

**WELCOME REMARKS BY THE PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER DURING THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF REFUGEES IN THE GREATLAKES REGION AT SPEKE RESORT HOTEL, MUNYONYO-KAMPALA, UGANDA**

**MARCH 5, 2019**

- ✓ Amb. Said Djinnit, UN Special Envoy from the Great Lakes region
- ✓ Amb. Zachary Muburi Muita, Executive Director ICGLR
- ✓ Amb. Basile Kouebe, Special Representative of the AU (Chairperson) and Head of AU Liaison office for the Great lakes region
- ✓ UNHCR Country Representative and Heads of UN missions in Uganda
- ✓ Refugee protection and management experts from the Great lakes region
- ✓ My colleagues refugee protection and management practitioners from Office of the Prime Minister
- ✓ Representatives of local, regional, continental and global NGOs
- ✓ Various media houses present,
- ✓ Distinguished invited guests
- ✓ Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister who is the overall technical supervisor of refugee protection and management in Uganda, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you to this historical occasion when, refugee protection and management practitioners from the Great Lakes region come together to share skills, knowledge and understanding, experience, expertise and practical lessons and solutions to this increasing global challenge.

Forced migration is increasingly becoming a thorn in the flesh of the international community and understanding how countries are dealing with people forced to flee their homes requires strategic collaboration, benchmarking, in-depth dialogue at technical, policy and diplomatic levels, hence, partly explaining why we have gathered here today.

Distinguished invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, during the past 20 years, the global population of forcibly displaced persons has nearly doubled from 33.9

million in 1997 to 65.6 million in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017). At least 34% of those displaced have ended up as refugees in a countries not of their own.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important to note that, low income countries, like many of us are representing here today, are shouldering an increasing burden of hosting refugees. The UNHCR 2017 World report indicates that, 28% of the global numbers of refugees are seeking for asylum in least developed countries. But most important to worry about is the facts that, some of the countries that continue to registered the highest numbers of stateless persons are within the Great lakes region. Meanwhile, please note that, the Great lakes region is on record for registering big numbers of asylum numbers within the Great lakes region.

Uganda is ranked among the top three refugee hosting countries globally after Turkey and Pakistan and in 2016, it became the biggest refugee hosting country in Africa with over 1.2m

The high number of refugees in Uganda is partially explained by the country's traditional hospitality and its progressive refugee policy. From a regulatory standing point, the 2006 Uganda's Refugee Act and the 2010 Refugee Regulations, offer refugees various rights. Key among these are: then right to access to public social services including education, health, sanitation, safe water provision; the right to engage in IGAs and to seek employment; the right to documentation, security, protection and freedom of movement. These rights and entitlements are meant to provide a pathway for refugees to establish their own livelihoods and attain some level of self-reliance thereby, becoming progressively less reliant on humanitarian assistance.

However, despite Uganda's progressive refugee policy, challenges remain and these are;

- Population explosion within the refugee hosting communities which put a lot pressure and competition on existing resources and services such as education, health sanitation, water, etc.

- Only 40% of refugees needs are met and humanitarian and development programs are chronically and severely under-funded.
- There is a tendency to degrade the environment as refugees cut trees for firewood, charcoal, building materials, timber, thus affecting the climate.
- Many refugees are political refugees and ex-combatants and they pose security challenges to both hosting countries and countries of origin.
- Sometimes the outbreak of epidemics and communicable diseases are associated with movements of refugees

Due to protracted nature of refugees in Uganda a number of interventions have designed to address some of the above mentioned challenges. These are;

Self Reliance Strategy (SRS): This was initiated in 1998 to integrated services for refugees and host communities and promote self reliance among both communities. Prior to this SRS initiative, services in Refugee settlements were run parallel with those in host communities and it compromised harmony.

Development Assistance to Refugee Hosting Area Programs, Refugee and host population empowerment (ReHOPE) and CRRF. These programs are aimed at strengthening the resilience and self-reliance of host communities and refugees through multi-sector and co-ordinated interventions

As I conclude, I call upon all of you to critically look at the refugee challenges faced by member states of this regional grouping and come up with appropriate remedies which will assist refugees live a dignified live in their host countries.

Thank you

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY