



INTERNATIONAL  
REFUGEE  
RIGHTS  
INITIATIVE

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# ANNUAL REPORT

Milestones Emergence Growth

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2018 - 2019



# Preventing Flight Promoting Rights

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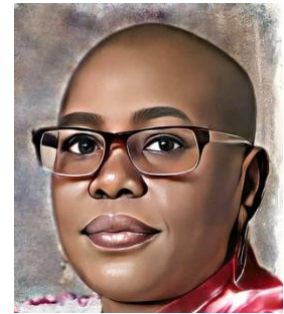
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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



When I was joining IRRI in the first quarter of 2019, I could not have imagined the dynamism and shifts we would experience by the end of 2019. We changed. Simply put. At the milestone of 15 years, we determined that we needed to re-strategise and rethink IRRI, and what we wanted to do and achieve. Africa, our core geographical focus had changed. The management, context and -isms around displacement, our primary thematic focus, had changed. Systems, structures and policies were also changing, and we wanted to ensure that we were strategically placed to make the most of the new opportunities, and proficiently respond to challenges. As aptly put by Dr Chidi Odinkalu, our Board Chair, “over time, the situation, food security, human security, climate change, governance situation, put into a mix, is likely to mean that the displacement situation and security situations in this part of the world, will need more of IRRI.”

So we brought together our Board and staff, and some of our founders, ex-staff, and Pan-African thought leaders, into a [retreat](#) where we looked back at the milestones IRRI had achieved in the 15 years of our existence, in order to plan for the next 15 years, and align IRRI’s mission to the regional and international context, including SDGs and Africa’s democratisation. We deliberated on what we could do and should do,

not only to reorganise our institution, but also, our work.

With our transformation, we emerged stronger and bolder, capitalising on our strengths in research and capacitation, while pushing the boundaries of our advocacy. December 2019 saw us [co-hosting](#) in Kampala, the AU’s annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy and Governance, themed on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs. We brought in a significant constituency of refugees to this policy space, and also co-hosted a civil society pre-forum.

The growth that IRRI has experienced in these two years, developing both our geographic and thematic expertise, makes me convinced that we are well on our way to realising my vision of IRRI as an Ambassador for the “humanness of refugees and displacement, and everything that this entails”, including entrenching dignity, rights and agency for displaced persons. We will dedicate the next two years to further growing IRRI’s capacities, expertise and resilience. Hence why we have titled this special commemorative issue of our annual report:

**“Milestones. Emergence. Growth”.**

It provides a vivid account of where we worked and what we worked on in 2018 and 2019.

*“Refugees are people who need to live holistic, fulfilling and meaningful lives, in dignity. It is to this cause that we must bring our best efforts. We cannot leave anyone behind.”*

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AU	African Union
CoI	Commission of Inquiry
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FEMNET	The African Women's Development and Communications Network
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IHRDA	The Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa
<i>Imbonerakure</i>	Burundian violent youth militia of about 50,000 youth, who arose in 2010 out of disarmed fighters who never fully demobilised (thenewhumanitarian.org)
IRRI	International Refugee Rights Initiative
KHRC	Kenya Human Rights Commission
NHRMO	National Human Rights Monitors Organisation/NUBSUD Human Rights Monitoring Organisation
Photovoice	Photovoice is a qualitative method used in community-based participatory research to document and reflect reality, combining photography with grassroots social action (Wikipedia)
PRC	[AU] Peace and Security Council
R-ARCSS	Revitalised Agreement for Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan
RADDHO	Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme
SPLM/A-N	The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army – North
SRG	Sudan Research Group
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WARIPNET	West African Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Network

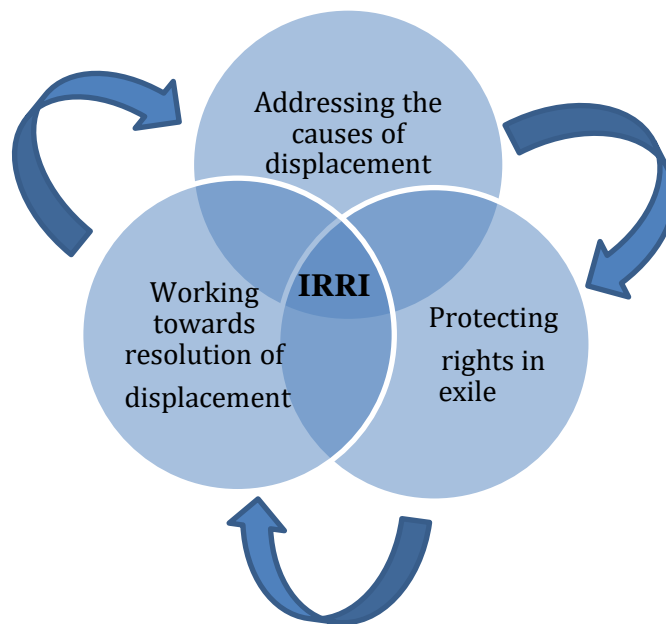




## WHO WE ARE

The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) strives for a peaceful world where every person enjoys rights, security and dignity. We work towards promoting and protecting human rights in conflict and displacement. IRRI, founded in 2004, has vast experience and has distinguished itself in research in refugee and migration spaces across Africa; in advocacy at national, regional and international levels; in capacitation of marginalised communities enabling agency, and amplifying voices; and in management of consortiums and building of meaningful partnerships.

Over the last 15 years, IRRI has developed a holistic approach to the protection of human rights in displacement by focussing on, identifying and responding to situations which result in displacement; protecting the rights of those who find themselves displaced; and, ensuring durable solutions that are safe, timely and respect human rights. We seek to ensure that voices of displaced and conflict-affected communities are not only heard, but also heeded, at the national, regional and international level through our evidence-based advocacy that is built on solid field-based research and analysis. Our holistic approach is reflected in our three core programme areas, as illustrated below:



Our **Vision** at IRRI is of a peaceful world where every person enjoys rights, security and dignity.

While our **Mission** requires us to promote and protect human rights in conflict and displacement, through research, advocacy and meaningful partnerships.

The **Values** which underpin our work and engagements, include:

1. *Courage*

At IRRI, we are courageous, willing to take leadership and calculated risks with our programming, in order to be innovative, to grow new areas of work, and to be outstanding.



2. *Collaboration*

We cherish meaningful partnerships, stand in solidarity with our constituencies, allies and associates, and excel at building alliances that entrench a unity of purpose.

3. *Participation*

We believe that every person is important, and should effectively contribute to decision-making. We believe in inclusivity, and in the effective consultation and participation of our constituencies. We are present to the power dynamics and relations in our interactions, and actively exercise humility, patience and understanding.

4. *Professionalism*

At IRRI, we are committed to personal and institutional excellence, ensuring quality, reliability, accuracy and timeliness in the delivery of our programmes. We are an effective institution that fortifies our growth with continuous learning.

5. *Accountability and transparency*

We are responsible and accountable for our work and outputs, to our constituencies, and towards meeting our vision and mission. We maintain the highest levels of integrity, trustworthiness and authenticity, and are committed to the efficient and honest use of resources. We walk the talk and deliver on what we commit to doing.

6. *Equity*

We believe in treating people equally and fairly. We are committed to non-discrimination, to levelling the playing field, and to the provision of equal opportunities for all.

### ***WHY DO WE DO THIS WORK?***

Not only have displaced persons been forced to leave their homes due to conflict, unrest or persecution, they are particularly vulnerable to abuse in conflict situations, during their journey and when they arrive at a place of supposed safety. Often treated as a burden by the hosting entities, they are forced to live in dire conditions, and in remote locations with scarce resources, often putting them in competition against host communities. At IRRI we believe in people. We believe in agency and voice. Hence as we do this work, we do it with courage, professionalism and accountability for our work outputs and to our constituencies, as reflected in our values.

*"We go out there, we go to the settlements, we go to the countries where conflict is happening, so... we can... grasp that reality well"*  
Thijs Van Laer, Staff

### ***HOW DO WE ENVISION CHANGE?***

IRRI recognises that displacement is highly complex and multi-faceted, and if not managed correctly, can lead to repeat displacement, especially where reintegration has failed. IRRI also recognises that just as the causes of displacement are multifarious, so are the consequences. Therefore, we do not have a "one size fits all" approach, but instead take 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, human rights based and gendered, hence, more effective strategies of response.

We believe that there are opportunities to pre-empt, or at a minimum mitigate the human cost and impact of displacement. Through an integrated framework of, situational and comparative research; international advocacy and the amplification of voice; and our expertise in protecting human rights in situations of ongoing conflict and displacement, mass atrocity prevention, peace-building, sustainable integration, curating policy platforms, capacitation and partnership, IRRI is uniquely effective in having a tangible impact for those whose lives and livelihoods are severely threatened.

We are registered as a non-profit organisation in the US and in Uganda, and have a multinational board of five, ably led by our Nigeria-based Chair, Dr Chidi Odinkalu.

*From the [photovoice](#) training for peaceful coexistence*



**A woman participating in quarrying at Agojo refugee settlement**

*By: Mapkwe Simon, 2019  
Refugee*





## WHERE WE WORKED IN 2018 AND 2019

“Solidarity... is what links the personal with the institutional in the IRRI story”

Dr Chidi Odinkalu, Board Chair

In 2018 and 2019, IRRI made several interventions across the African Continent and particularly in the Great Lakes Region, Central Africa and West Africa. We programmed in or in regard to these 12 countries:

**Angola:** [rights in exile](#)

**Burundi:** [advocacy and awareness campaigns](#), [solidarity actions](#), [peacebuilding](#) and [democratisation](#), [forced and voluntary return](#)

**Cameroon:** [solidarity actions for ongoing and escalating brutality and human rights violations](#)

**Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** [ongoing conflict and violence](#), [return](#), [peace and security](#)

**Eritrea:** [migrants](#), [rights in exile](#), [human rights situation](#)

**Ethiopia:** [rights in exile](#), [African Union advocacy](#)

**Senegal:** [assistance with protection issues](#)

**South Sudan:** [peacebuilding](#), [rights in exile](#)

**Sudan:** [emergency crisis response](#), [democratic transition](#), [peace building](#), [support for civil society](#), [coalition building](#), [institutional development](#)

**Tanzania:** [rights in exile](#), [forced return](#), [statelessness](#)

**Togo:** [solidarity actions around electoral reform and democratisation](#)

**Uganda:** [refugee response](#), [rights in exile](#), [security concerns](#), [access to status determination processes and the asylum system](#), [access to land](#), [statelessness](#)



Map from geology.com



## Causes of Displacement

## BURUNDI STILL NOT SAFE FOR ITS PEOPLE

Throughout 2018 and 2019, IRRI continued to undertake advocacy and awareness-creation campaigns regarding the political and displacement situation in Burundi. An [external article](#) brought to light the growing pressure on refugees from Burundi following their government's announcement that the country was now safe again. Tanzania, which hosted a large number of Burundian refugees, urged the refugees to sign up for voluntary return and imposed restrictions on economic activity in refugee camps. This, despite many Burundians still fearing for their safety in Burundi in the event of returning there.

Indeed, ongoing human rights violations in the country led IRRI, in solidarity with 40 other national, regional and international civil society organisations to [call upon the UN Human Rights Council](#) to support a resolution to extend the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Burundi for a further year, until September 2020. The CoI had already unveiled the level of human rights abuse in the country, at a time when the Burundian government had systematically forced out international observers and cracked down on civil society groups ahead of the Country's elections. Another central piece of advocacy was a [joint civil society statement](#) published in December 2019, which called on African leaders and regional organisations to urge the government of Tanzania to stop plans to forcefully return 163,000 refugees and asylum seekers back to Burundi, where they were at imminent risk of facing serious electoral related human rights violations.



## MONITORING VIOLENCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

In these two years, IRRI has remained steadfast in bringing regional and international attention to the prevailing violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 2018, IRRI published a [report](#) on the findings from a mission we undertook to Angola in late 2017, to interview Congolese asylum seekers who had fled the Kasai region. The research documented various accounts of how attacks by a pro-government militia were followed by abusive military operations and mass killings, causing the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands.

In a [blog post](#) done in March 2018, IRRI further drew international attention to the incidents in Ituri which culminated in the death of over 60 people, the destruction of thousands of houses, and the displacement of over 42,000 refugees into neighbouring Uganda. The North Eastern Province had previously enjoyed relative levels of peace for a number of years, and the article underscored the volatile situation in the country

as a whole, warning of how quickly conflict can spread if not properly managed. Only months after, a deadly massacre played out in Yumbi in the previously low-on-the-radar province of Mai-Ndombe. Over 535 people were killed and another 38,000 displaced, when members of the Tende community attacked members of the Nunu community following tensions between the two groups. IRRI [spoke to survivors](#) to uncover the details of the incidences that led to the attacks, and the response from national authorities and the international community.

Following a [joint letter](#) in June 2018, with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, addressed to the delegates of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), encouraging them to renew and expand the Human Rights Council-mandated investigation into human rights violations and abuses in the DRC's Kasai Region. In July 2019, IRRI [delivered a statement](#) during a side event of the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, which highlighted concerns over growing violence in the Kasai, Ituri and Yumbi areas of the DRC. Attacks by militia groups and government military, as well as between neighbouring communities, had resulted in atrocities against the civilian population, including children, and with women and girls also being subjected to sexual violence. The statement called for efforts to hold key actors to account and promote peacebuilding within the communities.

## CONFLICT IN THE SOUTH KORDOFAN AND BLUE NILE AREAS OF SUDAN

In 2018 and 2019, IRRI continued to support the National Human Rights Monitors Organisation (NHRMO), a Sudanese organisation monitoring the conflict and human rights violations in the SPLM/A-N controlled areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan (the Two Areas). With institutional support and mentoring from IRRI, NHRMO managed to register in Uganda as NUBSUD Human Rights Monitoring Organisation, with a Board and other institutional and governance mechanisms set up. NUBSUD continued the monitoring, documentation and reporting of human rights violations principally perpetrated by the governmental armed forces and their supported militias in the Two Areas. In 2019, NHRMO, with the support of IRRI, produced four issues of a regular publication, Human Rights update, posted on the Sudan Consortium website and circulated widely among relevant stakeholders.

## LITIGATING AT THE AFRICA UNION ON THE SITUATION IN THE TWO AREAS

### *Expert Submission to African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)*

In 2018, IRRI and NHRMO joined up with a number of organisations to submit to ACHPR an “Expert Brief on Continuing Human Rights Violations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan,” a process led by Project Expedite Justice (PEJ). Other organisations that joined in the submission were the Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HACSF), African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), and Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment (KACE). The submission referred to a case by Sudanese in South Kordofan and Blue Nile (represented by Sudan Democracy First Group, Interights, Human Rights Watch, REDRESS and Enough Project) filed in 2011 at the beginning of the conflict in the Two Areas. The Communication was made against the government of Sudan, but the Commission had not still not made a decision on it in 2018. The PEJ-led brief was a renewed effort to build pressure on the Commission to issue a decision in the case.

### *Communication Before the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)*

In the same year, PEJ and partner organisations, including the Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development, the International Refugee Rights Initiative, the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, the Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum, and others, decided to also file a communication before the ACERWC highlighting egregious violations of human rights violations against children in the Two Areas. They asserted that the government—then led by former President Omar al-Bashir—engaged in systematic bombing campaigns against the civilian population. The attacks had a significant impact on children in the Two Areas, who were not only maimed and killed, but also faced educational and health crises, as a result of the destruction of schools and hospitals. The Committee deemed the Communication admissible in September 2019.



## THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN SUDAN

Campaigning against political oppression in Sudan was high on the agenda in 2019, in support of Sudanese people's struggle for democracy dating back to 2013, which culminated in popular mobilisation and political leadership in December of 2018, that successfully ousted, five months later, the 26 year dictatorship of Former President Bashir and his National Congress Party.

Since IRRI's establishment in 2004, we have been actively advocating for the cessation of conflict, respect for human rights and adherence to democratic governance in all parts of the Country. IRRI first hosted the Darfur Consortium, which then naturally evolved into the Sudan Consortium, which is an African-led solidarity network that engages in advocacy for change in Sudan. In September 2019, IRRI convened a meeting of the Sudan Consortium, with a view to establishing how African advocates can support Sudanese activists through the delicate transition process that has been initiated since the fall of the National Congress Party regime in April. Throughout 2019, IRRI continued to facilitate Sudanese activists to speak for themselves in regional and international fora, during the Sudanese revolution, as well as during the subsequent transition. IRRI continuously mobilised African and international actors to organise in solidarity with their Sudanese counterparts, and also supported critical documentation work, support for victims, and critical thinking platforms on the path ahead for Sudan.

In particular, IRRI supported a Sudanese organisation to hold a conference on sustainable development in Sudan in November 2019. The conference was intended to engage with key economic issues facing the country and investigate how dividends of the transition might be gathered and shared with the people.



*"It is a core value of the organisation to really strengthen and build the capacity of the*

IRRI further supported Sudanese organisations in the development of a public interest litigation strategy to ensure accountability for the violations committed against protesters between December 2018 and June 2019. The two organisations held consultations in November and December 2019, with a view to identifying and supporting specific cases for litigation.

IRRI also pushed forward Sudan advocacy at the African Union (AU), including at the 64<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) held in Sharma El Sheikh, Egypt, in April 2019. In collaboration with key partners, we organised briefing sessions for AU policy makers, by Sudanese civil society in May 2019, where we also brought in NHRMO to highlight the dynamics between the centre and periphery areas, even as the Country struggled with its overall democratic transition. Between 14 and 17 May 2019, the delegation of Sudanese civil society participated in conversations with CSO liaisons, AU Commission officials, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), as well as select members of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) and other representatives of strategic embassies in Addis Ababa.

IRRI remained engaged with other civil society organisations in order to co-ordinate solidarity and advocacy efforts on the situation in Sudan. In January 2019, IRRI, in collaboration with Sudanese and other partners, [urged Sudanese authorities](#) to make known the names and whereabouts of detainees, and either charge them or set them free, following mass arrests during the protests in December 2018.

The statement was followed up by an [open letter](#) to the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC), signed by 35 African civil society organisations, calling for urgent action against Sudan and its blatant abuse of human rights. On 10 April 2019,

twenty organisations including IRRI, published an [open letter](#) addressed to the international community, warning about the volatile situation in Sudan and calling for protection of Sudanese civilians and democratic efforts. Following the 11 April military takeover and ousting of Omar Al Bashir, IRRI was signatory to a number of letters,<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> addressing authorities at AU and UN levels and calling for urgent action. Another [civil society letter](#), addressing the AU Peace and Security Council, was published after the 15 May militia attack near McNimer Bridge.

In June 2019, IRRI [co-signed a statement](#), along with 29 other organisations, condemning the violence against peaceful protesters in Sudan earlier the same month. It called for the UN Human Rights Council to hold a special session on the human rights situation in Sudan, and for the international community to suspend cooperation with Sudanese authorities, except on lifesaving humanitarian aid. This was further followed by an [open letter](#) to the UN Security Council; signed by IRRI and 29 other civil society organisations, and calling for UN support in

reducing violence and supporting the transfer of power to civilian authorities. At the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council in September 2019, IRRI and 16 other organisations [submitted a letter](#) criticising the lack of response and calling for comprehensive monitoring and action to secure future peace and stability in Sudan.

While political change was brewing in Khartoum the people in the periphery areas remained under significant threat. In June 2018, IRRI, alongside scholars, human rights organisations and leading activists, wrote an open letter to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to express concerns over the proposed reduction of the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). In light of frequent devastating incidents of continued violence, the letter urged the UNSC not allow the significant decrease of the mandate and scope of UNAMID's work. It advised the UNSC to recognise the vital importance of UNAMID's presence in Darfur and consider the catastrophic impacts that further reductions in peacekeeping forces would have on civilian protection and peacebuilding.



<sup>1</sup> [African and Sudanese civil society calls for strong AU PSC response to coup in Sudan, 12 April 2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Sudanese, African and International civil society calls for protection of the democratic will of the people of Sudan, 16 April 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Civil society calls for strong AU support for civilian transition in Sudan, 29 April 2019](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Transfer of political power to civilian-led Transitional Authority in Sudan, 29 April 2019](#)

## ADVOCATING FOR PEACE IN SOUTH SUDAN

In February 2018, together with 23 national, regional and international NGOs, IRRI jointly signed a letter to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, calling upon the members to renew and strengthen the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, to ensure accountability for gross violations of human rights and related crimes in the country. In July 2018, IRRI published an assessment of the protection of displaced persons by the UN Mission in South Sudan, two years after the ethnically motivated clashes in Juba, that saw the death and displacement of many people in the country. Drawing on several sources, IRRI documented shortcomings in the Mission's response to atrocities in the country.

Concerns around the inadequacies of the draft 5 August South Sudan peace deal were raised, with IRRI arguing that the suggested agreement repeated the same power-sharing arrangements that plagued the previous defunct peace agreement from 2015. IRRI warned of a clear risk that implementation would fail again and that such failure would come at an astronomical human cost. A new peace agreement, viz the Revitalised Agreement for Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed by various parties in September 2018. This led IRRI to conduct a topical and opportune research project in which we interviewed over 100 South Sudanese citizens and stakeholders in South

Sudan, and South Sudanese asylum seekers and refugees in Uganda and Ethiopia. [The report](#) expressed growing concerns over the fragility of the agreement, and that the fighting that had persisted in parts of the country, despite the signing of the agreement, further accentuated frustrations of the populace in the peace processes, and entrenched the distrust of the political elites leading the processes. We therefore made recommendations for wider dissemination, dialogue and inclusion of people to end the growing sense of alienation, as well as more effective implementation and monitoring of the peace accords, to enable the most affected to have positive futures, and reduce the risk of new conflicts emerging.

In May 2019, IRRI joined a coalition of 16 international and regional civil society organisations to send a joint letter to the UN Security Council seeking for their urgent support in addressing the precarious situation in South Sudan. Delays in implementation of the R-ARCSS and the six-month extension of the pre-transitional period demonstrated that sustained international political pressure from the region and the UN Security Council was essential to protect the lives of civilians, ensure continued momentum towards peace for the people of South Sudan and remedy serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

## ELECTORAL REFORM IN TOGO

An [assessment](#) of the December 2018 elections in Togo showed that, although the election day itself passed in a relatively calm way, tensions over electoral reform continued to persist in the country. Togolese security forces were accused of using unnecessary violence, with six people killed in the run up to the elections, and calls made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for a comprehensive review of the electoral register were ignored, causing a coalition of opposition parties, the C14, to boycott the polls. An IRRI blog post called for consensus on the rules for democratic participation and highlighted the critical role of ECOWAS and the international community in facilitating the negotiations, as well as the importance of an inclusive approach to engaging all stakeholders.



## REQUIRING HUMAN RIGHTS IN ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON AND IN ERITREA



As violent hostilities between the Anglophone minority and the government continued in Cameroon, so did IRRI's efforts to call for a de-escalation of the conflict and addressing of the human rights situation in the country. In an [open letter](#) to the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), IRRI, as part of a coalition of 82 organisations, highlighted concerns over the increased brutality from the government's side that started in 2016 when protesters in the country's Anglophone region demanded that their political, social and cultural rights and autonomy be recognised. The letter urged the ACHPR to refer the serious and systematic human rights violations in Cameroon to the next AU Summit of Heads and State and Government in accordance with the African Charter, establish and carry out a fact-finding mission to the Anglophone regions, and call upon the AU to create a position of a special envoy on Cameroon.

In June 2019, IRRI joined several other human rights organisations to [call for the adoption of a resolution](#) at the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of United Nations Human Rights Council, towards maintaining a monitoring and reporting mandate for the human rights situation in Eritrea. The groups indicated that the situation remained dire with rampant human rights abuses including, arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention, violations of fair trial, lack of access to justice, lack of information on the fate and whereabouts of disappeared persons, lack of enforcement of the Constitution, severe restrictions on human rights, and the continued use of indefinite national service involving torture, sexual violence and forced labour, and "their gendered impact and generalised impunity".





## Rights in Exile

## GAPS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE



"The thing about IRRI is that whatever we do, we have to have facts first and that is

The Ugandan asylum system and the situation for refugees in Uganda is of great importance to IRRI's work, and in 2018 and 2019 thorough research and investigations resulted in multiple contributions to knowledge in this area and generated recommendations for vital advocacy work.

In an [open letter](#) in March 2018, IRRI, alongside other International NGOs, affirmed our concerns about allegations of fraud and corruption in the South Sudanese refugee response in Uganda. The letter called for urgent investigations and taking of measures and sanctions against the profiteers. It further appealed to the international community for their continued support. In the same month, IRRI [spoke to 31 Burundian refugees](#) about their concerns regarding security in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement. Many lived in fear that, despite their asylum in a foreign country, they remained within reach of their home government and militia. The refugees reported incidents of stalking and harassment by unknown individuals

whom they suspected to work for the *Imbonerakure* and the Burundian government.

In July 2018, IRRI published a [policy paper](#) that examined Eritrean asylum seekers' ability to access refugee status in Uganda. It showed how the combination of low recognition rates, the proliferation of informal interlocutors and corruption all render refugee status increasingly inaccessible to Eritreans and undermine the efficiency of the Ugandan asylum system. In a [blog post](#) the following month, IRRI brought to light abuses against Rwandan refugees in Uganda and demanded a concerted effort towards ending the abuses and holding the perpetrators to account.

Along with 25 other International Non-Governmental Organisations, IRRI published a [joint statement](#) calling for urgent funding of refugee response in Uganda, which is the largest refugee hosting country in Africa. The letter highlighted the shortage in the provision of elementary services, such as education for children and access to clean water, which created a protection gap and constituted a serious risk to the refugee communities. In October 2018, IRRI [published a thorough assessment](#) of the "Ugandan model" of asylum which detailed the historical and political context of the country's refugee policies, shone a spotlight on its implementation gaps and proposed crucial recommendations for the success of Ugandan refugee responses going forward.

## PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMONGST REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN UGANDA

A March 2018 [IRRI policy paper](#) shed a light on the complexities and perspectives surrounding the acquisition of land used to support refugee response in Uganda's Lamwo Refugee Settlement. It provided recommendations to all stakeholders in the country's refugee response in relation to

the upholding of the rights of customary landowners as well as supporting community-driven development which includes the local integration of refugees. Further, it made suggestions for avenues for promoting positive social cohesion among host communities and the

Ugandan government, as well as supporting positive refugee-host community relations.

Between December 2018 and May 2019, IRRI carried out more extensive research, this time in refugee settlements in Arua, Lamwo and Adjumani Districts, in order to investigate the conflict dynamics between South Sudanese refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda. [Findings](#) highlighted that tensions around natural resources, livelihoods and land should not be ignored. Prevailing frictions could spark violent incidents and could escalate into broader conflict, if not properly addressed. The findings of the report were summarised in a [video](#) and redistributed to stakeholders, including members of the affected communities. In accordance with our capacitation mandate, we partnered with Refugee Law Project to train refugees and host communities on the photovoice community action research

methodology and subsequently displayed the photos produced at the launch of the report and in our offices.



The scarcity of resources also led IRRI, together with 15 other organisations, to [publish a statement](#) on World Refugee Day 2019, urging the Government of Uganda, UNHCR and its partners to increase reforestation efforts, and ensure follow-up, in order to combat the negative consequences of the shortage of firewood around refugee settlements.

## PROTECTION CONCERNS ACROSS THE GREAT LAKES

As a continental organisation, IRRI also documented and created awareness on protection concerns and violations of refugee rights in the wider African context and in the East Africa and Great Lakes Regions, while making continued efforts to hold those responsible to account. In January 2018, we published a [policy paper](#) aimed at clarifying the legal obligations of countries hosting political asylees, while urging for their increased protection. It was written following increased cases of abductions and unlawful extraditions, largely for political reasons, in the East African region.

March 2018 saw the publication of a [policy paper](#) based on an IRRI field mission to Angola, where we spoke to 45 unregistered Congolese refugees who had fled the violence of the Kasai region in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite the Angolan government's offer to protect the Congolese asylum seekers, the treatment of the asylees was troubling. The paper described how unregistered refugees in Angola are living with limited protection, severe restrictions to their freedom of movement, and threats of premature return.

## MIGRATION

In September, IRRI, together with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Waging Peace (WP), [submitted a review of Sudan's state party report](#) to the 124<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Committee. The submission built on [previous IRRI research](#) on tackling the root causes of trafficking and smuggling from Eritrea, and highlighted key areas of concern regarding Sudan's compliance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in the context of mixed migration from



and to Sudan. Based on its findings, the submission recommended both fundamental and specific reforms in Sudan's legal system and practice. Sudan has become the focal point of policy initiatives and projects on mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, particularly in the context of the Khartoum Process, an initiative comprising thirty-seven states as well as the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). The Khartoum Process has been widely criticised, as it is viewed as prioritising migration control objectives over addressing the root causes of mixed migration from Sudan, particularly where there is a legacy of, and ongoing, human rights violations. These violations include the lack of recognition and protection of the rights of foreign nationals who live in Sudan, especially in the context of immigration controls and status.



IRRI also published articles addressing various knowledge gaps in the context of migration. In April 2018, Dr Jeff Crisp, RSC Research Associate, [spoke to UNHCR's Senior External Relations Officer](#) in Tripoli about what happens after refugees and migrants are intercepted in the Mediterranean and who were returned to Libya by the EU-funded Libyan coastguard. Dr Crisp documented UNHCR's knowledge of how migrants were treated by the Libyan coastguard, and the extent to which UNHCR was able to support them.

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IMPACTING REFUGEES

Following the publication of the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2018, IRRI provided an [analysis of the document](#) with a focus on **urban refugees**. It found that, while the Compact addresses some important rights that affect urban refugees, such as the freedom of movement, it falls short when it fails to explicitly recognise urban refugees as a group. It thus neglects the opportunity to highlight the benefits of letting refugees integrate into local communities, rather than keeping them in camps. This means that urban refugees will continue to fight hostile policies that assume disadvantage to the host community, on their part.

In October 2019, an IRRI [blog post](#) commended the fact that several African countries were furthering rights to health care for refugees, even if the lack of available resources made it difficult to meet the needs, in practice. Especially problematic was the fact the many health systems had underprioritised **mental health** concerns, which disproportionately affect refugees as they have often experienced trauma, leading to struggles with PTSD, depression and/or anxiety.

Should refugees be passive recipients of aid or political actors and agents of change? In Uganda, refugees in settlements and urban communities are confronted with the daily challenges of meeting their socio-economic needs and those of their families. As a result of these more apparent humanitarian and livelihood-related concerns, the potential for refugees to have **political agency** which can shape solutions to their displacement is largely overlooked by humanitarian and development stakeholders, and is, at times, directly prohibited, e.g. where legislation in Uganda does not allow refugees to “engage in any political activities... whether at local or national level”. This is presumably derived from the provisions of the African Refugee Convention that bars what is termed as “subversion”. In April 2018, to better inform this reality, IRRI in partnership with the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)



published a study on the [Political Participation of Refugees: the Case of South Sudanese and Congolese Refugees in Uganda](#). The study examines perspectives of a number of South Sudanese and Congolese refugees on their civic engagement in Uganda. It does this by exploring their formal and informal political activities and the ways in which they are able to participate in peace-building and democracy-building in South Sudan and DRC. Among the formal mechanisms for political participation, the case study explores issues of access to citizenship in Uganda, perspectives on electoral rights for refugees and electoral rights for refugee communities, for instance through out-of-country voting mechanisms. In addition, it sheds light on the opportunities and limitations of informal mechanisms for political participation, such as the Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs) for settlement-based refugees in the settlements, as well as refugee-led civil society organisations. The [report](#) presents a set of policy recommendations on the political inclusion of refugees addressed to relevant institutions in Uganda, South Sudan and DRC.

IRRI is committed to ensuring that our work promotes human rights in all its aspects, that all our projects and programmes take into account **intersectionalities** within the beneficiary communities, and therefore ensure ethnic, religious, gender, age, ability, language, literacy, sexuality and other diversity inclusion. We recognise that asylum and exile are shaped by social constructs and thus impact on people differently. For example, women's role as primary care givers, combined with cultural norms, impact the way they experience displacement and exile. Women's inability to inherit in customary interpretation means women in exile continue to have lesser access to factors of production. This, compounded with the socio-economic challenges faced by displaced persons, especially in urban areas, have been cited as driving survival sex and GBV. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, including sex for favours, and lack of access to effective sexual and reproduction health services, further entrench women's marginalisation while in exile. Gender and sexual minorities find it particularly difficult to enjoy asylum and receive protection in countries with state-sponsored and institutionalised homophobia. IRRI is obligated to ensuring equality and inclusion in asylum determination and displacement management, and to continually engaging in discourse to address these controversial human rights issues, that most humanitarian actors shy away from. IRRI provides assistance with regard to asylum claims and legal challenges, upon request, and has a walk-in programme in Senegal.



## LEGAL TRENDS IN REFUGEE AND ASYLUM MANAGEMENT

IRRI continued its commitment to increasing refugees' access to assistance and information through its global Rights in Exile programme. The Programme provides a centralised [information portal](#) and country specific information to refugee law practitioners and advocates. The portal serves as a referral mechanism to service providers within refugee hosting countries. During the period, IRRI also published the monthly [Rights in Exile newsletter](#), which can be easily referenced below:

<a href="#">March 2018</a>	<a href="#">June 2018</a>	<a href="#">November 2018</a>	<a href="#">March 2019</a>	<a href="#">September 2019</a>
<a href="#">April 2018</a>	<a href="#">July 2018</a>	<a href="#">January 2019</a>	<a href="#">June 2019</a>	
<a href="#">May 2018</a>	<a href="#">September 2018</a>	<a href="#">February 2019</a>	<a href="#">July 2019</a>	

## CURATED SPACES FOR POLICY ADVOCACY

IRRI collaborated with the African Union (AU) to host the 8<sup>th</sup> High Level Dialogue (HLD) on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, themed on “Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa”. IRRI was able to facilitate a significant constituency of refugees to attend the HLD and engage with AU policy makers, government and other civil society actors on the needs and demands of Africa’s refugees.

In partnership with the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) and the Institute for Security Studies, IRRI hosted a CSO pre-forum on the margins of the HLD, which was a curated space that enabled Civil Society Organisations that work on Africa, to reflect on the issues being discussed during the HLD. The objectives of the CSO Pre-Forum were to a) set out the dynamics of displacement in Africa, and develop a civil society narrative on the related issues including the protection and support of displaced persons; b) deliberate on the key issues arising and making recommendations for policy and other interventions, with a particular emphasis on durable solutions; and c) increase synergies between CSO actors, and agenda setting for the 2020 theme on silencing the guns. The Outcome Statement from the CSO Pre-forum was widely distributed at the HLD and used in subsequent policy spaces. Relevant IRRI publications were also distributed during the HLD and were very well received.



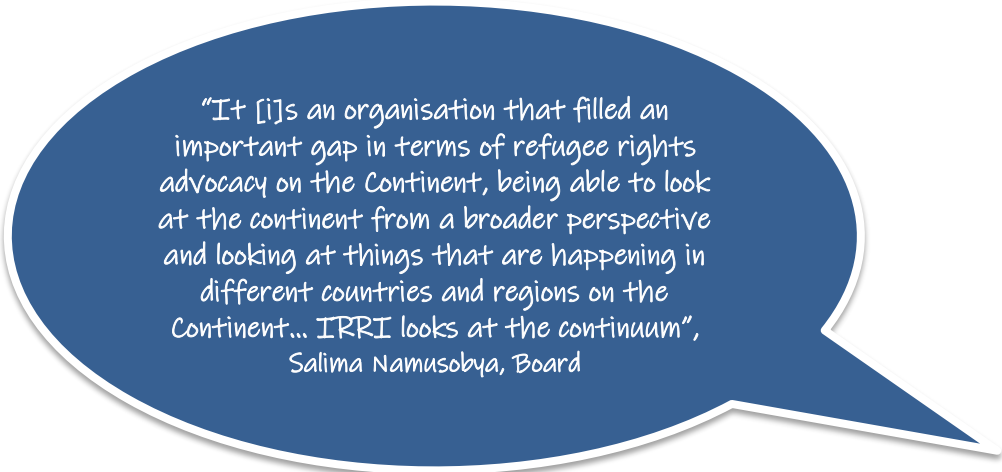




## Resolving Displacement

## DURABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND IMPACTFUL SOLUTIONS

Hosting 26% of the world's refugee population, Africa renewed its commitment during the 2019 Year for Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, towards ensuring durable solutions for forcibly displaced persons on the Continent. IRRI believes that for solutions to be durable, sustainable and impactful, they need to be people-centred, contextual and aimed at reaffirming dignity, rights and the agency of refugees. UNHCR recognises three solutions to displacement of a) return, which requires the existence of conditions suitable for such return, as we see with Burundi and other countries below; b) resettlement to a third country which is only attainable by a small minority; and c) local integration, which needs to be bolstered by inclusive policies, aimed at ensuring the self-reliance of refugees, which in turn builds their resilience. This latter aspect is what researcher Andreas Muff Kristiansen sought to explore when he approached IRRI in the midst of his research in 2019, learning lessons from Uganda, which has been implementing a self-reliance strategy for refugee response for nearly two decades.



*"It [i]s an organisation that filled an important gap in terms of refugee rights advocacy on the Continent, being able to look at the continent from a broader perspective and looking at things that are happening in different countries and regions on the Continent... IRRI looks at the continuum",  
Salima Namusobya, Board*

In 2018-2019, IRRI provided thought leadership on rights in displacement at several policy platforms, particularly on the need to reimagine long-term solutions for displaced persons. As many conflict situations across the Continent become intractable, those fleeing their home countries require sustainable solutions to prolonged exile. IRRI posits that Pan-Africanism of the 21st century should be informing a reimagining of asylum in Africa, in the light of regional integration, citizenship and related free movement arrangements. These platforms included, the Regional Workshop on Strengthening Cross-Border Child Protection Mechanisms in Kenya & Uganda, organised by Save the Children in May 2019; the Annual Transitional Justice Forum organised by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) in conjunction with the African Union organised in June 2019; the African Union Member States and RECs meeting to validate the Draft Implementation Plan of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in Africa in June 2019; the Roundtable on Strategic Litigation on Refugee and Migrant Rights organised by the Public Interest Practice and the Annual Conference of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges (IARMJ) in September 2019.



## RETURN

With such an intricate displacement landscape in the Great Lakes Region and across Africa, the topic of return is one that concerns IRRI greatly, and forms an important part of our work on resolving displacement. Return is often controversial and fraught with several complex factors occupying the nebulous space between forceful deportation or refoulement, voluntary repatriation and spontaneous arrival. These factors of return do have a significant impact on integrating previously displaced persons.

While voluntary repatriation is the preferred solution to displacement by regional and international actors, research conducted by IRRI and our partners indicate that, contrary to previous assumptions, returnees rarely come home to political stability or socio-economic security, and return migration can confound local conditions. This is particularly relevant in the Great Lakes Region, where cycles of displacement and return have fuelled conflict and power struggles over many years.

In February 2018, IRRI released a [statement](#) condemning Israel's plan to illegally deport African asylum seekers. It came after Israel announced a plan to coerce Eritrean and Sudanese individuals to leave the country within a very short period of time by offering them cash in return, and builds on years of controversial transfers of asylum seekers from Israel to Uganda and Rwanda.

In September, IRRI, together with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Waging Peace (WP), [submitted a review of Sudan's state party report](#) to the 124<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Committee on including human rights violations as causes of forced migration from Sudan, the treatment of Sudanese nationals who have been returned to Sudan by EU Member States, namely Italy, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, in pursuit of bilateral agreements with Sudan without regard for such treatment; and the treatment of foreign nationals in the country. On the basis of findings, the review made specific recommendations for reforms in Sudan's legal system and practice.

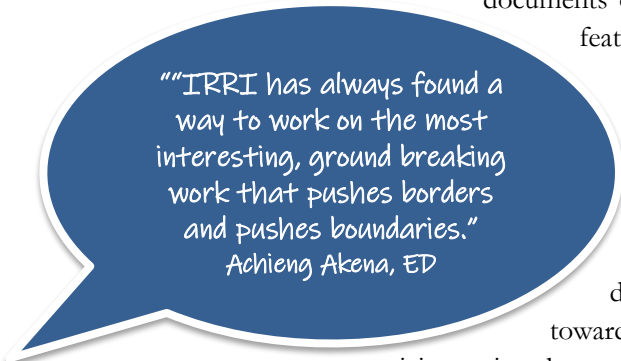
In the first half of 2019, IRRI co-ordinated extensive field research with our partner organisations in South Western Burundi, in Faradje in North Eastern DRC, and in Kalehe in Eastern DRC. The research was carried out in collaboration with the Conflict Research group (CRG), Actions pour la Promotion Rurale (APRu) and Groupe d'Etudes sur les Conflits et la Sécurité Humaine (GEC-SH). [The findings](#) of this research were used to understand how the return of refugees has affected conflict dynamics and relations with local authorities in the two countries. They also provided an analysis on how interventions by international agencies and their local counterparts affect the politics of return. An [interactive map](#) was created as part of the project, the findings were discussed with the Egmont Institute in Brussels, and the research Report titled [Returning to Stability? Refugee Returns in the Great Lakes Region](#), was launched in October 2019.

IRRI also highlighted the issues impacting Burundian refugees being returned from Tanzania. Based on interviews, IRRI [published a report](#) in February 2019 that described the daily struggles of recently returned refugees from Tanzania. Most relied on the help of neighbours or local authorities, and as the report warned, that this solidarity would be further strained as larger numbers were expected to return ahead of the upcoming electoral process. Many returned spontaneously with the little savings they had left, and even those assisted by UNHCR received little, in the form of free transport across the border and a return package that did not even last the three months that it was intended to cover. As a result, most of those interviewed were in a highly precarious situation. They were landless, their return packages had run out, and there was little other support, and they were living in the shadows of historical enmities. As Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher at IRRI said in the report, "humanitarian and development support must recognise the needs of both returnees and the communities to which they are returning, and address the underlying tensions that contributed to displacement in the first place".

## STATELESSNESS, CITIZENSHIP AND THE RIGHT TO A NATIONALITY

The issue of statelessness was high on the agenda for IRRI in both 2018 and 2019. From 2008 when we partnered with the Social Science Research Council, to undertake research on the lived experiences of unequal access to belonging and citizenship, and its relationship to displacement and integration, IRRI has been at the forefront of advocating for a right to a nationality. In addition to participating in various coalitions to advance this right, IRRI hosts and manages the [Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative \(CRAI\) website](#) and information portal that has a rich database of nationality information and laws from across Africa, providing a critical resource for those working to ensure respect for the right to a nationality and an end to statelessness on the African continent. The website contains a database of more than 9,000

documents on nationality laws and statelessness information in Africa featuring national laws and subsidiary legislation, government and independent reports, academic articles, news stories, blog postings, and several other resources. The website is maintained by Bronwen Manby and Djibril Balde.



*"IRRI has always found a way to work on the most interesting, ground breaking work that pushes borders and pushes boundaries."*  
Achieng Akena, ED

IRRI further convenes social scientists, civil society actors, lawyers and stateless, at risk or displaced communities to deliberate on trends and threats, and plan joint actions towards eliminating statelessness on the Continent. IRRI

participates in advocacy platforms to push for policies and practices that protect those who find themselves without, or are at risk of losing their nationality. During this period, IRRI joined other likeminded African civil society organisations in [advocacy efforts](#) to set clear standards at the Continental and regional levels, on the recognition of nationality and the eradication of statelessness in Africa. For example, in January 2018, IRRI and WARIPNET organised a panel on the Right to a Nationality in Africa in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. This panel was an opportunity to mobilise Ivorian civil society organisations to exchange on issues of statelessness in Africa. In April 2018, in the leadup to the May African Union (AU) meeting on the draft protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness, IRRI and RADDHO organised a panel on Right to Nationality in Africa and Statelessness at the 62nd session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nouakchott, Mauritania, with the participation of Commissioner Maya Sahli-Fadel, Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons and Migrants in Africa. The panel discussed the evolution of the draft protocol on nationality and statelessness in Africa. In June 2018, IRRI hosted a [workshop](#) that brought together key stakeholders from government and national and international NGOs, aimed at introducing the draft protocol, and exploring ways civil society and government can support its adoption and share knowledge. The civil society organisations involved in the meeting decided to create a working group. In October 2018, a panel on the Right to Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, was organised during the NGO Forum of the 63rd Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in Banjul, by IRRI, the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), CICA, Equality Now, FEMNET, WARIPNET and IHRDA.

In addition to advocacy meetings with the Uganda Government Focal Point on Statelessness, prior to the Specialised Technical Committee (STC) in Malabo in October/November 2018, IRRI, in collaboration with (KHRC) and Dignity Kwanza, facilitated a series of meetings including a side meeting with representatives from the ministries of foreign and internal affairs on the margins of the Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of Statelessness in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). IRRI also addressed leaders from intergovernmental organisations UNHCR, AU and ICGLR at the Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of Statelessness in April 2019. Director Achieng Akena gave



a [statement](#) on behalf of civil society in the Great Lakes Region in which she highlighted the importance of continued efforts to eliminate statelessness. In the statement, she applauded steps already taken by governments, encouraged further measures and pledged the support of civil society in helping to combat the problem.

The focus on statelessness continued into 2019 where a [case study](#) on the Maragoli, a minority community in Uganda, shed light on how communities end up being barred from accessing important human rights because they are failed by inadequate policies. The story was part of a the project [Empowering Stateless Communities in East Africa](#), led by IRRI within a coalition of East African civil society organisations supported by [Voice.Global](#). It gives a timeline of the Maragoli community's struggles since they were excluded from the list of Ugandan communities in the Constitution, and effectively rendered stateless. In 2019, IRRI, RADDHO, and CICA conducted research on populations at risk of statelessness in Guinea Conakry and Burkina Faso. This research is in line with the Banjul Plan of Action, particularly its objective 2.1 on research, analysis and dissemination of data on statelessness. Based on this lack of reliable and informed data on statelessness, these organisations in partnership with OSIWA and AfRO, initiated this research to understand the phenomenon of statelessness, identify the populations at risk of statelessness in Guinea and Burkina Faso, the main difficulties and obstacles they face, and the strategies that need to be implemented to address these difficulties and accelerate the eradication of statelessness.

In fulfilling our commitments during the ICGLR Ministerial meeting, IRRI established new and stronger links with stakeholders in Uganda, broadening the constituency of actors who are aware of statelessness issues, e.g. Voice grantees at the Linking and Learning Workshop in July 2019 in Mukono who subsequently established a joint platform for solidarity and sharing of information. In the two years, IRRI also worked closely with Minority Rights Group, Uganda who also focus on statelessness and who are founding members of the Indigenous Minorities Coalition of Uganda. In October 2019, IRRI participated in a meeting of the Africa-wide Coalition on the Right to a Nationality, where it was agreed to establish sub-regional platforms, on diversifying the coalition's funding and broadening the scope of themes and actors in the statelessness/nationality rights campaigns e.g. including risks in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. In October 2019, IRRI, as a member of the Right to Nationality Coalition, participated to the side event on the Right to Nationality in Africa at the session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples in Banjul. It was an opportunity to present the activities that have been carried out by the Coalition on the Right to Nationality in Africa which is a coalition of African NGOs which works, individually and collectively, to promote the right of all peoples of the continent to a nationality. Over the past few years, the coalition has carried out many advocacy and awareness activities in the different sub-regions of the African continent.

## STRATEGIC LITIGATION

### *Test case on the right to a nationality for refugees and communities at risk*

In May 2019, IRRI began a test case on the right to citizenship on behalf of two refugees of Somali decent, one having lived in Uganda for 23 years, while the other being her 21 year old daughter who was born in Uganda. They both fulfil the requirements for naturalisation as prescribed by law, but their attempts to apply for citizenship have been futile. In Uganda, there are a number of Refugees, who fulfil the requirements as prescribed by the Citizenship and Immigration Control Act, and who would wish to acquire Ugandan Citizenship by Naturalisation. However, Refugee status has become a permanent limbo for those that have been in Uganda for more than 20 years, or who are born here and come into adulthood. Beyond living a transient existence, the lack of



nationality severely limits their access to opportunities, education or employment, and hampers their ability to integrate fully. Many of these refugees have established families in Uganda and others have no links back home. Some, like the daughter in this test case, may be barred from accessing nationality by the restrictions in Somali's nationality laws. On a closer look at the records of the Ministry of Internal Affairs which processes applications and grants citizenship, there is a dearth in successful refugee applications. From interviews and investigation, IRRI has learned that naturalisation applications from refugees are not even officially received by the office. The case intends to build on previous case law from 2010, and seize the Court in challenging the *de facto* exclusion of refugees from acquiring citizenship.

## JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

IRRI believes that for peace to be sustainable there must be a way to seek accountability for the atrocities and human rights violations which occurred during any conflict or instability. IRRI avers that there is not just one blueprint for what constitutes justice, and that communities should not simply be at the receiving end of justice

initiatives, but should have a say in what justice looks like for them. Formal or informal, conventional or traditional justice systems and models, should be engaged and strengthened to ensure a coherent and integrated system that responds effectively to the rights and needs of justice users, and galvanises actors to work more effectively, as part of a broader and symbiotic justice system, that comprehensively accommodates both the providers and the users.

In June 2018, IRRI published a [blog post](#) urging relevant institutions to put an end to the impunity in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), reinforce the capacity of judicial authorities to investigate and prosecute international crimes, and to consider alternative ways to ensure justice is done for the numerous victims of violence. This was followed by another [joint letter](#) to the delegation of the UN Human Rights Council urging them to support the creation of a country-wide human rights monitoring and reporting mechanism on the Democratic Republic of Congo at the Council's

39th session in September 2018. In December 2019, a year after the December 2018 massacre in Yumbi, IRRI [brought to attention](#) the lack of accountability and justice for the survivors. In the region, the attacks were all but forgotten. Victims were still struggling to rebuild their lives and communities. Many survivors interviewed by IRRI said that they knew the perpetrators, yet nobody has been convicted so far for organising or carrying out the attacks, which put in jeopardy the chance of reconciliation between these communities.

Over the two years, IRRI continued to monitor the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC), contributing to and participating in discussions on the cases, the institutional efficacy more broadly, and citizen perspectives on the work of the Court, including contributions to the [International Justice Monitor](#). In May, June and August 2019, IRRI enjoined various actions towards enhancing the impact and efficacy of the International Criminal Court, including a memo from civil society organisations to President Kwon of the Assembly of State Parties (ASP), regarding the independent expert review of the ICC's performance. The organisations offered support for the initiative to review the performance of the Court, and shared a concept note with principles that should be integrated into the process to help safeguard the independence of the expert review. These

included clarity of both the purpose and process of the review which should ultimately be to enable the ICC to move forward in achieving its core mandate. In June 2019, the Victims' Rights Working Group (VRWG), of which IRRI is a member, called upon the international

community to ensure the surrender for prosecution of Bashir and other individuals in Sudan, against whom arrest warrants had been issued by the ICC. In December 2019, IRRI attended the Assembly of State Parties in the Hague.



## CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY AND BUILDING NATIONAL CONSENSUS

Consolidating democracy through inclusive governance is fundamental to sustainable peace in Africa, and particularly the Great Lakes Region which has experienced persistent and recurrent conflict, and is thus the origin of the majority of refugees on the continent. IRRI's related work in 2018-2019 was focussed on promoting participatory governance in the region. IRRI remained a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P), which is a community of civil society organisations from around the world, dedicated to the effective and consistent implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle.

Work on Burundi included in-depth research which provided for rich commentary and recommendations on the situation in the country. Between December 2017 and March 2018, IRRI conducted 106 semi-structured interviews in Burundi, Uganda and Belgium in order to untangle the dynamics around the dialogue processes and peace agreements in the country. The [research culminated in a report](#) which found that, despite considerable scepticism, many Burundian citizens support a continuation of talks and strongly value previous peace agreements. The report therefore urged African leaders to revive political dialogue on Burundi towards establishing national consensus in order to move the country forward, away from the cycle of conflict. In November 2018, IRRI penned an [op-ed in the New Vision](#) on the need for EAC, and the international community more broadly, to remain engaged and support the pursuit of a just and sustainable peace in Burundi, despite fledgling talks.

In February 2019, IRRI also published a report titled "[they don't even understand why we fled](#)", which highlighted the difficulties of reintegration in Burundi. Based on interviews with returnees in Burundi, the report, describes the daily struggles of recently returned refugees to provide for their families. Burundi received a large influx of returnees ahead of the elections with up to 116,000 returnees by the end of 2019. Hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled to neighbouring countries around the contested 2015 elections, marked by political unrest and violent repression. "To break the cycle of conflict and displacement in Burundi, the government and international actors have to recognise that repatriation is a complex, long-term process that must be adequately supported", Lucy Hovil, senior researcher at IRRI, said. In December 2018, IRRI [foreshadowed exacerbated violence](#) ahead of the first peaceful transition of power since the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gained its independence. The blog post predicted a fragile electoral environment by analysing the political situation which included the use of state machinery and resources, by the ruling party, to suppress the opposition. The blog also warned that the election could negatively impact security in some of the country's already volatile regions, especially in the east, drawing on previous research by IRRI demonstrating the impact of national dynamics on local conflicts.





## Strategic Growth and Development







The grand milestone of 2019 was IRRI turning 15. We commemorated 15 years of unique, ingenious, disruptive and authoritative work, covering a broad spectrum of issues related to displacement in Africa, with an event held on the margins of the AU High Level Dialogue, that was graced by government and AU officials, dignitaries, our constituencies, and our civil society partners, including those working on issues of displacement. We recorded a commemorative [video](#) reflecting the views of staff, board and founders on those 15 years of IRRI, and on the future they imagine for the organisation.





# SPOTLIGHT ON IRRI

As part of a special commemorative issue of our annual report, we sat down with Dismas Nkunda, to discuss in detail, how IRRI came into being, to take stock of the achievements of the last decade and a half, and get his take on IRRI's future.



## WHO ARE YOU

My name is Dismas Nkunda and I am the co-founder and former Co-Executive Director (2004-2014) of IRRI. My background is in journalism and human rights, and prior to the establishment of IRRI, I was the Africa Co-ordinator of the International Refugee Programme at Human Rights First in New York. Today, I serve as a board member for IRRI.

## WHY IRRI

The foundation for setting up IRRI was laid while I was still in New York, working for Human Rights First. The work I was doing at the time was very similar to what IRRI is doing today, but after 9/11, priority areas shifted, and, together with Olivia Bueno and Dierdre Clancy, we started thinking about other ways to continue the important work of supporting refugees in Africa. We already had a good civil society network on the continent that we didn't want to betray, we still had the energy and wish to contribute and there was funding left to work with, so we took the step and started our own organisation with our head office in Kampala. That's how IRRI was born and I'm happy to say that it worked very well!

## LOOKING BACK

Here I would mention again how we've managed to grow to become even bigger than what we initially hoped for, which I think is a great achievement in itself. But if I had to highlight something more specific, I am particularly proud of the work we have done in the area of justice and accountability where we have spearheaded discussions which have directly informed the international discourse and helped the International Criminal Court in understanding connections pivotal to their work.





# WHAT HAS CHANGED

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Initially it was just the three of us, though we were soon joined by Sandra Akello whom we hired as my assistant and who is still with us today, having evolved into the Finance and Admin Manager. The work took off pretty quickly and we became a leading voice on atrocities in Africa while co-ordinating the Darfur Consortium with me as spokesperson. So after just a couple of years we had already become a known name, recognised for our commitment to the cause. Since then, we've grown to become even bigger and more international than we could have imagined, with projects in all parts of Africa and presence in both the US and the UK. We were also excited recently to bring in as the new Executive Director Achieng Akena, who is bringing with her a wealth of previous experience, so overall we are at a very encouraging and heart-warming point in time.

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## LOOKING AHEAD

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At the moment we are facing several challenges, not least because of the global pandemic which is likely to impact on our ability to carry out projects. So my first hope is to come out strong on the other side with a potential to grow even bigger and more international than we are now. My dream is for IRRI to become the go-to institution to be consulted on matters relevant to our core work around displacement. I also hope that we can continue to increase our global outlook and focus more on how African migration is impacting the rest of the world. The world we live in is getting more interconnected by the day, and the influence of this is something that cannot be underestimated. I would like to see IRRI properly positioned to face these myriad of challenges, while equally being able to take advantage of new opportunities







## STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION

At the milestone of 15 years, taking advantage of new leadership in the organisation, IRRI went through a process of strategic transformation. While our core mandate around displacement and the inter-related issues remained critically relevant, the socio-political, economic and technical context had shifted. Africa, our core geographical focus had changed, including the drivers of forced displacement. The management, context and -isms around displacement, our primary thematic focus, had changed as had the typology. Systems, structures and policies were also shifting, and IRRI needed to ensure that we were strategically placed to make the most of new opportunities, as well as proficiently respond to the fluidity of global organising. We therefore determined that we would re-strategise and rethink IRRI, and reprioritise what we wanted to do and achieve. As aptly put by Dr Chidi Odinkalu, our Board Chair:

*Over time, the situation, food security, human security, climate change, governance situation, put into a mix, is likely to mean that the displacement situation and security situations in this part of the world, will need more of IRRI.*

### **STAFF AND BOARD RETREAT**

We brought together our Board and staff, and some of our founders, ex-staff, and Pan-African thought leaders, into a retreat in June 2019, where we looked back at the milestones IRRI had achieved in the 15 years of our existence. In order to plan for the next 15 years, we reviewed the broader context in which we worked and the changing landscape of the governance and displacement in Africa. We deliberated on what we could do and should do, not only to reorganise our institution, but also, our work, in order to align IRRI's mission to the regional and international context, including SDGs and Africa's democratisation agenda. After deliberating on the key sub-themes and new directions our work would take, we then decided on what sort of institutional infrastructure would allow us the greatest flexibility and dynamism in programming. From a thematic structure divided according to programmes and projects, to a technical one on based on functionality of each role e.g. the advocacy role would design and undertake advocacy activities across the different thematic areas in which we work. We found that creating this new structure would amplify our operations and greater align our strategic priorities. These discussions were reduced into a new strategic plan for 2020-2024. With our transformation, we emerged stronger and bolder, capitalising on our strengths in research and capacitation, while pushing the boundaries of our advocacy.

*"Don't be afraid  
to give up the  
good to go for  
the great."  
John D. Rockefeller*



## SUPPORTING ORGANISING

IRRI is unique in that in addition to our usual substantive work, we also provide non-profit management and fiscal sponsorship to incubate new ideas and organisations. IRRI has considerable experience in grants management, partnerships, and building stakeholder engagement, having incubated and fiscally hosted nearly 20 initiatives over the years. IRRI has vast experience in management of consortiums and in the management of collaborative capacity, research and advocacy programmes in refugee spaces across Africa, including in Northern Uganda. This support is part of our institutional DNA. As our Board Chair Chidi Odinkalu indicated, “the status of refugee or displacement is one of vulnerability and therefore one that, by definition, imports solidarity.” For us, doing rights in displacement work, this means ensuring that our constituencies are resourced and have the capability to organise in extremely difficult situations. Our WEZESHA initiative, Swahili for enable, was our way of being more deliberate and intentional, post transformation, about our capacity support, and about growing the constituencies with whom we work to occupy spaces and amplify their voices.

Our commitment to supporting organising mandated us to make resources available to civil society actors in situations where they would otherwise not have been able to access critical resources to shift prevailing dynamics. With Sudan’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, it was very difficult for civil society actors to access much needed funding for their work towards democratic transition in the country. In 2019, IRRI was able to successfully provide flexible and rapid support to Sudanese partners, both to advocate with international partners to support change in Sudan and also to support on the ground projects providing direct assistance to Sudanese people. The fast moving political developments in Sudan through this period showed the utility of having quickly deployable funding to respond to political challenges and opportunities as they evolved. Our ability to keep close contacts with key leaders and activists in the country to ensure that we understood, and could quickly respond to developments, was quite critical.

Specifically, IRRI also supported the work of NHRMO, nurturing the organisation to build institutional capacity in order to become an independent organisation. We are currently hosting Climate Refugees as they grow into an independent institution. We have also been a conduit for funding for a number of organisations during this period.

*“IRRI has contributed a lot to my team since 2013 to date and now we are a registered organisation... all this happened because IRRI is passionate in..*



## THE STAFF, BOARD AND PARTNERS

During 2018 and 2019 IRRI both said goodbye to old friends and welcomed new faces to the team. Johanna Seidl, who had previously supported IRRI's fundraising efforts on a consultancy basis, came in to lead our statelessness work in 2018. Naomi Kabarungi joined the team in October 2018 as programme and communications officer, supporting projects on causes and resolution of exile.

In June 2019, ahead of our Board and staff retreat, we had a staff team building day that had us twisting our collective minds around physical puzzles and games, and revealed our hidden strengths and highly competitive spirits.



Andie Lambe who took over as Executive Director in 2014 left the position in August 2018. The position was held temporarily by Olivia Bueno until Achieng Akena was recruited in March 2019 and took over at the helm of IRRI. At the end of 2019, we said goodbye to Thijs Van Laer and Johanna Seidl who went on to greener pastures. We also said goodbye to Lucy Hovil and re-established connections with Fauzia Nkunyingi who came to provide support on our strategic litigation work. We had some of our Associates leave, but gained new ones for example, Ibrahim Lutwama, Georgia Cole and Andreas Kristiansen.

Board Chair remained Dr Chidi Odinkalu and the Vice Chair became Salima Namusobya, who is Uganda-based. Dismas Nkunda also joined the Board.

We remain grateful to all our partners and supporters including, Open Society Foundations, Voice – Hivos, Oxfam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, NWO WOTRO, Kenya Human Rights Commission and Dignity Kwanza, without whose partnership we could not have accomplished the work we did over these two years.

*“Nous sommes  
aujourd’hui  
devenir comme  
une famille”*  
Djibril Balde, staff



## HOW TO SUPPORT IRRI

In the upcoming years, IRRI will work to expand our rights programming, by scaling up our global information and resource portal, contributing to conflict-sensitive programming and taking part in dialogues, working groups, debates and advocacy, highlighting the persistent challenges to displacement worldwide. We will continue to push for a people-centred robust refugee response framework that centres dignity and agency. If you would like to partner with us and support our work, you can be a part of our [associate or volunteer programme](#), or you can donate online, via bank transfer or by cheque.

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](#).

To send your contribution by post, make a cheque payable to the “International Refugee Rights Initiative” and send to:

International Refugee Rights Initiative,  
1483 York Avenue, No. 20463 New York,  
NY 10021 UNITED STATES.

