

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

REFUGEE OPERATIONS IN ZAMBIA

BY

THE HON. MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, MR KAMPYONGO, MP

Madam Speaker, I would like to start by thanking you and the Leader of Government Business, Her Honour the Vice-President for affording me this opportunity to render a ministerial statement to update the House, and through this House, the nation at large, on the status and situation regarding the refugees we host in this country. I am grateful because today, the rest of the world is commemorating the World Refugees Day.

Madam Speaker, Zambia continues to maintain an open door asylum policy in line with its international obligations while ensuring that internal security is maintained. The country is currently hosting a total number of 80,700 refugees and former refugees and asylum seekers from the neighbouring country and beyond half of whom are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The number of refugees from the DRC has continued to increase despite the successful holding of general elections and the peaceful transfer of power in the DRC. The refugees, most of whom are arriving through Luapula and Northern provinces, are claiming violence due to tribal and militia conflicts in the Kivu, upper Katanga and Tanganyika regions.

Madam, following the enactment of the Refugees Act No. 1 of 2017 by this august House, the ministry has embarked on programmes that are centered on taking care of the needs of refugees and former refugees as well as host communities in order for them not to only survive, but to also thrive. This is exemplified by the establishment of Mantapala Refugee Settlement where more than 15,000 Congolese refugees are settled among the population of over 5,000 inhabitants sharing the social amenities and other facilities put in place in the area from the beginning of the influx in august 2017.

Madam Speaker, let me take this opportunity to once again extend the Government profound gratitude to the people of Luapula, North Western and Northern provinces especially those in the border areas who have been at the front line of receiving asylum seekers and assisting them. Traditional leaders, local authorities and host communities in areas where refugees settlement are located also need to be commended for their resilience in continuing to receive refugees and sharing their land and resources.

The development of Mantapala Refugee Settlement was also made possible with the support the gallant men and women of the Zambia National Service (ZNS) who have been on the ground to open up the area by constructing roads and bridges. In addition, the Government has been assisted in this endeavour by the United Nations (UN) agencies led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations and local organisations. Further, the work would not have been possible without the efforts of partner ministries including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare, Ministry of General Education and the provincial administration. However, a lot remains to be done to consolidate the response and provide adequate services to the refugees and their host communities.

Madam, there is, for instance, urgent need to complete the works that have been started on the promotion of livelihood among refugees, the construction of schools, health centres, police posts including the supply of safe water and sanitation. The humanitarian and development needs of the two populations need a wholesome approach to us to leverage on the establishment of the settlement in order to bring development to the people of Nchelenge and Kawambwa in line with the government's intention for the refugee programmes to also benefit the host communities.

Madam Speaker, it will be recalled that in September, 2016, His Excellency President Edgar Chagwa Lungu was one of the world leaders invited by the then, President of the United States fo America (USA), Mr Barrack Obama to the Leader's Summit on Refugees in New York, which was held concurrently with the UN General Assembly where the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants was adopted. Annex 1 of the Declaration sets out a comprehensive refugees response framework for responding to large movements of refugees including

emergencies and protracted refugee situations, a framework which Zambia is now using to implement each programme.

Madam, on 18th December, 2018, the UN General Assembly affirmed the global compact on refugees and the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration. These international guidelines on refugees programming are intended to ensure that not only humanitarian actors respond to refugee situations, but also that developmental partners, including the UN agencies, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, NGOs, the church and business houses become part of the responses.

Madam Speaker, the new approaches also encourage social and economic inclusion of refugees in national programmes. This is important if we are to ensure that refugees do not constitute a burden on the State but become a shared responsibility, and that refugees should be able to develop themselves into assets not only for the host country but their countries of origin as well. In the event that they are unable to repatriate, they should be able to contribute to the development of our country as is the case with the 20,000 Angolans and 4,000 Rwandese who have chosen to remain in Zambia even if the situation in their countries has returned to normal.

Madam Speaker, protracted cases of former Angolan and Rwandese refugees have been offered local integration as a durable solution. In accordance with the Immigration and Deportation Act No. 18 of 2010, the former refugees are being given residence and temporary permits to ensure that they are properly documented so that we do not have a population that is unaccounted for. This is part of the desire of the Government to find a durable solution for former refugees who are unable to return to their countries of origin. The former refugees are settled in Meheba and Mayukwayukwa resettlement schemes, now being managed by the Department of Resettlement in Her Honour the Vice-President's office where they have been given land alongside Zambians. Some former refugees are professionals who have been deployed in various Government ministries and private institutions providing various services.

Madam Speaker, following our participation at the Leaders Summit and the UN General Assembly in 2016, His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa

Lungu, also took part in the mobilisation of support from the international community during the Uganda Solidarity Summit on Refugees in 2017 to show solidarity to the Republic of Uganda which is hosting close to 1.2 million refugees from South Sudan. At the summit, Zambia was commended for showing a good example of implementing local integration as a durable solution for former refugees. In view of the leadership shown by His Excellency the President, in this area, the ministry has been working to consolidate Zambia's positive reputation in refugee protection. In this regard, Zambia has been taking part in various meetings to ensure that we advance and seek support for our refugee programmes. In October 2018, I was privileged to represent the country at the UNHCR Executive Committee where I did interact with the commissioner for refugees, who pledged international commitment for refugee programmes and local integration of former refugees in Zambia.

Madam Speaker, recently, I was in Uganda at a meeting of ministers in charge of refugees in the Great Lakes Region, where member states shared their knowledge, understanding and experiences in refugee protection and the search for solutions to the increasing global challenge of people forced to flee their homes. With an estimated 4.4 million refugees and asylum seekers forcibly displaced, the meeting expressed concern over the scale and scope of the refugee crisis in the Great Lakes Region. The meeting recognised the disproportionate impact of displacement on women, children and reiterated the centrality of protection with special attention to these vulnerable groups.

Madam Speaker, a peaceful transfer of power in the DRC, the revitalised agreement for the resolution of the conflict in South Sudan, and the political agreement for peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic (CAR), which provide new prospects for peace and stability in the region, were equally recognised. Finally, members appealed to national, regional and international partners to ensure adequate financing, including appropriate amounts and quick disbursement mechanisms to address the unmet humanitarian and development requirements to support the implementation of durable solutions.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that Zambia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda were commended for having adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and

for their forward-looking policies and programmes on refugee inclusion and integration. All member states agreed on the urgency to address the drivers and root causes of forced displacement in the region, including violence, armed conflict, human rights violations, natural disasters and environmental degradation, among others.

Madam Speaker, lessons can be learnt from such events about the high price that many of our neighbours have had to pay to restore peace once it is lost due to conflict and violence. In conclusion, the ministry will continue to collaborate with partner ministries, UN agencies, international and local NGOs, and faith-based organisations to ensure that we maintain a positive approach to refugee problems.

In October 2019, UN member states will gather in Geneva to deliberate on the phenomenon of statelessness, which to date affects more than 10 million people worldwide. On 17th and 18th December, 2019, the UN member states will once again, meet in Geneva to discuss the provisions of the global compact on refugees.

Madam Speaker, the African Union (AU) has this year, 2019, adopted the theme, “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa”, bringing into focus, the need for member states to deal decisively with this problem.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Home Affairs remains committed to ensuring that only genuine refugees are granted refugee status. It is also committed to fulfilling its international mandate of providing protection and assistance to all asylum seekers and refugees in order to contribute to their general welfare and the maintenance of our country’s internal security.

Madam Speaker, I will end by commending the commissioner for refugees and his officers who often have to be away from home in their quest to serve their fellow human beings and offer services to those who have no place to call home.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.