



Keynote Address

By

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At the

African Union Special Summit on
Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced
Persons in Africa

*African Union Addressing the Challenges of Forced Displacement in
Africa*

Munyonyo
22nd October 2009

The Chairman, African Union Commission;
Your Excellencies;
Hon. Ministers;
Hon. Members of Parliament;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference is dedicated to the plight of Refugees and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa. This is a welcome move so that we discuss these important topics thoroughly. In order to do so scientifically, we should first ask ourselves the following question: **‘What factors generate refugees and IDPs?’** As we all know, the main factor that generates refugees and IDPs is conflicts – wars. Therefore, the main solution to the phenomena of refugees and IDPs is ensuring that conflicts do not take place and the ones in progress are resolved fairly.

As you may probably know, I know quite a lot about conflicts, having taken part, directly or indirectly, in many. The problem I have is the total lack of seriousness and thoroughness on the part of those who set themselves up as the ones to resolve many of these conflicts. Many of these actors are very superficial in their approaches towards conflict resolution. They mostly misdiagnose the causes and, therefore, prescribe wrong medicines. Hence, the conflicts are never resolved in many cases.

In other cases, where the root causes of those conflicts are fully addressed, the conflicts end. For example, the independence of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and the majority (democratic) rule in South Africa brought about the end of conflicts in the Southern African sub-continent the zig-zag course the different countries traversed notwithstanding.

In Burundi, through the regional mediation, there is now peace and democracy with a power-sharing formula agreed upon in Arusha.

In Uganda, there is now peace in the whole country because the root causes of the conflicts in different parts of the country were dealt with. One factor was, for instance, the nascent state organs created after 1986 – especially the Army. With the maturing of the Army, the parasitic terrorists that used to take advantage of the underdeveloped state organs were defeated. The Kony terrorists, the cattle-rustlers in Karamoja, the ADF terrorists were all defeated. The people are now enjoying peace, democracy and are busy with developmental issues. The terrorists had been interfering with the free choices of the Ugandan people as well as their safety and development. They can no longer do so.

Coming back to the superficial style of management of these conflicts, our experience is that the core problem is the failure to define conflicts. Conflicts and wars are either just or unjust. Just wars are legitimate – they involve fighting for justice. The best example of just wars, I can give are the decolonization wars. The colonized peoples had to chase away the colonialists. The European colonialists had it in their head that they had a right to colonize and oppress other people. They said that they needed raw-materials for their industrialization, markets for their manufactured goods and, therefore, had a right to colonize less organized societies to achieve these. At one time Britain attacked the weak feudal Chinese Government to force the Chinese people to buy opium (1839-1842). China, according to Britain, *had made a very big mistake by refusing the selling of opium in China. China had to be attacked because of this.* The colonized peoples could not accept this. They launched anti-colonial wars e.g. Mau Mau rebellion, the war in Indo-China, Southern Africa, etc. These were just wars. The colonized peoples could not keep peace with their oppressors. Other conflicts are caused by wars of aggression. The imperialist wars were wars of aggression. The First and Second World Wars were wars among the aggressors that had fallen out amongst themselves, fighting over the colonial loot. A unified Germany (1871), Italy and Japan wanted ‘a fairer’ re-division of the colonial loot – the colonies.

All these wars, whether just or unjust, cause refugees and IDPs. However, to eliminate the phenomena of refugees and IDPs, you

must deal with the wars whether they are just or unjust. You deal with the just wars by bringing justice and the unjust wars by stopping the aggression. When you are confronted with a conflict, the first question you should ask yourself should be: 'Who is right and who is wrong?' The two sides cannot be both right; one side must be right and the other one must be wrong as far as causes are concerned. Sometimes, however, both sides may be wrong as happened in the inter-imperialist wars of 1914 to 1918 and 1939 to 1945. That must also be established. It is useless to just *sweep the dirt under the carpet* with protestations for 'peace' without thoroughly dealing with the wrongs and the rights of each conflict. Such peace will not last. There are plenty of cases to illustrate this.

Even if a war is just, we must also look at the methods used to execute that war. This is what distinguishes a freedom fighter from a terrorist. Using indiscriminate violence, especially against non-combatants, is criminal and terrorism. It is worse when one is fighting for an unjust cause and also uses terrorist methods. It is a double mistake historically. Furthermore, even where a just cause exists, it is important to ensure that you exhaust all the peaceful methods before resorting to violence. Resorting to violence prematurely is adventurist.

Therefore, when we are dealing with the root causes of conflicts, we must delve into these matters if we want to bring about a just and, consequently, a durable solution that will create long lasting peace. Whatever the cause of the conflict, however, the refugees and IDPs must be catered for. They need security, food, shelter, clothing, medicine, education, safe-water, etc.

When Uganda was under terrorist threat, the UPDF ensured that routes to IDPs remained open in spite of the terrorists using land-mines, ambushes, etc. All the 1.9 million¹ IDPs were getting food through convoys escorted by UPDF. We used zonal forces to guard IDPs and the mobile forces to hunt for the terrorists. Immunization, provision of safe-water, education, etc., should, actually, be easier in IDPs because the people are congregated in

¹ IDPs reached highest levels of 1.9 million in 2003-2004

one place. Sustained relief for long periods, however, can cause distortions in people's psychic. They may lose interest in earning one's upkeep. In Uganda, we, therefore, used to give land (hectares) to each family of refugees so that they could produce their own food. As agricultural land becomes scarce in Uganda, it may be difficult to sustain this policy. We should, therefore, look at the possibilities of giving refugees skills beyond agriculture such as in carpentry, pottery, weaving, metal-work, computer knowledge, construction, etc. They may, then, have a possibility of earning income in their host country or in their own country when they go back home. The refugee or IDP years would not have been wasted in vain. This is on top of obtaining formal education – Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), etc.

All refugees must have a right of return to their countries of origin. No country should be allowed to disown its own people. Also important is the possibility of the host countries allowing the refugees to take up citizenship after a certain minimum period.

In the pre-colonial times, the region of the Great Lakes never had permanent refugees as is the case now. Except for exiled princes seeking to regain their thrones, refugees would be absorbed in host communities. In Uganda, for example, refugees who ran away from the succession war of Ssemakookiro and Jjunju of Buganda were absorbed in Ankole (Banyaruguru) and Bunyoro-Tooro (Kitagwenda). They would *kwehongyera* (pledge loyalty) to the host king and that was it. They would be absorbed in the society. When the Christians fled from Buganda to Ankole in September 1888, king Ntare V offered them the area of Isingiro for residence. The Baganda Christians, however, preferred Kabula, which was near the frontier because they feared that with the comforts of Isingiro they would never think of going back to Buganda. It was because they had political ambitions of re-conquering Buganda that they decided to remain near the frontier. Otherwise, they would have been absorbed in Ankole like the Banyaruguru were or like the Moslems, again from Buganda, were later on absorbed. Therefore, this concept of somebody being a refugee permanently is not in the traditions of Africa. It needs to, however, be handled with care,

especially where rural land is involved, so that there are no clashes with the indigenous people.

As land becomes scarce, I propose that refugee groups can be more easily integrated in the urban areas rather than the rural areas. There is, for instance, a very strong Somali community in the urban areas of Uganda, especially in Kampala. I have not heard of any friction they have generated. Instead, they are contributing to the economy, especially in the transport sector.

I have dwelt much on the issue of refugees and IDPs caused by conflicts. I have not touched on the causes of the refugees and IDPs by natural factors such as drought, earth-quakes, floods, etc. The answer for these is all-round development especially provision of electricity, roads, the railway, education-for-all, industrialization, etc. This will enable our economies to generate resources to cope with all these problems. We need to have capacity to predict these natural catastrophes and adopt viable response mechanisms to cope with them. That is why the base of all-round development is crucial because all this needs money. If it is earth-quakes we anticipate, then, building standards must be arranged in such a manner that buildings can cope with that problem. In March 1966², there was an earth-quake in the Ugandan town of Fort-portal. Some buildings collapsed and even the Palace of the king cracked. Some of the subsequent builders such as those who built the Catholic Cathedral at Virika, catered for this. The Catholic cathedral was built to the standard of 9 points on the Richter scale. Then, there was another earth-quake in the same area in February 1994.³ Some of the buildings were affected; but not the Catholic cathedral. These are very important lessons to internalize. The same goes for floods, landslides etc. In Uganda, these problems are caused by the population degrading the environment by cutting forests, settling in the flood plains of the rivers, cultivating on the hillsides without following contours, etc. All these are entirely curable problems.

² Earthquake was of 6.1 magnitude on the Richter scale

³ Earthquake was of 6.2 magnitude on the Richter scale

In 1986, Uganda was among the five countries that had the greatest number of refugees in the world. These were Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Sudan and Uganda. There were 500,000 Ugandan refugees in Congo and Sudan. These are all back in Uganda. Later on, the terrorists pushed about 1.9 million Ugandans into IDP camps. We defeated the terrorists and soon all the IDP camps will be no more.

Apart from resolving the fundamental issues that generate refugees, the question of building state capacity is also crucial. By state capacity, I am referring to the building of the Army, the Police, the intelligence services, administration, the courts, etc. Terrorists, without a justifiable cause, can target people and cause exodus of population if the state structures are not strong enough to protect them.

In conclusion, let us diagnose correctly the factors that generate refugees and IDPs and resolve them; look after them while their problem lasts; integrate those that are interested in the host countries; give them skills while in exile; build strong state institutions, especially the Army, to protect peace; and integrate returnees back into their original societies.

I cannot end my speech without saluting the UNCHCR, the World Food Programme for always providing relief to the refugees and IDPs. Many Africans would have died were it not for the support of these organizations. We thank Governments that contribute to their budgets.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to end by thanking all those who have worked tirelessly, in their various capacities, to make this Special Summit a success. And, once again, I welcome you to Uganda and wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you very much.