

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF**  
**REFUGEES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION**  
**SPECIAL ENVOY SAID DJINNIT**

7 March 2019

Speke Resort Munyonyo, Uganda

H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda,  
Hon. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda,  
Amb. Zachary Muburi-Muita, Executive Secretary of the ICGLR,  
Amb. Basile Ikouebe, Special Representative of the African Union (AU)  
and Head of the AU Liaison Office for the Great Lakes Region,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Heads of UN Agencies and International Organizations present,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over four millions out of the 6.3 million refugees on the African continent originate from countries in the Great Lakes region, including from Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Rwanda.

Continued high levels of forced displacement, in particular the presence of protracted cases of refugees, come at a high cost and constitutes a source of tension and mistrust between neighbouring countries in the region.

To address and foster solutions to this crisis, the 9<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM) of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework held in October 2018 in Kampala, encouraged my Office, together with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), UNHCR and others, to facilitate a regional meeting on durable solutions for protracted refugees, under the auspices of H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

To reduce displacement, we need to first and foremost address its causes and drivers, notably by preventing violence and armed conflict and neutralising armed groups, by enhancing efforts to promote and protect human rights, and by ensuring State presence able to perform core functions, even in hard to reach areas. Efforts are also required to provide people with better alternatives than fleeing their places of origin in pursuit of better socio-economic opportunities.

Strong collaboration among the countries in the region is necessary. When there is political will, concrete results are possible as demonstrated by the effective cooperation under the Framework of the Follow-up Mechanism on the repatriation of disarmed combatants, which resulted in the voluntary repatriation of disarmed FDLR and ex-M23 combatants and dependents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda to their places of origin.

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the Global Compact on Refugees as a blueprint guiding refugee responses. More recently the African Union chose Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement as its 2019 theme. This high-level Ministerial meeting today provides an opportunity to discuss and agree on how, as a region,

we can translate these global and continental commitments into tangible actions.

Of course, voluntary return remains the preferred durable solution in the majority of refugee situations. This requires long-term investments to ensure the sustainable and dignified return and re-integration of returnees.

However, many protracted refugees in the Great Lakes region may never be able to return home. Moreover, many refugees in the region were born in host countries where they are de facto integrated without affinity to their home country.

Local integration is, therefore, a viable alternative for many protracted refugees and a way to ease pressure on host countries. A growing body of evidence shows that successful local integration can be a vehicle for economic development benefiting both host communities and protracted refugees creating a win-win situation focused on local development, self-reliance and resilience.

Indeed, local integration of refugees is already happening to various degrees in some countries including Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia. I would like to commend those countries for their political commitment to address protracted refugees through lasting solutions.

In addition to local integration, we need to think of other solutions including the free movement of persons as an integration aspiration and development enabler.

Regional stability and economic integration is the basis for shared prosperity and development in the Great Lakes in line with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. It is ultimately this approach of deepening integration that will enable the region to tackle the drivers of conflict and forced displacement which include poverty, economic hardship, the marginalisation of youth, and poor governance.

In concluding, I would like to thank most sincerely H.E. President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the Government and the People of Uganda for the hospitality and generosity in hosting this meeting.

Thank you.

End.