

## Thank You Message to the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda on Securing Refugee-Host Relations in Northern Uganda



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Today I received two motor vehicles and eight motorcycles donated by Refugee Law Project at our headquarters in Naguru. The vehicles were handed over to me by H.E the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Henk Van Bakker.



IGP Okoth Ochola greets H.E the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Henk Van Bakker at Police Headquarters in Naguru during a handover ceremony of automobiles (Photo Credit: IGP's Twitter Page).

On Saturday 27 April 2019, Refugee Law Project (RLP) joined the citizens of the Netherlands living in Uganda and elsewhere in celebrating King's Day. This important national holiday in the Netherlands marks the birth in 1885 of King Willem-Alexander Claus George Ferdinand, the son of Queen Beatrix. At that time, liberals in the Government of the Kingdom were searching for means of promoting national unity. The event is thus organised as an opportunity for patriotic celebration and national reconciliation, and as a reminder of the Government's historical commitment to reconciliation and sustainable peace in the Netherlands and world-over - a commitment that has since been seen in Kingdom's support to Uganda on the rule of law and other peace promoting activities.

To mark this special occasion the Government of the Netherlands allows for *vrijmarkt* (free market) - the only day of the year that street sales are permitted without payment of value added tax (VAT). There are also a series of public festivities, and the monarch honours Dutch citizens who have given outstanding service to the Netherlands.

As we join the celebration of this special day, and as a beneficiary of generous funding from the Kingdom's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, H.E. Henk Jan Bakker and to the entire team for their support to refugees and host communities in Uganda, particularly to the refugees and host communities in northern Uganda.

During the Refugee Solidarity Summit organised in Uganda in 2017 by the President of the Republic of Uganda, H.E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez, a concerted effort to show solidarity to the refugees and refugee management regime of Uganda, and to generate momentum for financial support to the refugee response, the H.E. Henk Jan Bakker, Netherlands Ambassador to Uganda, pledged the Kingdom's financial support to strengthen refugee-host relations in northern Uganda.

As a human rights-based organisation, and as a leading Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants, we are pleased to report that this commitment included support to a project titled '*Securing Refugee-Host Relations in Northern Uganda through Enhanced Protection*', with five interlinked objectives; 1) to build the capacity of Uganda Police Force and other Rule of Law Stakeholders (Immigration, Uganda Prison Service, UPDF, Magistrates) and other local leaders to ensure that they have both the technical and social knowledge and skills to interact effectively with complex refugee communities and to mediate between host and refugees, 2) to build the confidence and self-reliance capacity of south Sudanese refugees through addressing profound harms experienced in the country of origin and in flight to Uganda, 3) to Empower refugees to speak for themselves and to be able to engage in full dialogue with hosts, police and other authority structures, 4) to engage host communities in reversing the



Delegation from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda and staff of Refugee Law Project pose for a Group photo at the Police Headquarter in Naguru in July 2018 after handing over automobiles to Uganda Police Force. (Photo Credit: IGP's Twitter Page)

impacts of sudden overpopulation and resultant environmental degradation, and 5) to conduct regional and international advocacy on refugee issues in Uganda. In the pursuit of the above, and since September 2017, we have vigorously supported the Dutch Government's commitment as pledged during the Refugee Solidarity Summit.

### **Rule of Law**

Through this project, we procured equipment to facilitate the operation of Uganda Police Force in Adjumani and Lamwo districts. Herein, we acquired 2 double cabin pick-ups and 4 motorcycles for Uganda Police Force (1 pick-up and 2 motorcycles each for Adjumani and Lamwo district).

For those who have followed closely our intervention, you will agree that the support to the Uganda Police Force through donation of automobiles to ease the operation of the uniformed forces has gone a long way in strengthening security through facilitating timely responses whenever police is required to apprehend suspects, conduct community policing, and respond to security concerns of both refugees and host communities especially in the districts of Lamwo and Adjumani.

Relatedly, it doesn't require any exploratory study to sympathise with police officers' accommodation facilities in especially far and hard-to-reach rural areas of Uganda. Through this project, we are constructing modest accommodation facilities for police offices in Lamwo and Adjumani districts as a move to ensure that police officers lead decent lives and that their conditions of work and welfare are improved. While this support cannot address the extensive operational needs of uniformed personnel including police, prisons, immigration, and UPDF, it nonetheless significantly contributes to changing this bigger picture.



IGP Okoth Ochola opens one of the cars to crank engine as a symbol of receipt of the automobiles which also included motorcycles. The cars and motorcycles were meant to ease operation of Police officers in Maaaji II and Palabek refugee settlement in Adjumani and Lamwo respectively. *(Photo Credit: IGP's Twitter Page)*

Besides the hardware, we have trained 225 police instructors at the National Police Training School in Kabalye and 192 police officers drawn from various police posts and stations from Adjumani, Kiryandongo, and Lamwo on refugee rights and protection. All the trainings are guided by our first ever training manual and user guide on refugee rights and protection designed, printed, and disseminated with support of the grant.

Using the same Curriculum and User Guide, we have trained 25 judicial officers, 40 community interpreters, 28 border point immigration officers, 100 prison officers, 60 UPDF officers, 106 Refugee Welfare Committee leaders and Local Councillors, 59 health workers. An additional 76 medical students (from Gulu University) and 43 paralegals were trained on refugee rights and protection, and how to promote peaceful co-existence between refugees and hosts.



Refugee Law Project Staff and Prison Officers of Openzinzi Prison in Adjumani district pose for a group photo after training of Prison Officers on refugee rights and protection. *(Photo Credit: RLP's Twitter Page)*

Besides the training, we have, through the funding support, promoted the rule of law through direct court representation (benefiting 323 refugees and hosts), 98 mediation (Alternative Disputes Resolutions) sessions, legal advice to 151 refugees and hosts, 48 visits to detention places (36 to police posts and stations, and 12 to prisons) reaching and supporting a 944 refugees and hosts.

We have also promoted people's access to consolidation of basic livelihoods as well as access to and uptake of services through equipping refugees and host communities through our English for Adults (EFA) programme vigorously implemented using an internally designed 5-level 'Speak Your Rights' curriculum.

## Addressing profound harms

Most of the districts in northern Uganda that host refugees are also districts recovering from decades-long destructive armed conflicts. Between refugees and hosts therefore, there are not thousands of individuals, households and communities still struggling with legacies of conflicts, including profound physical, psychological, psychosocial, psycho-sexual, and political impacts.

Addressing such harms is a herculean but necessary task if we are to arrive at peaceful and self-reliant communities. People living with profound and untreated war-related injuries need professional and inclusive physical, psychological, psychosocial, and psychosexual support so as to recover and lead dignified lives and to be in a position to proactively engage in government's developmental programmes encapsulated in the Uganda's Vision 2040, and other regional, continental and international programmes including Africa's Vision 2063 and the Global Sustainable Agendas. Understanding such barriers to effective realisation of government programmes and other development agendas requires detailed and deliberate mapping of members of refugee and host communities surviving physical and war-related challenges which exclude them from constructive engagements.

Through the project, we screened 4,316 refugees and hosts, out of whom 1,054 (58 percent females, 41 percent males, and 1 percent sexual and gender non-conforming persons) subsequently received rehabilitation support. Beneficiaries were those with injuries sustained during conflicts, refugees who had experienced harms during the wars and transit to country of asylum, or for host communities whose injuries were sustained during various armed conflicts, including the LRA war in northern Uganda.



RLP's English For Adults (EFA) learners presenting a song during the commemoration of World Refugee Day in Palabek Refugee Settlement – Lamwo District. (Photo Credit: RLP's Twitter Page)

## Refugee-Host Voices

We believe that whereas a lot has been to change lives positively, government of Uganda together with humanitarian and development actors need further robust actions to empower youths from refugee and host communities to increase opportunities for livelihoods, inform and orient youths on available services, and equip the youths with advocacy skills so as to raise issues of concern from within their communities, and to challenge injustices and hold duty bearers to account at grassroot levels. The various trainings and mentorship on videography and the establishment of the first ever *fee nil* Innovation Centre for refugees and hosts in Gulu district - with more to be established in Kiryandongo, Lamwo, and Adjumani districts are promising and beginning to yield positive results.



RLP Video Advocacy Trainee documenting 2018's International Women's Day Commemoration event at the Reception Centre in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.  
(Photo Credit: RLP's Twitter Page)

## A Thank You on King's Day

As the above demonstrates, the support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to strengthening of refugee-host relations in northern Uganda must be seen as integral to its broader commitment to supporting Rule of Law processes throughout Uganda - all of which are important in fulfilling Uganda's Vision 2040, realising the Refugee Response Plans/Strategies, making the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework a reality, and boldly supporting the realisation of international frameworks governing refugee protection including the recent Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

We therefore take the opportunity of King's Day to once again send our best wishes and thanks to the citizens of the Netherlands living in Uganda on this very special day, and bravo to the 'orange' celebrations.