



Press Statement on the International Day of Peace 2021

Living in Harmony Together

We believe that peace is a right that should be enjoyed by everyone, and that efforts at consolidating peace can ultimately contribute to “*recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world*”, especially amidst the global COVID-19 Pandemic.

While refugees in Uganda have experienced some level of harmonious relations, with different ethnicities co-existing alongside host communities, interacting, intermarrying and sharing services and limited resources, factors for sustaining positive peace have remained wanting. The lack of resilient economies, sustainable livelihoods and general wellbeing, has led to repeated outbreaks of interethnic and intercommunity strife, sometimes resulting in the loss of life. The COVID Pandemic and resultant lockdown measures in 2020, served to entrench tensions in places like Madi Okollo where conflict between host and refugee communities saw 10 people killed, 19 wounded and several others missing and/or displaced from their settlements. “This was a tragic loss of lives to violent conflict, when we needed to be at peace with each another in order to collectively fight against the COVID Pandemic” said Ronny Kajaga, Executive Director of HANDLE Uganda.

The greater strain on already scarce resources and limited services in the light of dwindling funding; increased competition for the few jobs available and exacerbated pressures on livelihoods; trauma and lack of adequate psychosocial services; continue to hamper peaceful coexistence in the settlements and have resulted in increasing levels of violent clashes. The 3-month lockdown in 2020, saw refugees, particularly those in urban areas, suffer a decimation of their small businesses, which exposed them to food insecurity, evictions and arrest. Several studies have indicated that there is no resilience amongst refugees to withstand the existing inequalities faced by them, which were exacerbated by the COVID restriction measures. Many were forced into risky behaviour for survival. Furthermore, there was a dearth of access to essential services, psychosocial support and spaces for engagement, as humanitarian agencies and implementing partners were unable to continue their work.

While Uganda has progressive refugee policies and has, in particular, been implementing a self-reliance strategy for the last 20 years, the hard knocks of the COVID Pandemic demonstrated that refugees remain vulnerable to inter-related shocks. As Achieng Akena, Executive Director of IRRI said, ‘In order to live dignified lives, refugees require interventions and solutions that are durable, sustainable and impactful, and also, that are people-centred, contextual and aimed at reaffirming their dignity, rights and agency. They further need to be aimed at ensuring self-reliance of refugees which in turn builds their resilience’. The responsibility for realising self-reliance cannot be placed on refugees alone,



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ignoring systemic and structural issues that are also part of the problem. Refugees cannot build resilience, without considering other essential aspects of their lives, such as peace, education, health, housing, legal access and community support structures, as being part of the self-reliance rubric. “It is therefore essential to foster a holistic environment for peaceful co-existence for refugee and host communities to sustain peace and recover their lives,” said George Matete, Country Director for BRAC Uganda.

The SPACE Project seeks to build the capacity of refugees to claim their rights and access justice to enforce those rights, leading to greater peaceful coexistence and harmonious living. The project seeks to reduce the gaps in access, delivery, and uptake of justice for refugees and host communities in Palabek, Palorinya and Rhino settlements. The Project implemented over the next three years will primarily contribute to the safety, protection, and wellbeing of women and young people.

For more information on this project contact:

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