



**Date: Monday August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

The Commissioner

Office of the Prime Minister Department of Refugees

Sir Appolo Kaggwa Road, Old Kampala

*Dear Sir,*

**Re: Calling upon you to ask InterAid Uganda to stop manipulating initiatives to have credible refugee leaders who are to represent refugees. We call upon all actors in the Refugee Regime here in Uganda not to recognize today's elections of the Congolese Refugee Community leaders spearheaded by InterAid and OPM Department of Refugees.**

The sovereignty of people or a group of people to choose freely and without fear their leaders is one among the fundamental human rights enshrined in all human rights bodies. Over the years we have repeatedly observed pupate refugee leaders who are just created by the refugee regime here in Uganda and who only represent the interest of the refugee regime. Each humanitarian organization working for refugees here in Uganda has own created refugee leaders. And the situation is becoming worse because we seem to be seeing that some humanitarian organizations are deliberately leaving aside outstanding refugee leaders, penetrate into refugees and create their own leaders to serve their interests, and especially they are looking for leaders who cannot question anything about the money for projects, those who cannot insist that there is transparency in the whole project process and those who cannot challenge why the project.

Two weeks back we observed the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) creating a new wave of refugee leaders to represent refugees in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism here in Uganda, and put side the refugee leaders who were part of the UPR since 2015 just because these refugees want to know more about the funding in the UPR Refugee Cluster which is spearhead by LWF.

In May 2018 while Hon. Musa Ecweru wanted to understand better how fake refugee leaders are fabricated, we observed that during a meeting held at OPM Department of refugees, many of the refugee participants were just leaders created by some powerful staffs in OPM. Since the change of leadership at InterAid in 2016 up to now we have observed a clear move of fabricating fake refugees to meet different delegations for foreign missions or other delegates who want to meet with refugees at the Refugee Community Center in Kabusu. There has been a clear and a deliberate move to ignore the outstanding refugee leaders in the Communities and both InterAid, OPM and UNHCR have only invited refugee leaders who they can easily impose what they should speak in the meeting with delegates.

It is on the short background that a battle to control and to own Congolese refugees was engaged here in Kampala between the Congolese Diaspora which is the arm of the Congolese Embassy, the M23 Rebel Group which seems to be active among Congolese refugees here in Uganda and InterAid Uganda. All have made pressure to some people among the Congolese refugees to organize elections in order to legitimate and influence the process. In a consultative meeting held at InterAid on **Thursday August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018** on the elections of the Congolese Refugee Community, we observed the quickly shift of positions and the apparent alliance between Congolese Refugees who are suspected to be members of M23 and InterAid for common positions which finally InterAid won the market and the group of Congolese refugees who are backed by the Congolese Diaspora lost the deal on who should support officially the elections.

While OPM representatives in the meeting argued that they support these elections in order to show to the world that OPM does not create fake leaders as it has been believed, InterAid on its hand clearly said it wants leaders to deal with as such elections are among the ways to legitimize their positions towards such leaders. Let us also note that up to now, UNHCR has not been having a clear stand on this leadership issue.

Being strongly convinced that a credible, independent and with integrity refugee leadership is one among the best practices in order to improve and innovate services to refugees here in Uganda, and that such kind of refugees can be found among refugee Communities through a process which is done on enabling environment of free, fair and inclusive electoral process among refugee communities here in Uganda. Such process should first of all base on a clear civic education among refugees here in Uganda.

Because of that conviction we strongly denounce the elections of the Congolese Refugee Community which are being organized today **Monday August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018** at Old Kampala Primary School playground and distance ourselves from these elections. We strongly believe that these elections will only come up with InterAid Refugee Leaders but not Congolese Community Refugee Leaders. There is no need to point out all the technical shortcomings which have characterized these elections, in case we should even call them elections.

On **May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018** together with the Executive Director and his team, during a meeting chaired by the Commissioner OPM Department of refugees, UNHCR Deputy Country Representative in charge of Protection and her Team, the Head of Police Old Kampala Police Refugee Desk and refugee leaders representing different nationalities suggested and agreed that there will be elections of refugee representatives. The process to elect refugee leaders was then placed into the hands of Darlson Kusasira the Head of OPM Community Service and she was supposed to coordinate with all the interested parties in an inclusive manner and for a process acceptable by all. During the commemoration of the World Refugees held at Nakivubo Primary School here in Kampala on **June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018**, the Commissioner OPM Department of Refugees reaffirms that elections of refugee leaders will be held and that Darlson was working on terms of references.

As we are waiting for the arrangements which are to be put in place by OPM Department of Refugees together with all concerned partners in order to have credible election of refugee leaders,

We do regret to observe an agitation within the Congolese Refugees in Uganda to try to jump this arrangement Darson is working on in order to hold parallel own elections and unfortunately InterAid Uganda has been behind these arrangements and surprisingly we are perplexed to also observe the support of OPM Department of Refugees in this divide and rule strategy. We still do not understand clearly the reasons behind such rush but we believe that these elections may be geared to challenge the ongoing investigations into what the media calls “**refugee Scandals in Uganda**”. But we are also much concerned about the candidates at various posts who are perceived as having a worrying history of either serving as soldiers in the Congolese National Army, being perceived as having been members of M23 Rebel Group or being perceived as being backed by the Congolese Diaspora in Uganda which is the arm of the Congolese government or backed by InterAid Uganda which is part of the Refugee Regime.

All these arrangements take away possibilities to have in place credible refugee leaders who will be the voice of refugees which refugees are yearning for over the years. We strongly distance ourselves from the justifications advanced by both InterAid Uganda and OPM Department of Refugees in order to mitigate the negative impacts of these elections by calling them “*these are just local refugee elections at the Community level and that both OPM have come in because they were asked to come in*”. There is no need for OPM and InterAid to get involved in refugee issues at the Community levels and much as it may be true they were asked to support the elections, this is because both OPM and InterAid have their own people placed in the Community to lobby for them and these are the people who sought for their support.

Consistent allegations indicate that Patrick Nuwagaba and John Asimwe are among InterAid Staffs who been behind the preparations of these elections as the representatives of InterAid, the candidates claim having held meetings with InterAid officers and at last but not least the Communiqué made public by the Congolese Electoral Commission on **Tuesday August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018** indicated that InterAid has financed the elections by paying for the Old Kampala Primary School Field where elections are supposed to take part according to the people involved and InterAid has assured to provide the security.

As per now much as this Communiqué has circulated on Whatsup including Whatsup refugee groups where some InterAid staffs are members, InterAid has not yet distanced itself from such arrangements.

In a reaction to our letter, which was sent to InterAid last week, the Executive Director of InterAid called for a meeting with all the Congolese refugee parties, a representative from the Foundation PPDHR, Madame Carol from UNHCR and two representatives from OPM Department of Refugees Madam Patience from the Protection Unit and Madam Darlson from the

Community Service Unit. With the purpose to come up with the consensus, while InterAid, and OPM supported the elections, UNHCR stated they are observing the situation and Foundation PPDHR challenged the whole process.

Having a particular attention on the roles which will be played by the legitimate refugee leaders we are so much concerned about the external influences which are behind this exclusive Congolese Community Elections which has brought together an estimated number of around 300 refugees who turned up to vote out of the 50,000 Congolese Refugees estimated in Kampala mainly the Congolese Diaspora which is perceived as supporting in different ways including financially one candidate, InterAid which is perceived as offering the ground and lobbying for the Police to provide security and supporting one candidate and members of M23 as being perceived by many refugees as highly involved in the whole organization of these so called elections.

Bearing in mind that we should not create an environment which will make easy for the Congolese Government to penetrate all refugees, for M23 to infiltrate refugees and for InterAid Uganda to control refugee leaders we are highly concerned about the protection of different refugees who may have a different views and positions from these actors.

To make the matter worse the campaigns have been violent amongst Congolese refugees who are involved, have created more divisions among Congolese and have created worries among those who believe have been victims of these actors behind the candidates. Particularly we have received worries from Congolese Human Rights Defenders who are refugees here in Uganda, Congolese Politically persecuted refugees and all those who survived atrocities alleged being committed by M23 and all those who are critical to InterAid ways of handling refugees.

**Being strongly engaged into the promotion of refugee rights in Uganda we request InterAid Uganda the following:**

We appeal to the Government of Uganda, the UNHCR and the Donor Community to quickly finish the said investigations into refugee scandals and bring to books all those who will be found guilty and to ensure that victims are rehabilitated,

We appeal upon UNHCR and OPM to review their contract with InterAid in their implementation of services to Urban Refugee Programmes here in Kampala because InterAid as per now cannot offer services to all refugees and has not ceased to appear impartial in refugee affairs,

We appeal to OPM Department of refugees to as soon as possible hold its staffs accountable especially those who are involved in these so called Congolese refugee elections and all those who are suspects in refugee leadership abuses,

We appeal upon OPM Department of Refugees and UNHCR Uganda to request all those involved in the investigations to speedup these investigations so that the suspects may face the law,

We call upon OPM Department of Refugees, UNHCR, their implementing organizations and all organizations which offer services to refugees here in Uganda to suspend their staffs who are suspected of abusing refugees in one way or the other in order to pave way to credible investigations,

We appeal to OPM Department of Refugees and UNHCR to urgently put in place a quick mechanism to handle and extend services to refugees especially those who feel not welcome by InterAid and all those who are victims of divisions created by these elections in the Congolese refugee community in Kampala,

We appeal upon the Commissioner of OPM Department of Refugees, and the UNHCR to make a public Communiqué not to recognize the Congolese leaders who will come out of these elections and only consider them as InterAid Congolese Refugee Leaders,

We appeal upon all actors interested in refugee issues in Uganda not to recognize Congolese Refugee Leaders from these elections,

As part of the Congolese and part of the whole entire refugee community in Uganda who are victims and witnesses of how refugee leaders have been abused, we pledge our position not to recognize any refugee leaders who may likely be a result of such fabrications baptized the name of elections of Congolese Refugee Leaders,

*Yours sincerely*

Kulihoshi Musikami Luc Pecos

**Executive Director**

**CC:**

Hon. Musa Ecweru

State Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugees

Office of the Prime Minister Department of Refugees

Kampala Uganda

**The Deputy Country Representative in charge of Protection**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR Uganda,

The United Nations Inspector General

Geneva

The Donor Community accredited to Uganda,