REFUGEE LAW PROJECT

Our **Success Stories**

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Journeys of resilience

From Misunderstanding to Integration: Five Sudanese Brothers get jailed for trying to save a sister

In June, five Sudanese brothers, Galalaldin Alsami, Hamidan, Abubaker Gal Ali Alobedee, Wissam Hamad Ibrahim and Hossam Saud, took their sister to Panyadoli Health Center IV in Kiryandongo. Like many health facilities in Uganda, Panyadoli struggles with overcrowding, and on that day, there were not enough beds for all the patients. Their sister was left lying on the floor, a situation that deeply distressed the brothers.

Out of concern, they sought help from the medical staff to find a bed for their sister, but due to the language barrier, they were unable to express their concerns clearly. What began as a desperate plea for assistance quickly escalated into a heated exchange between the health workers and the brothers.

In the midst of the tension, Dr. Alex Tezita at Panyadoli appeared to calm the situation by offering them a place to sit. But moments later, police officers arrived at the health centre. It dawned on the brothers that the temporary calm had been a tactic to allow the staff to summon law enforcement. Shockingly, all five were arrested and charged with assault. For the very first time in their lives, the young men found themselves behind bars in a land they had come to for protection and safety.

> ***We were very scared, but when we went to prison, we were well received and we met some very nice people who we continue to visit till now***,"
> one of the brothers later recounted.

Their case drew sharp reactions from various stakeholders. Some partners argued that the brothers should be punished harshly to send a message to other refugees in Kiryandongo, warning them against *"challenging"* medical personnel. Yet few paused to consider the circumstances: that these were young men acting out of fear for their sister's health, caught in a communication barrier that prevented them from explaining themselves.

For three months, the five brothers remained in prison. Ironically, their confinement became a window into deeper integration. They built friendships with both officers and fellow inmates—Ugandans and refugees alike. Through daily interactions, they learned about Ugandan culture, values, and lived experiences in ways they never could have outside prison walls.

It was at this point that the Refugee Law Project (RLP), through its Access to Justice program, stepped in to represent the brothers. ***"We had to go down to the community to start the mediation process,"*** recalled Kennedy Owor, a Legal Assistant at the RLP Kiryandongo office. ***"Many stakeholders said RLP supports lawbreakers. The prosecution was tough, and we had to plead with Dr. Alex at the health center to forgive the brothers."***

The mediation was not easy, but through persistent dialogue, RLP was able to broker understanding between the parties. Eventually, the charges were dropped, and the brothers regained their freedom. This outcome highlighted the importance of mediation and legal support in contexts where misunderstandings can easily escalate due to language and cultural barriers.

These interventions are made possible through the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Uganda, whose partnership strengthens RLP's ability to provide access to justice for refugees and host communities alike through the Securing Refugee Host Relations Project Phase 3.

Without these efforts, the five brothers might have remained entangled in the justice system, misunderstood and unfairly punished.

The case of the Sudanese brothers is more than just a legal story; it is a lesson in empathy, justice, and the power of dialogue. It underscores the need for systems that do not criminalize vulnerability but instead recognize the humanity and intentions behind actions.

Above all, it demonstrates that when justice is pursued not as punishment but as restoration, both refugees and host communities can find pathways to mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Justice Beyond the Courtroom:

Kiryandongo Strengthens Refugee–Host Relations Through Dialogue and Mediation

During a recent visit to the Kiryandongo Magistrate Court, the Chief Magistrate, His Worship Samson Abiti Loum, said the court is handling 6,004 pending cases, including 113 where refugees are accused, 34 where they are complainants, and 20 involving refugee children. He said, to ease the backlog, alternative justice mechanisms such as mediation are being prioritized, with three Refugee Law Project (RLP) staff being considered for training for accredited mediators.

His Worship Abiti said the court has held several plea bargain sessions, though challenges remain, particularly with children in conflict with the law, most of whom are refugees. The court provides counseling for the children and their parents, transport support, and legal sensitization for refugees on peaceful coexistence in host communities. They also use radio talk shows to educate both hosts and refugees on the laws of the land.

The Senior Resident State Attorney, Roselyn Rukundo, praised RLP's training for prosecutors, which deepened her understanding of refugee challenges. "With this understanding, I always encourage out-of-court settlements," she said. She highlighted that 60% of cases handled under plea bargain processes come from the settlement. RLP also provides interpreters, which has greatly improved access to justice. Still, some refugee are too hostile to alternative mechanisms.

The Senior State Prosecutor, Stanley Sabunyo, added:

> ***"While it is our duty to serve without external support, RLP's help is invaluable, especially in counseling refugees to appreciate their new environment."***

Similarly, the District CID Officer, Teddy Atieko, noted that most refugee statements would be impossible without RLP interpreters.

Prison Officer Alfred Okello, appreciated RLP's continuous support to inmates, including the provision of soap, sanitary pads, and razors for both hosts and refugees.

On children in detention, Ms. Rukundo raised concern that many crimes stem from unaccompanied minors lacking food, parental care, or education. *"We once had a child nearly beaten to death for stealing a chicken,"* she said.

Reduced refugee food rations have worsened the situation. Some minors face hostility from communities. Other common offenses that children commit include theft, sexual crimes, robbery, and murder.

The Community Liaison Officer, AIP Avubieng Micah, urged authorities to consider separating Sudanese and South Sudanese groups within settlements to reduce tensions, given their historical conflicts.

Beyond courtroom representation, RLP has strengthened the capacity of state actors, including judicial officers on refugee issues, thanks to support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy through the Securing Refugee Host Relations Project (Phase 3).

From Struggling Student to Community Facilitator:

How English for Adults Changed Winnie's Story

A few years ago, 24-year-old Winnie Alanyo was left devastated after sitting her O-Level examinations and scoring a pass 8 in English. Unsure of what the future held, she wondered how she could ever overcome the barrier of poor grades.

Then a friend introduced her to the English for Adults (EFA) program run by the Refugee Law Project, with support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy.

> ***My friend told me I wouldn't only learn English, but I would also gain skills to work with the community,"*** Winnie recalls.

Winnie enrolled in the Level 3 class, determined to turn her story around. The program not only strengthened her English but also built her confidence through debates, discussions, and peer assessments. *"By the end of the training, my English had improved greatly,"* she says with a smile.

The transformation didn't stop there. After graduating, Winnie competed for a position as an EFA facilitator at the Whitaker Foundation in Kiryandongo—against a candidate with formal teaching qualifications. *"During the interviews, we had both oral and practical sessions. I was able to manage a class of adults confidently, and I got the job,"* Winnie proudly shares.

Today, armed with her EFA certificate, Winnie has taken an even bigger step forward: she has enrolled for a Certificate in Social Work at Makerere Business Institute.

Her journey is a testament to how impactful the English for Adults program is not just in improving language skills but also in opening doors to education, employment, and community leadership.

Turning Wounds Into Resilience:

Rehema's Story of Healing in Uganda

At only 14, Rehema crossed into Uganda as an unaccompanied minor. On the journey, she endured violence; was gang-raped by militias, and left alone, traumatized, in a foreign land with no one to turn to.

For the next ten years, the assault left her with immense pain: severe backaches, genital injuries, and a burning sensation whenever she urinated.

“***I couldn’t carry a jerrycan of water or dig in the garden. Even going to ease myself was painful,”*** Rehema recalls.

In 2023, during a Refugee Law Project (RLP) sensitization session on war-related harms in Kiryandongo settlement, Rehema finally spoke out to the RLP staff as she sought medical attention. Using its Screen Refer Support and Document (SRSD) tool, RLP assessed her situation and referred her to Kiryandongo Hospital, where she received treatment for a month. Having assessed her situation, the doctors had initially told her she might never have children, but today Rehema is a proud mother of two. The treatment she got helped her regain her health. She has since returned to farming and is grateful for the support that changed her life.

Rehema's recovery reflects RLP's wider work on war-related harms. Many survivors of conflict arrive in Uganda carrying invisible and untreated wounds. Through careful documentation, medical referrals, legal assistance, and follow-up, RLP helps them access critical care, restore their dignity, and rebuild livelihoods shattered by war.

Equally central is RLP's mental health programme, which complements the war-related harms work. Survivors receive trauma-informed counseling and psychosocial support to heal the emotional scars of conflict. By combining medical and psychosocial interventions, RLP offers a holistic pathway to recovery, helping clients not only survive but thrive.

Fatima Ismael's story of building peace where refuge begins

Conflict reshapes lives in ways few can imagine. For many who flee war, the expectation is safety, yet for some, a new kind of conflict awaits. This has been the reality for Fatima Ismael, a 26-year-old computer science graduate from Sudan.

Eight months ago, Fatima sought refuge in Uganda when conflict broke out in Sudan. Back home, she worked for a tech company and was running a small clothing business on the side.

When she arrived in Kiryandongo Settlement, she was struck by tensions in spaces meant to be safe. In schools, for instance, children of different ages, for example, a 7-year-old sitting alongside a 20-year-old, sharing a class, sparking frustration and misunderstanding.

Beyond the classroom, old grievances from home countries were spilling over into everyday life in the markets, at water points, and even on playgrounds, places normally associated with inclusion, joy, and diversity.

"Some communities feel more entitled than others," Fatima explains.

> ***"I noticed that the Sudanese community, which is very entrepreneurial, was being targeted simply because they are new entrants to Kiryandongo settlement, yet they have already built thriving businesses.***

Through the Securing Refugee–Host Relations Project, supported by the Dutch Embassy in Uganda, Fatima has become one of the trained Peace Commissioners working to heal these rifts. She mediates between groups, fosters understanding, and volunteers as a translator for organisations and at the emergency room of Kiryandongo Hospital.

This has helped in extending her impact beyond conflict resolution to lifesaving work.

Fatima's journey embodies the broader mission of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), which recognises that forced displacement is never just a physical journey; it is also a journey through trauma, justice, and rebuilding social trust.

By investing in peace commissioners like Fatima, RLP advances its work on conflict transformation and transitional justice, helping communities not only survive displacement but also heal from the legacies of violence they carry with them. Her story is a powerful reminder that true refuge is not only about safety but also about dignity, inclusion, and the chance to build peaceful futures together.

Peace Fellows Trained on Social Media Depolarisation and Trauma Healing

In August 2025, the Conflict Transitional Justice and Governance programme of the Refugee Law Project conducted a training of Peace Fellows under the Cross-border Dialogue for Peace Phase III.

The Peace Fellows are youth who were selected from all the regions of Uganda as part of the 120 youth from the five zones of the Great Lakes Cross-border Programme in Burundi, DRC (Bukavu and Goma), Rwanda, and Uganda. The programme engages youth through 3 pillars of

i) Training, Capacity Building and Mentorship;
ii) Dialogues – Intergenerational and Cross-cultural;
iii) Advocacy and Influencing.

Under the Capacity building pillar of work, Uganda's 24 Peace Fellows participated in a second phase of training (first phase was conducted in 2023) where they were equipped with knowledge and skills on Social Media Depolarisation with a focus on countering polarisation, mis & disinformation facilitated by Yaga Burundi. They were further engaged in *'Trauma Healing'* facilitated by Adelite Mukamana.

Under Social Media Depolarisation, youth gained knowledge on alternative narratives, counter-narratives, how to detect, understand, counter disinformation, hate speech, online polarisation, and how to verify the information available on the different social media platforms as part of broader peace-building efforts in the region.

The trainer created groups among the trainees to share their thoughts, knowledge, and also learn from each other, new ways they can use social media constructively. With the advancement in technology and the AI era, the Peace Fellows were encouraged to always do a fact check of all the information they encounter on social media, including using advanced searches, geo-location, AI fact checker, AI image detector, and Invid, among others.
After the training, one of the peace fellows was quoted as saying,

 # Social media, *when used constructively, can have a positive impact in society. I have used it to fundraise locally for the vulnerable people in my community in Arua city, thanks to the fundraising skills from* ***Refugee Law Project's*** *training of peace fellows..."*

From the Trauma Healing session, Psychological Trauma and Factors of Resilience, the trainees were equipped with knowledge and skills on how to detect, deal with, and support trauma victims.

This is because young people in the Programme reported dealing with many underlying challenges, but being unaware of how to deal with challenges around mental unwellness, given the limited information available to them on the subject.

After the training, the Peace Fellows reported learning that young people continue to experience traumatic situations and ways of dealing with such situations. They shared some of their key takeaways.

“When dealing with trauma victims, we should uphold the Do No Harm principle and avoid questions that trigger emotions.”

“If we want to understand other people, we must understand ourselves first.”

“Many times, we appreciate other people and forget to appreciate ourselves, and that is what takes us into self-doubt and mental illness, so it is OK to find time and appreciate yourself self”

“You can identify depressed people from their social media posts, their comments, their online engagements, and the way they behave in society”

“When giving support to victims and survivors of trauma, we have to be active Listeners, compassionate communicators & provide psychological support to help in their recovery.”

Over the course of the training, the Peace Fellows got the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with their Mentors about the critical issues affecting young people in Uganda and the Great Lakes region. Some of the issues highlighted include; Unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse. HIV AIDS, teenage pregnancy, high cost of education and politics to mention but a few.

In Uganda's context over 70% of the population is youth and young people and yet they still grapple with all those issues mentioned above. This has a tremendous effect on the peace of the country because youth can easily be trapped in subversive activities as a way of survival. If not addressed, such issues can cripple the peace building efforts in the region.

Therefore, sharing experiences by a fireplace between the youth and mentors was one way of learning from one another and getting guidance and mentorship required to shape the future of the youth that attended.

The 9-day training that brought together Peace Fellows' representatives from all regions of Uganda (Rwenzori, West Nile, Western, Eastern and Northern) empowered the youth with new knowledge on the pros and cons of social media especially in this era where there is a lot of cyber bullying and disinformation but also how it can be used to impact the communities positively. Since social media is a potential weapon for political instability (examples Egypt, Tunisia and the recent banning of social media in Nepal that caused riots), this training created new ambassadors of peace in Uganda and the Great Lakes Region.

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