



InterAid Uganda Ltd

WILL YOU STAND # WITH REFUGEES



DR. SOUSAN MOHAMED ELMATI, Sudanese

I appreciate the Government of Uganda for welcoming us as refugees, UNHCR for supporting our presence in Uganda and Inter Aid Uganda for giving us the opportunity to freely express our views, providing emotional, health, legal and financial support to the very vulnerable.

As a refugee single woman who escaped war from Sudan, I have had many challenges ranging from language barrier, with no means of survival, difference in education qualification especially for professionals who can and are not readily accepted to practice their profession in Uganda. Despite the fact that I went an extra mile and re-enrolled for further studies in Medicine at Makerere Medical School where I obtained a degree by the support of the Norwegian Church Aid, I was still denied an opportunity to be registered by the Medical Council on the grounds that I am a foreigner. I only registered upon the intervention of InterAid and Office of the Prime Minister, who wrote several letters to the Medical Council, Ministry of health clearly spelling out that a refugee has the same rights as a national to employment as mandated by the Refugee Act, I was eventually registered and now I am a practicing Medical Doctor working in Uganda. To a great extent I have managed to survive by enrolling for English language training to enable me gain basic communication skills which enables me engage in income generating activities for livelihood.

I am glad I managed to achieve the above but other refugee women living among us in Uganda they are

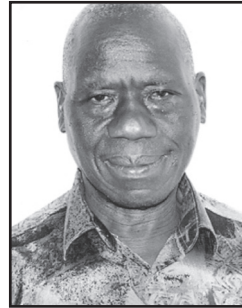
facing numerous challenges regardless of whether married or unmarried, the challenges include discrimination while seeking services from public service providers who consider them as foreigners and actually to the point of even of overcharging them; some hurl comments like ***"You are foreigners and thus constraining on our minimum resources so you need to dearly pay for the services you get or go back to your country"***.

Single women who may have fled without their husbands, lost truck of them during flight, whose husbands were killed during the war or abandoned, owing to livelihood challenges and searching for greener pastures have suffered double tragedy which range from rape and or tortured during flight but also survival sex in the Uganda, livelihood challenges which force them to live in single roomed houses located in slums thus exposing them to theft, diseases among other challenges.

Among the Sudanese and the Somalis where female genital mutilation is still prevalent most women have a big challenge during delivery and there is only one doctor at **Case Medical Centre** who manages their safe delivery which is very expensive for them, this has also been the major cause of fistula among this group of women, high child and maternal mortality rate.

My sincere gratitude to the kind host communities who provide employment for refugees thus providing them with a source of income; in addition most refugees from South Sudan, Sudanese, Ethiopians and Eritreans engage in hotel services to earn a living, while Congolese women engage in hawking jewels, crafts and casual labor to earn a living.

I appeal to the Government of Uganda to support us with affordable health care services which meet specific health needs most especially for women who have suffered Female Genital Mutilation. Just like IAU and Refugee Law Project are providing language services for refugees, Government should consider establishing adult language training centers. I also call upon the Government to relax the procedures of acquiring travel documents of refugees to ease our movements to allow us engage in cross boarder business to enhance our livelihood.



Serwaniko Wilberforce
Chairperson, Kawaala Zone II, L.C.I
KASUBI PARISH

I am so grateful to the Government of Uganda for welcoming and providing enabling laws to host refugees, UNHCR, InterAid Uganda that adopted a community – based approach, developing a working relationship with local leaders at a Village level in the areas of mainly social/welfare services, legal, economic and health.

For the past three years, InterAid Uganda has been conducting regular meetings with local leaders at

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village level in **Kampala, Rubaga and Makndye Divisions**, to allow them to interact with refugees, updated with current matters concerning refugee issues, build their capacity to address their concern as local leaders among others.

I must admit that before I was invited to participate in these meetings, I used to have a very, very negative view of refugees – an attitude that was being shared by majority of the local leaders that had gathered at the initial meetings hosted by InterAid Uganda. For example, I used to ask myself as to why we should allow these refugees to come here, after they have caused trouble to themselves in their respective country of origin. In some other instances, I used to receive complaints from concerned host community members within my jurisdiction as some refugees were often seen bathing during broad day-light at water source, an act not acceptable among most cultures of Ugandans. A campaign was then mounted not to allow refugees to stay in our locality. Personally, I was always bitter with all refugees.

The participatory and involvement approach adopted by InterAid, revealed to me, for example, that being a human being, I was a potential refugee under circumstances that could be of not my making; refugees were fellow human beings that should be allowed to enjoy their rights in full.

With the change of mind, I started to realize that the

situation of refugees was being adversely affected by the negative attitude that some local leaders and members of the public exhibited towards them. In this context, I must admit that I have been empowered by InterAid to ensure that my responsibility as one of the local leaders SHOULD emphasize not only the rights of refugees, but also their obligations. By so doing, some success has been realized; such as, in my locality;

- We are living in harmony with refugees.
- Refugees have now been offered rentals for their accommodation.
- Some refugees regularly attend our monthly local councils.
- Refugees can now engage local leaders to address their social need(s) or resolve disputes among themselves.
- Refugees who have reported to our office as a resident in our area been issued with village identity cards.
- We endeavor to understand and appreciate the different cultures of refugees.

In order to sustain the above mentioned success and to gain more, I suggest the following;

- InterAid capacity should be strengthened to match with the growing size of refugees and physical area of Kampala.
- Rising awareness is aspect to expanding access to services. It is, therefore, imperative to sensitize host communities about refugees are and the relevant local laws relating to them, this will go a long way to curb discrimination and other obstacles inhibiting accessing public and private services. This calls for intensive and effective advocacy mechanism at the local level (village).
- Given the fact that refugees live among the host communities and are governed by the local (Village) leaders, it is critical that local (village) leaders are made aware of refugee rights and obligations for effective management. This requires clear communication and close working coordination between InterAid Uganda and the local leaders who are responsible for basic services delivery.
- Ensuring that refugees are made aware of their responsibilities to foster good relations with the local community.
- The Office of the Prime Minister should take a lead in ensuring the entire Ugandan population is made aware of refugees' issues, rights and responsibilities in their respective localities.



Some of the Local Councilors during one of the Coordination meetings