

Heading to Uganda for 'solidarity summit,' UN chief marks World Refugee Day with calls for action

20 June 2017 – Refugee protection is not a matter of solidarity or generosity, but an obligation under international law, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today said, detailing five strong appeals to the international community for respecting refugees' rights.

“We are still witnessing many remarkable examples of [solidarity in today's world](#). But at the same time, we are seeing more and more borders being closed, we are seeing more and more refugees being rejected and, namely in countries of the developed world,” Mr. Guterres said in his first press conference in New York since becoming Secretary-General.

Among his calls on Member States, Mr. Guterres urged Governments to manage their borders but to increase their resettlement quotas and protect asylum seekers and people who deserve protection; to seek political solutions to world's conflicts which are spurring the record 65.6 million refugees; and to fund humanitarian aid work.

In line with [World Refugee Day](#), marked annually on 20 June, Mr. Guterres, who was the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for a decade prior, announced that he would be leaving later today for Uganda, which this week hosts a UN-backed summit to support the more than 1.3 million refugees within its borders for the next four years.

Some 950,000 refugees from South Sudan have crossed into Uganda since the start of the conflict in the world's newest country in December 2013. The figure is three times higher than the number of refugees who crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe last year, Mr. Guterres said, adding that Uganda not only provides protection but land for the refugees.

I also think it's important to underline that the difficulties faced by refugees are also linked to the fact that the migration debate has become quite irrational in today's world.

In contrast, the UN chief had sharp words for developed countries not doing enough to provide support for refugees or take them in despite heart breaking pleas for food, water and other basics.

Some 80 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries with “a dramatic impact” on their economy, society and security, he noted.

“This is particularly worrying, especially when associated to forms of political populism, xenophobia, racism, in which refugees become a

target,” Mr. Guterres said, “many times being accused of being part of the terror threat when refugees are not terrorists – they are the first victims of terror, they are fleeing terror; that is why they are refugees.”

RELATED: [Sheer scale of influx into Uganda means Africa's largest refugee crisis now a 'children's crisis,' UNICEF warns](#)

Speaking alongside Ninette Kelley, the Director of the NY Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), Mr. Guterres lashed out at the “irrational debate” surrounding migration, calling it a “necessary element of establishing different forms of equilibrium in the global society and the global economy.”

Stressing that Governments need to apply their own migration policies in their countries, he urged world leaders to respect human rights and to create opportunities within their borders so that people migrate “out of choice and not out of necessity.”

Addressing the difference between [refugees and migrants](#), Mr. Guterres said that the UN General Assembly will next year hold two key debates with the aim of agreeing on two compacts – one on refugees and one on migration.

“We are talking about two different situations: refugees crossing borders, fleeing conflict or prosecution, [and] economic migrants who aspire legitimately to have a better life and move from one country to another, aiming at a better future for them and their children,” the Secretary-General said.

He added that migration is necessary: “If something is necessary, it's better to control it and to do it regularly than to let smugglers and traffickers be in charge of these movements.”