



REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

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AT

PANEL DISCUSSION ON “*EXTENDING THE WELCOME: LONG-TERM APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING REFUGEES AND AT-RISK SCHOLARS IN HIGHER EDUCATION*”, March 7, 2018 – Edinburgh

1. I am pleased to join the distinguished participants here today to exchange views on this important issue. Our appreciation goes to the organisers: Association of Commonwealth Universities, British Council and the University of Edinburgh.
2. This discussion on long-term approaches to supporting refugees and at-risk scholars in higher education is very timely, taking place a few months since the United Nations adopted the first ever Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018 in New York following the Marrakesh Conference.
3. Given the prevailing political sensitivities surrounding migration and immigration especially in developed countries, there is a real risk of not giving requisite attention to the dire needs of refugees and displaced persons.
4. The core objectives of the global compact are four namely to: (i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third country solutions; and (iv) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. It is essential to intensify efforts in addressing the root causes, including political instability and insecurity, which force people to flee their countries and seek refuge in other countries.
5. According to UNHCR there are currently over 68 million forcibly displaced people globally of whom 25 million are refugees. My own country Uganda hosts over 1.4 million refugees, the largest number on the African continent and third largest globally next to Pakistan (about 1.5 million) and Turkey (3.5 million).

6. Uganda has been lauded for having one of the most progressive and generous refugee policies globally. Indeed, the 2016 United Nations Summit for Refugees declared Uganda's refugee policy a model. Refugees in Uganda are not kept in camps but are integrated within host communities and have access to the same public services as nationals, including education at all levels and health. They have freedom of movement and pursuit of livelihood opportunities, including access to jobs and starting up businesses.

7. Uganda's policy is underpinned by humanitarian consideration for providing refuge to persons in need fleeing from danger, most times through no fault of theirs. It is further premised on providing such affected persons livelihood and skills for self-sustenance even when they eventually return to their countries of origin. It is also worth noting that a number of Uganda's current political leaders experienced first-hand what it means being a refugee, as they lived in exile during the country's turmoil between the 1970s and mid-1980s.

8. However, implementation of the policy continues to put pressure on national and local budgets as Uganda government spends over USD 350 million annually (according to a study carried out by UNDP in 2017) to supplement support received from UNHCR and other donors.

9. It is therefore crucial that States and all relevant stakeholders devise more innovative ways of mobilizing resources and expertise to expand access by refugees and displaced persons to education, especially higher education. By doing so, we will be contributing to achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all. This is one of the best ways of empowering refugees and displaced persons for self-sustenance and development.

10. The Global Compact identifies some of the approaches for support including: mobilizing financial, material and technical resources to expand educational facilities; increasing scholarships for refugees; innovative online/virtual education; flexible certified learning programmes; implementation of national education sector plans that include refugees; as well as resettlement places and complementary pathways for admission to third countries.

11. At the first Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland formal pledges and contributions will be made by States and stakeholders. Subsequent Forums will provide an opportunity both for new pledges, taking stock of the implementation, and progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the Global Compact.

12. I am sure today's discussion will provide valuable input and actionable proposals on practical measures that can be taken to increase support for higher education of refugees and at-risk scholars. Thanks for your attention.