in Uganda. *"He says that while many Ugandans are not on the new register, many non-Ugandans, including refugees, made the new list, Mao by NBS"*.

### **Cause of refugees in the Great Lakes Region**

Uganda has played a frontline line role in forcing many people to leave their countries of origin such as Rwanda since 1994 up to now, D R Congo since 1996 up to now, South Sudan, Somalia and now Burundi where the ethnic belonging of those who are seeking asylum in Uganda may raise questions. In the eyes of many refugees, Uganda is not a country of asylum by choice but it is the only available option for them.

### **Statistics about refugees in Uganda**

Currently Uganda hosts 620,000 refugees from different countries but the majority comes from D R Congo, South Sudan and Burundi. They are all in both urban and rural areas in Uganda and they represent around 1% of the entire Ugandan population. Uganda is either directly or indirectly involve in military and political affairs in some of these countries and Ugandan population has taken this as normal.

### **The diversity of refugees in Uganda**

Far from the legal frameworks which clearly define who a refugee should be, information point at Uganda going beyond and having a whole a range of circumstances in which people become refugees. Some refugees ran away to Uganda because their lives were at risk in their countries of origin but we have also observed many other factors which have forced many people to acquire refugee status including Ugandans according to some allegations. This diversity alone would help us to make informed opinion on which kind of refugees we would like to refer to while addressing refugee issues in Uganda.

### **Confusing Legal frame work on refugees and politics**

Uganda does not have her own legal framework on refugees but puts together pieces from the international community such as the United Nations, the African Union and other humanitarian laws.

All these laws are not clear on refugees and politics, the United Nations 1951 Convention on Refugees prohibits refugees from *"subversive political activities"*, the African Union says about *"taking arms and making rebellion against the host country or the country of origin"* and the Uganda Refugee Act 2006 prohibits refugees from *"political activities"*. These policies do not

clearly indicate which kind of political activities and leave room to all kinds of interpretations and yet refugees are inclusive part of the global “*political animal*”.

### **Uganda failure to respond to the basic needs of refugees**

Information about the continuous support from the international community to Uganda in order to address the basic needs of refugees is encouraging but we have remained disappointed by the failure of Uganda government to make this aid reach to all refugees at the lower levels. As consequences refugees who came to seek protection in Uganda are forced to suffer misery alongside Ugandan refugee host communities in the name of cohabitation instead of community development. Uganda approaches of discrimination and exclusion are part of the driving factors which have led refugees to create other survival mechanisms including partisan political activities.

### **Refugees participating in voting exercise in Uganda**

The issue of refugees voting, refugees having identity cards from political parties, the issue of refugees holding the National Identification Cards, the issue of refugees having the Ugandan Pass-port are not new, they date since 2006. In 2011, the FDC raised these same issues during the campaigns and many refugees were affected including those who are innocent.

Information from different refugee communities does indicate that some refugees have these voting cards and other cards and the same information indicate that refugees have used them during the voting period in 2011. The questions would have been the category of those refugees who hold these IDs and the magnitude on how they influence the elections and how we can come up with a national position on the refugee and politics in Uganda.

### **To whom refugee votes benefit?**

As many refugees in Uganda claim, they do not know much about political parties but individuals who lead these parties. Information from refugees indicates that some they have been mobilized by the NRM members at local levels, peer friends members of different political parties and local leaders in their communities. In the recent NRM primaries, refugees were seen participating in rallies for different candidates either because they were threatened, they were given money or they were told to do so for their better future. The same information also indicates that some refugees do have Identity Cards from the FDC and DP much as we do not have information on the implication of refugees in political rallies for these two parties yet.

### **Refugees are part of the Ugandan population**

As part of the Uganda population, refugees have also been affected positively and negative by all social, economic and political realities faced by the country and yet refugees are not represented in the country’s affairs. These have created frustrations among refugees who perceive themselves as always victims of a given political order.

## **A call for actions**

We still believe and have believed that due to the necessity to ensure a global protection to refugees in Uganda, refugees should be encouraged not to participate in partisan politics in Uganda and not also get involved in partisan politics against their countries of origin. And since 2011 we shared these concerns with all the stakeholders for appropriate measures which have not yet been put in place.

During the NRM primaries we also shared the information with those in charge of refugee affairs but again no actions have been taken yet. We recently wrote to the Citizen's Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda to seek for their support in our effort to create awareness among refugees not to get involved in partisan politics. We hope this will yield positive results so that we can start working on these accusations against refugees.

## **Conclusions**

We strongly believe that the first priority for each refugee in Uganda is first of all protection in all dimensions and as such, each Ugandan has a role to play in this process including political parties. Using refugees for political gain put them at high risk and exposes them to many problems from members of the local communities who support particular political party at local level and this can cause violence against refugees.

All our efforts during this electoral period process would be to ensure that refugees are not used by individuals for political gain, empowered refugees not to take part in partisan politics while in Uganda, and ask refugees to pray for Ugandans to go and vote and more than that vote wisely for the best candidate with best programs because the outcome of the vote will affect both Ugandan and refugees as well.

**Kampala December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Kulihoshi Musikami Pecos**

**Executive Director**