

**CLOSING REMARKS BY THE RT. HON DR RUHAKANA
RUGUNDA**

PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

**AT THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF
REFUGEES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

SPEKE RESORT HOTEL, MUNYONYO-KAMPALA, UGANDA

MARCH 7, 2019

- ✓ Hon. Ministers in charge of Refugees from the Great Lakes Region,
- ✓ The UN Special Envoy of the Secretary General for the Great Lakes Region,
- ✓ The representative of the UNHCR High Commissioner,
- ✓ The Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region,
- ✓ Special Representative of the African Union,
- ✓ Development Partners present
- ✓ Representatives of UN Agencies,
- ✓ Distinguished team of Experts
- ✓ Distinguished invited guests

I am pleased to join you at the closing of this High Level meeting of Ministers responsible for handling refugee issues in the Great Lakes Region.

I would like to salute the organizers for bringing this high level attention to a subject of common concern—ensuring that our response to the situation of refugees and host communities, as well as forced displacement is handled with the seriousness, dignity and humanity that it rightly deserves.

I am aware that this meeting was preceded by a two- day meeting of experts from Member States of the Great Lakes Region aimed exploring the mechanisms of providing durable solutions to refugees and populations in forced displacement in the region.

As we are all aware, the Great Lakes Region has an estimated 4.4 million refugees and asylum, seekers some of whom have found themselves in protracted situations lasting beyond twenty years. Uganda is no exception, with over 1.2 million refugees, a significant number of them have been hosted here since the 1950s and 1970s.

They have stayed as refugees and the conditions may not be favorable for them to return to their countries of origin at the moment. Some of them are stateless and have no country they call home.

It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that a sustainable solution is found to this situation. It is comforting that the effort is being geared towards addressing this challenge in our situation.

In addressing the issues of refugees, it is worth noting as has been variously stated that no one chooses to be a refugee. The reasons for people to flee are majorly external to the refugees. It is therefore a responsibility of all of us to treat refugees humanely and with dignity.

This high-level meeting of Ministers in charge of refugees in the Great Lakes region has been held in line with the Global Compact on Refugees adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. This is a blueprint to guide refugee response in the world.

The Compact among other things, emphasizes voluntary return to the countries of origin, relocation to third countries and local integration as some of the approaches towards providing durable solutions.

Each of those approaches has challenges like unsuitable environment in the country of return, limited slots and lengthy relocation procedures, as well as lack of appropriate legal and policy framework for integration.

I am glad that the outcome document from this meeting has pointed out some concrete actions to address the bottlenecks for realizing durable solutions in handling the situation of refugees.

In Uganda, we have continued to pursue progressive and inclusive approaches to displaced persons and granting rights to refugees to make them feel at home.

We have also embraced the Comprehensive Response Framework as a whole of society approach to provide for needs of both refugees and host communities. This is important in ensuring sustained asylum space and mitigating conflicts between refugees and host communities which could arise due to competition for scarce resources.

The importance of addressing the root causes of displacement and voluntary return cannot be emphasized enough as the most durable approach to addressing the refugee problem.

We need to continue working collectively together, as region, as a continent and as a global community, to ensure that durable peace prevails in the region to curtail the scourge of forced displacement.

With these remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the High Level Meeting for Ministers in Charge of Refugees in the Great Lakes Region closed.

Thank you