



Refugee Law Project

School of Law, Makerere University
A Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants



World Refugee Day 2021

THEME: TOGETHER, WE HEAL, LEARN and SHINE

Every year on June 20, the world comes together to remember and celebrate refugees. The United Nations designate World Refugee Day to honour refugees around the globe. Uganda hosts 1.4 million refugees, the fourth largest refugee population in the world. Refugees in Uganda mostly come from the Great Lakes region, including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Refugees flee their homes for many reasons, including political persecution, war, race, nationality, membership of a particular social group. As a signatory to the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees and the 1951 Convention of refugees, and the Optional Protocol of 1967, Uganda is obligated to receive refugees in Uganda. Having first received refugees in 1940 from Poland, we have now been hosting refugees for more than 70 years.

Refugee Law Project is an outreach project of the School of Law, Makerere University, established in 1999 primarily to provide legal aid and research about refugees. Refugee Law Project has 210 staff members working in 12 offices around the country. The services provided by Refugee Law Project include Legal Aid, English for Adults, psychosocial support, research and advocacy, and training of multiple stakeholders, including forced migrants themselves as well as governmental and civil society duty-bearers. Refugee Law Project assists refugees and displaced people through five thematic areas, including a) Access to Justice b) Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing c) Gender and Sexuality d) Conflict, Transitional Justice and Governance e) Media for Social Change.

This year's theme for World Refugee Day is Together. We Heal, Learn and Shine. It is a unique theme, as it celebrates the courage and resilience of refugees who mostly flee their homes due to war, persecution, and violence. It is easy for us to focus on the grim side of things when we think of refugees. The truth, however, is that despite being forced to flee from their home countries, and the challenges occasioned by the current COVID 19 pandemic, the refugee population in Uganda continues to work towards a stronger, safer, and more vibrant world through different aspects such as music, dance, storytelling, art, technology, food, and sports among others.

Together We Heal: Refugees flee their home countries with injuries from conflict or during flight. Health care is paramount when a refugee is in the country of asylum. Working in partnership with health partners in Kampala, Arua, Kitgum, Mbarara, Kiryandongo, Lamwo and Adjumani, Refugee Law Project provides medical treatment and mental health services for Refugees. Access to health care and medical support saves lives. Refugee Law Project offers medical services for war-related harms for refugees who fled from persecution. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, many refugees experienced mental health challenges. In response, Refugee Law Project provided

telephone counselling. On this World Refugee Day, we ask the Government of Uganda to prioritize the vaccination of all refugees to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Together We Learn: Education provides a future for refugees in the country of asylum. Refugee Law Project offers English for Adults through a Speak your Rights Curriculum. For over 13 years, Refugee Law Project has reached over 20,000 forced migrants and their hosts with English language skills. Graduates of the English classes can access livelihood opportunities, access medical services, access tertiary education and improve their mental health. The curriculum helps refugees overcome their language barrier in access to health, education. However, refugees struggle with access to education beyond primary school. We request the government of Uganda and UNHCR to prioritize the inclusion of free secondary education for refugees in Uganda.

Together We Shine: Refugee Law Project uses video advocacy to let refugees shine. Through short video documentaries, refugees shine and document their experiences in the country of asylum. The videos focus on critical issues in their communities and are currently being used to create change in the communities. Refugee Law Project annually organizes a film festival called *WAKIMBIZI* to showcase the talents of refugees. At the onset of the pandemic and the lockdown, many refugees in the country were challenged by the lack of information on COVID-19, which put most at risk of violating the Covid restrictions. Basic Video Advocates produced messages in over ten refugee languages shared with different refugee communities on WhatsApp and SMS messages. The Advocates were instrumental in recording the messages, editing them and sharing them with their constituencies. On this World Refugee Day, we recognize the power of video in showcasing activities conducted by refugees.

On this World Refugee Day, we urge the Government of Uganda and UNHCR to prioritise the inclusion of refugees in health, education and sports.



Kingdom of the Netherlands