

Annual Report 2017

| International Refugee Rights Initiative |



www.refugee-rights.org



Word from the Executive Director

2017 has been a year of significant achievement for IRRI as we continued to work on our core issues of causes and resolutions to displacement and rights in exile. With our head office in Kampala, inevitably the ongoing refugee crisis in the country has been a major concern; as the unprecedented flow of almost 1 million refugees from South Sudan into Uganda placed a significant burden on the Ugandan government, as well as on humanitarian actors. In its advocacy efforts, IRRI has consistently raised concerns over the multiple protection challenges faced by those displaced by this renewed crisis. Many of these reflect a global response to refugees that places a growing emphasis on protection *from* refugees rather than *for* refugees, leading to serious rights violations and challenges in accessing resources and services for displaced populations. IRRI has taken every opportunity to speak out against this approach.

Our efforts to highlight the root causes of exile in order to prevent further displacement, saw us continuing to work on mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, and for instance research on the drivers of displacement in the Great Lakes region. Ensuring that conflict drivers are better understood and addressed, and raising the profile of these less covered crises among actors who are in the best position to prevent deterioration, has helped to ensure better responses and maintained pressure on decision makers to act.

IRRI participated in several events around the world, highlighting key issues and challenges faced by refugees and displaced populations in our focus countries. We have continued to strengthen and revitalise our existing partnerships as well as increased our engagement with new advocacy targets within governments and inter-governmental bodies in an effort to become more effective in ensuring that our research has a genuine impact.

In order to increase the coverage and readership of our work, we reworked our website and continued to improve our use of social media including increasing our twitter following by over 20%. We have also worked hard towards expanding our funding portfolio. While the influx of South Sudanese refugees has been gradually stabilising, new outbreaks of violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and ongoing instability in other countries in the region make our work more important than ever.



Andie Lambe, Executive Director

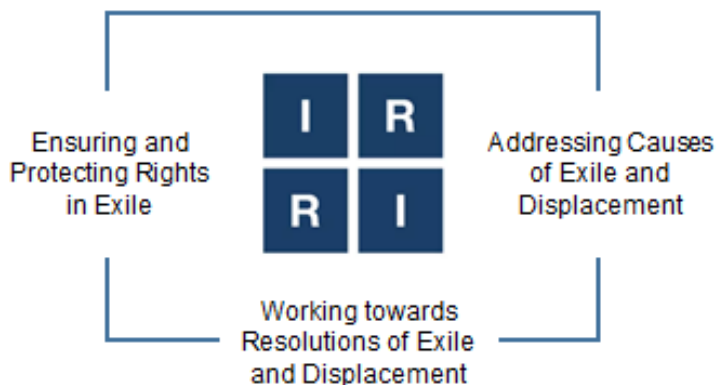


IRRI was founded in 2004 to inform and improve responses to cycles of violence and displacement that are at the heart of large-scale human rights violations. We work to ensure that the voices of the displaced and conflict affected communities are not only heard but heeded at the international level through our evidence based advocacy that is built on solid field research and analysis.

Over the last 13 years, we have developed a holistic approach to the protection of human rights before, during, and in the aftermath of, displacement by focusing on:

- identifying the violations that cause displacement and exile;
- protecting the rights of those who are displaced; and
- ensuring the solutions to their displacement are durable, rights respecting, safe and timely.

This holistic approach is reflected in our three core programme areas, illustrated below:



We are registered as a non-profit organisation in the US, the UK and Uganda with a board of five, headed by our Nigeria-based Chair, Chidi Odinkalu and our Uganda-based Vice-Chair, Salima Namusoby, with other board members based in the UK, US and Tanzania.



IRRI works to address the causes of conflict-related displacement; to ensure that the rights of those forced to leave their homes are respected; and to promote appropriate and sustainable solutions to their displacement. Displacement is a symptom and a cause of conflict and disenfranchisement; and failures to resolve displacement are a highly complex and multi-faceted and, if not managed correctly, can lead to future displacement where reintegration has failed.

Not only have the displaced been forced to leave their homes due to conflict, unrest or persecution, they can be vulnerable to abuse both during their journey and when they arrive at a place of “safety”. Often treated as a burden, they are forced to live in unacceptable conditions, isolated and marginalised for long periods of time and with little genuine effort to offer real solutions.

IRRI recognises that just as the causes of displacement are multiple, so are the consequences. Therefore, we do not have a “one size fits all” approach, but instead takes a context-specific model that is both comprehensive and cognisant of the commonalities in the way that issues of displacement are treated at governmental and multilateral levels. Taking this comprehensive approach and recognising the interconnectedness of these issues allows IRRI to formulate more nuanced and effective strategies of response.

While the challenges of civil conflict and the abuse of power by state and non-state actors are highly complex, we believe that there are opportunities to pre-empt these crises, or at a minimum mitigate their impact. Through an integrated framework of regional research, international advocacy and the amplification of local voices, our expertise in protecting human rights in situations of ongoing conflict and displacement in rights protection, mass atrocity and conflict prevention, peace-building and reconciliation enables IRRI to be uniquely effective and have a tangible impact on those whose lives and livelihoods are severely threatened.



In 2017, the key countries that IRRI focused on included South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, DRC, Cameroon, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, Senegal and Rwanda.



IRRI continued its commitment to increasing refugees' access to assistance and information through its global Rights in Exile programme, which provides a centralised [information portal](#) and country specific information to refugee law practitioners and advocates. It continued to serve as a referral mechanism to service providers within refugee hosting countries.



IRRI has worked hard to establish and strengthen our relationship with relevant policymakers in order to ensure that our work and publications under this programme lead to a genuine change in understanding of the complexity of issues and, therefore, to well-informed policy responses. Under this core programme area, IRRI has also invested in raising the profile of situations that have the potential to escalate into conflict and displacement, in order to contribute to prevention.

We have increased our focus on the causes of exile of refugees from South Sudan, the DRC and Burundi. In Q2 IRRI carried out [research with Burundian refugees in Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda](#), and published a [piece](#) on the African Union 9auOPSC Field Mission to Burundi. In Q4 IRRI, together with other civil society actors, IRRI investigated the violence in the Kasai region, calling on the UN to investigate. In West Africa, with peaceful election results in Gambia, IRRI has shifted its focus to the situation in Cameroon where tensions have been increasing. We spoke with a number of civil society organisations in order to better understand the history and context on the ground, leading to a blog in Q2 entitled [Why We Shouldn't Ignore What's Happening in Cameroon](#).

We continued our work on promoting the Responsibility to Protect through our ongoing commitment to the steering group of the [International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect](#) (ICRtoP) and by publishing a [report](#) on the AU's (and its predecessor, the OAU) normative and institutional framework and practice on R2P. IRRI also continued its vital role of information-sharing and capacity building around atrocity prevention as part of the Uganda National Committee on Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention and [Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes](#)' (GAAMAC) Africa Working Group.

2017 also saw significant changes relating to Sudan. In early 2017, notwithstanding Sudan's ongoing hostile human rights environment and ongoing harassment of civil society and interference with the media, the US eased sanctions. Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile remain in conflict despite a current ceasefire, and in an effort to help insert the voices of the affected people into these wider conversations, in Q4 IRRI's partner National Human Rights Monitors Organisation (NHRMO), published an article looking at the [reactions of people in South Kordofan](#) to the US government's lifting of economic sanctions and a [statement on the civilian perspectives on the issue of humanitarian access in Southern Kordofan](#).



Ensuring Rights in Exile

Our Rights in Exile programme has continued apace. We published our monthly *Rights in Exile* newsletter and continued to provide support and resources, online and in-person, to refugees from around the world. In Q1, we [submitted a paper](#) to the UK Parliament's International Development Committee's Inquiry into forced displacement and humanitarian responses in Central and East Africa, and were [called to present oral evidence](#) to the Inquiry. We contributed to case studies on Senegal and Uganda for a new World Bank project aiming to create a unique database on migrant and refugee integration law and regulations. In Q3 we published a [blog](#) encouraging states to ratify and implement the Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced people, a [blog](#) on the ruling of the Israeli High Court, allowing the transfer of migrants to unnamed third countries in Africa, as well as a [blog](#) urging the need for accountability, after the killing of 36 Burundians by DRC's security forces.

We took part in in-person consultations held by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture whose recently published [report](#) focused on migration related torture and cruel/inhuman or degrading treatment/punishment, and by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, whose [February 2018 report](#) focused on the situation of human rights defenders working for the rights of people on the move.

While the positive aspects of Uganda's refugee policy are well known, considerable challenges still exist, and in Q2 we addressed some of the [myths](#) around Uganda's refugee model. In Q2, Uganda hosted its Solidarity Summit. We engaged actively and contributed to the discussions in person, in the [media](#) and via a [blog](#) highlighting the need for political will, as well as money, to support the Ugandan refugee response.

With our concern about the global increase on the securitisation of refugees, in Q4 we published a paper, ["Protection for refugees not from refugees: Somalis in exile and the securitisation of refugee policy."](#) It was accompanied by an [op-ed](#) in *Refugees Deeply* and presented at meetings with UNHCR in Geneva and regional actors in Nairobi and Uganda. In a similar vein, in Q1 we [presented](#) at Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre conference on the failures in refugee policies to foster integration. In Q4, IRRI together with School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Strategic Initiative Horn of Africa (SIHA), published a report on ["Tackling the root causes of human trafficking and smuggling from Eritrea"](#) with two accompanying policy papers – one targeting [Intergovernmental Authority for Development \(IGAD\)](#) and the other the [European Union](#). Meetings with policymakers and a launch event was held in Nairobi and a public discussion on ["Migration in the Horn of Africa: European Union policy"](#) was held at Chatham House in London.



Whilst the conflict in South Sudan has been relatively high on the agenda of many international actors, conflict and displacement continues and peace remains elusive. As part of our Resolution to Exile programme, IRRI has been working with others to increase our outreach to policymakers. In an [open letter](#) to AU leaders we urged them to support a national dialogue in South Sudan and, in Q4, we published a short [summary](#) of refugees views of the South Sudan national dialogue. We also worked with our civil society colleagues to [push](#) the UN Human Rights Council to renew and strengthen the mandate and capacity of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

We also engaged with South Sudanese civil society by taking part in an [expert's meeting](#) hosted by Konrad Adeneur Stiftung in Uganda and organising a forum for exchange between the South Sudan Young leadership Forum (SSYLF) and Uganda based foreign diplomats and NGOs. This gave SSYLF a platform to create awareness about their activities and messages. We also published a [blog](#) on the practicalities and realities of registering children born in exile looking at the situation for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda.

Crucial to enabling resolutions to exile and preventing the reoccurrence of violence and displacement, is stability and one of the tools available is peacekeeping. In Q3 IRRI published its third report on civilian perspective of peace keeping forces in Africa, this time on [AMISOM](#), the AU-UN peacekeeping mission. We followed this up with meetings in Addis Ababa and via a [statement](#) on the AMISOM mandate renewal. We subsequently published, in Q4, a [paper](#) which pulled together shared findings from those three peace keeping reports on UNMISS, UNAMID and AMISOM and met with key actors in New York.

Also important to enabling resolutions to exile and preventing the reoccurrence of violence and displacement, is the need for accountability. With the Gambia's peaceful handover of power, increasingly the focus is shifting to accountability for crimes committed under the previous regime. In Q2 we published a [blog](#) on the need for accountability looking at a legal action proceeding in Switzerland against Gambia's former Interior Minister Ousmane Sonko. In Q4, we published a [blog](#) on Burundi's withdrawal from the ICC and, as members of the ICC Victims' Rights Working Group, published [recommendations](#) in advance of the 16th Session of the Assembly of State Parties of the ICC.



[Tackling the root causes of human trafficking and smuggling from Eritrea](#)

Eritrean migrants knowingly risk rape, torture and kidnapping when they leave. Many who migrate irregularly do so not because they are unaware of legal migration procedures but because the legal routes are so limited. Five thousand people leave the country each month, fleeing forced conscription, harsh labour practices, hunger, religious persecution and political repression. On the contrary, anecdotal evidence suggests migrants are being forced to take greater risks and endure worse conditions as a result. The only winners are smugglers and traffickers.

[From Non-Interference to Non-Indifference: The African Union and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

The report focuses on the African Union and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), exploring how this principle has taken root within the continental union, in the form of non-indifference. The report analyses the challenges for the AU in implementing R2P in the form of non-indifference, focusing on the conceptual relation between the concepts of R2P and non-indifference, the absence of clear triggers for AU action and the lack of clarity about decision-making, as well as the difficult access to sufficient financial resources and political will among heads of state as key challenges for the AU's role in preventing and addressing atrocities.

[Protection for refugees not from refugees: Somalis in exile and the securitisation of refugee policy](#)

Based on 80 interviews with Somali refugees living in Kenya, Uganda and the U.S., as well as interviews with NGOs, UN and government actors, the findings highlight some of the realities that refugees face when governments fashion a correlation between forced migration and insecurity, that is both fundamentally flawed and has serious implications for people's lives. The report highlights the need to reorient global migration debates away from overtly securitised narratives that likely benefit neither refugees, nationals nor global security, towards an emphasis on greater protection through greater inclusion that is likely to facilitate better security and cooperation.

["I fled because I was afraid to die": Causes of Exile of Burundian Asylum Seekers](#)

According to Burundi's second vice-president, Joseph Butore, "Burundian refugees should "return to their homeland, because peace and security prevail on the whole national territory". Such words are however contradicted by the stories of citizens, who continue to flee fear, insecurity and abuses and seek asylum in its neighbouring countries. With more than 418.000 refugees fleeing since the eruption of the political crisis in April 2015, the report sheds light on the two main reasons, narrated by Burundians who had recently arrived in Uganda. They left Burundi for two main reasons: threats and abuses by members of the *Imbonerakure*, a youth militia affiliated to the ruling party and killings and enforced disappearances of family members.

[Aligning Refugee Policies with Refugee Realities: A Rights in Exile policy paper](#)

The paper draws on six years of field research in the Great Lakes region, focussing on the links between citizenship and forced displacement in the Great Lakes region and examined both the differences and the interaction between local and national understandings of belonging. It intersects with a long and well-developed conversation among scholars and policymakers about the shortcomings within the refugee policy and humanitarian regime, caused not only by the upholders of the regime, but also by host countries themselves.

[“They Say They’re Not Here to Protect Us”: Civilian perspectives on the African Union mission in Somalia](#)

The report sheds light on civilian perspectives on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The report highlights that many in Somalia hold views that are very critical of the peacekeeping mission, especially about its failure to protect civilians, about some of the troop-contributing countries and about peacekeeper abuses. Citizens struggled to understand the mission’s mandate and often had difficult relations with the mission.

In addition to the publications above, we continued to carry out analysis and advocacy on a variety of issues via IRRI’s blog. Below are our articles of 2017:

- [“Yet there’s no place for us”: Trump’s Executive Order epitomises a global trend of exclusion](#)
- [The Kampala Convention: Time for Ratification](#)
- [Why We Shouldn’t Ignore What’s Happening in Cameroon](#)
- [Discussions about UNAMID must Prioritise Protection](#)
- [The donor dollar is important, but it is no substitute for good refugee policy](#)
- [Gambia in search of justice: the cases against former Interior Minister Ousmane Sonko](#)
- [Israel’s High Court allows transfers of Sudanese and Eritreans to Rwanda and Uganda but strikes down indefinite imprisonment: an analysis](#)
- [As Burundi Leaves the ICC, Can the AU Play a Role?](#)
- [Birth registration of South Sudanese refugee children: the view from Uganda](#)
- [Refugees from South Sudan Sceptical about Dialogue](#)
- [Accountability Needed for Killings of Burundian Exiles in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#)



IRRI is grateful for the support it received in 2017 from the Open Society Foundations, Humanity United, The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs NWO WOTRO, as well from anonymous and individual donors. None of the work accomplished would have been possible without them.

IRRI's 2017 financials are still being audited. In the meantime, we would be more than happy to share IRRI's audit report for 2016 upon request to info@refugee-rights.org



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



In 2018, IRRI will continue to develop our research and increase our advocacy under our three main programme areas, while tackling cross-cutting issues. In 2018 we will continue to focus on Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Sudan, however, we will also work to ensure we continue to raise the profile of under reported crises and will work towards making positive contributions to improving the Ugandan refugee response.

Additionally, we will work to expand our Rights in Exile programme, by scaling up our global information and resource portal, contributing to conflict sensitive programming and taking part in dialogues, working groups and debates highlighting the persistent challenges to displacement worldwide.



Donations to the International Refugee Rights Initiative will be gratefully received. You can donate online, via bank transfer or by post. Kindly visit [IRRI's website](#), to make an online donation or contact us for our bank details if you wish to donate via bank transfer.

Please contact us if you would like to set up a standing order or donate regularly and we will provide you with the relevant information.

You can also donate to IRRI by [shopping on Amazon](#) or via workplace giving through [Benevity](#) and [Cybergrants](#)

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