As Uganda joins the rest of the World to Mark World Refugee Day, Uganda Red Cross joins in solidarity with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent fraternity (IFRC and ICRC) to express our commitment to always #StandWithRefugees.

Uganda is one of the countries in the world with the biggest number of refugees. This is attributed to the good refugee model that we have as a Country and shows the country’s readiness to embrace one of the Red Cross Principles, “Humanity.” The Red Cross globally expresses solidarity with people who flee their countries because of war or persecution, as well as other forms of atrocities against humanity including natural calamities.

The Government of Uganda has opened boarders to more than 1.4 million people, including mothers and children who are the majority. The biggest number hails from South Sudan and the most recent new arrivals are from the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a local humanitarian organization, the Uganda Red Cross is always the first on ground. In 2016, a Red Cross volunteer in Yumbe district, northern Uganda received the first South Sudan refugee and this is how the government of Uganda started the biggest refugee settlement in the world, Bidibidi. Today, this is home to over 270,000 refugees whose lives have since improved because of the support they receive as part of the comprehensive refugee response framework in Uganda.

Uganda Red Cross is a partner of choice with respect to refugee issues in this country. With legal mandate
through an Act of Parliament (1964) which is further emphasized under the Uganda government Disaster Policy which positions URCS as an auxiliary humanitarian arm of government, URCS is mandated to manage humanitarian interventions as a first responder and being there until the humanitarian situation is thoroughly done. We are always the first on ground and the last to leave.

The Red Cross has established global tools developed and coordinated by the international Red Cross fraternity to enable fast response to emergencies in any country where the Red Cross operates. In Uganda for example, the Emergency Response Units (ERU) were deployed at short notice to massively process and produce water in 2016/17 during the mass influx of South Sudan refugees. More so, the ERU mass sanitation tools were also deployed to avert the WASH related epidemics that had threatened to befall the refugee settlements of West Nile. This coordination of Red Cross unique tools in emergencies is an innovation that makes the Red Cross unique.

The other strength is evident when Red Cross positions itself as a 1st responder in emergency health situations in the country. This was exemplified in managing and controlling the Cholera epidemic that came into Uganda as the DRC escalated their coming into the country early this year. The Red Cross social mobilization efforts averted the epidemic and saved thousands of lives.

With over 360,000 volunteers, members and staff, present in local communities across 51 districts in Uganda, the Uganda Red Cross is committed to offer support to the vulnerable through the different response activities ranging from offering emergency health and safety, responding to disasters, managing epidemics and pandemic outbreaks such as Marburg, Ebola and Cholera, and above all, being at the forefront of the big refugee response operations in the Country (South Sudan & DRC).

Through the services we provide, Uganda Red Cross restores the dignity of refugees and brings a smile on their faces. The psychosocial support given to the depressed and protection of the separated and unaccompanied children, family reunions / restoration of broken family links, provision of safe and clean water, offering emergency first aid and treatment to the sick and wounded, supporting registration of new arrivals, dissemination of important lifesaving information, providing livelihood programs for food security, and managing other emergency components as mandated by Government of Uganda through the auxiliary role framework is part of what makes the Red Cross unique in refugee response operations.

I thank the Government of Uganda through the office of the Prime Minister, department of Refugees, the UN fraternity, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, other partners, Red Cross staff, members and Volunteers, the local hosting communities with whom we support the refugees and the world at large for joining hands with us to support every cause of refugees. This is not a concern for only Ugandans but an issue of “Ubuntu” (Humanity). Behind the faces of refugees are tough stories that break our hearts, pierces with much pain and all we need to do is, give a shoulder for our brothers and sisters to lean on, extend a helping hand and give them a chance to life.

While we try so hard, we are challenged with resources to sustain the operations and yet the numbers keep growing. This reality sometimes makes our beneficiaries hostile, thinking they are deprived of basic necessities and instead turn violent to the actors on ground. It is my humble prayer to the international community to do much more to support Uganda as we manage these big refugee operations. I also appeal to the International Community to protect people uprooted from their home countries by war, persecution or suffering of all kind to ensure their safety. We need to see peace prevailing in countries where fresh conflicts keep forcing their own people to run to neighboring countries like Uganda.

To the donors, there’s need to operationalize the commitments made at the humanitarian summit of 2016 in Turkey one of them being the localization agenda. You cannot talk of a localization agenda without considering national local Humanitarian Organizations like Uganda Red Cross if that commitment is to take root and succeed.

The New York Declaration (adopted in September 2016, resolution 71/1), the 193 UN member states unanimously committed to a comprehensive and equitable way of addressing refugee and migration issues / challenges. Uganda has offered a platform for protection, respect, safety and dignity of refugees. We have shown responsibility through meeting an obligation of International Humanitarian Law. Hosting refugees is a very big responsibility that calls for more support in terms of resources. Refugees face challenges like diseases which are life threatening. We can only manage refugee issues through collective responsibility.
Uganda Red Cross is on ground and remains committed to supporting the needs of refugees in Uganda. We always strive to save and protect lives, and ensuring human dignity.

For God and my Country.

Everywhere for Everyone

#WithRefugees