



International Development Committee

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From Stephen Twigg MP, Chair

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State
Department for International Development

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Displacement and food crisis in Central and East Africa

Dear Priti,

We held our final evidence session of this Parliament on the extremely important and urgent matter of displacement and the food crisis in Central and East Africa. I wanted to write to draw your attention to the evidence, a full transcript of which is attached and the written evidence is also available through our website.¹

In recent years, displacement has affected an ever-increasing number of people around the world. The total number of displaced more than doubled between 2007 and 2015 from 31.7 million to 63.9 million.² With around 4.4 million displaced persons at the end of 2015, sub-Saharan Africa consistently endures a very high burden of displacement, despite having the least resources to deal with the impacts. As we were reminded Uganda:

“has taken 885,000 South Sudanese, 489,000 of them in 2016 alone. For comparison, Europe, which has 16% of the world’s GDP, took in 369,000 refugees in total across the continent. Uganda, a much smaller economy, has taken far more as a single country.”³

There are 1.1 million internally displaced persons in Somalia with a further 880,000 Somali refugees in neighbouring countries.⁴ There are an increasing number of displaced persons from the conflict in South Sudan with an estimated four refugees fleeing every minute⁵ and the political crisis in Burundi has resulted in 1,000 people a day crossing the border to Tanzania.⁶ There is now a famine in areas of South Sudan and an impending famine in Somalia where there has been no rain for two years, as well as a food crisis in Burundi and northern Nigeria.⁷ In addition to this there are 3 million people in need of humanitarian support in Kenya and with the likely failure of

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry/publications/>

² [UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2015](#)

³ Q24

⁴ UNHCR

⁵ Worldvision

⁶ Q25-26

⁷ Q28

the long rain this summer the number could go up to 4 million.⁸ OCHA says that the number of food insecure in Uganda has quadrupled.⁹ The situation was described to us as “a perfect storm of new emergencies overlapping with protracted crises that have never been resolved”¹⁰ and that those who were suffering “the poorest of the poor” were “very invisible” because the “profile of the crisis is so poor”.¹¹

We heard further worrying evidence regarding the repatriation of Somali refugees from Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya at a time when Somalia faces “continuing impunity of terror groups that are causing instability; lack of foreign troops and declining numbers there, and failed rains.”¹² In written evidence we were told:

“Human Rights Watch, along with Amnesty International, and the Norwegian Refugee Council have all found the repatriation program underway to be coercive. Similar concerns have been raised by Save the Children and Medecins Sans Frontieres regarding the security and health risks facing returnees under pressure to return to Somalia.”¹³

We were told by Moulid Hujale, who grew up in Dadaab, that refugees are effectively being forced to return to unsafe and unsustainable lives in Somalia due to the intolerable conditions in the camp where they are facing 50% reductions in food distributions and pressure from the Kenyan authorities.¹⁴ Refugees in Dadaab were not being provided with up-to-date and sufficient information to make informed decisions about returns but instead promised a ‘paradise in Somalia’ with resettlement packages.¹⁵ The result was refugees from Dadaab ending up in IDP camps within Somalia where the conditions were far worse with no health or education provision, or having to return to Dadaab where they no longer held refugee status so had no access to food distribution and health services.¹⁶ He told us:

“In early 2016, I met a woman who was forced to return, and when she went back to Somalia, her home was occupied by other people who were powerful in terms of their tribal affiliation and she could not get back. Her husband tried to demand that and was killed because of that. She was raped and had to come back. When she came back, Kenya said the people who went through the resettlement programme would not be registered, because, “You’re gone now”.”¹⁷

⁸ Q23

⁹ [OCHA Regional Outlook for the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region](#)

¹⁰ Q23

¹¹ Q24

¹² Q23

¹³ Human Rights Watch written evidence (DIA0004):

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/international-development-committee/forced-displacement-and-food-crises-in-central-and-east-africa/written/46031.pdf>

¹⁴ Q8

¹⁵ Q8

¹⁶ Q6

¹⁷ Q2

Alternatively people are turning to people traffickers and smugglers to try to leave Africa, in some cases to Europe across the Mediterranean.¹⁸

Mouldid made some powerful recommendations to us highlighting the absence of a refugee voice in the tripartite agreement between Kenya, Somalia and UNHCR in respect of refugee repatriation. He told us that there was an organised strong leadership structure within Dadaab, elected by its inhabitants who could represent their views¹⁹ and asked:

“let the UK Government advocate for these people and ask the Kenyan Government to live up to its promises of safeguarding these refugees and give them rights.”²⁰

He said:

“If they had a voice or if their voice was listened to, they would not find themselves in that situation.”²¹

We must prevent a return to the situation of 2011 when there were scenes such as those described to us by Sanjayan Srikanthan of IRC:

“with people, women and children, walking down the dusty road—mothers having buried their children en route—returning from Somalia, having been returned, whether voluntary or otherwise”²²

He also told us of a child he had met in Dadaab in 2011:

“a toddler who was crying because he was so weak he could not stand and didn’t understand why his legs weren’t working anymore.”²³

He warned that this horrendous situation could once again become a reality if the international community did “not take seriously what returns mean in the midst of a food security crisis, as well as the insecurity in Somalia.”²⁴ At the World Humanitarian Summit the UK signed up to 'Centrality of Protection' for civilians in conflict in its humanitarian programming.²⁵ DFID should consider its support or repatriation of refugees in light of this commitment.

We were told that lessons had been learnt from the 2011 famine but that they needed to be applied. OCHA have already warned that the 2011 famine killed so many because the international community were too slow to act²⁶, we must avoid a repeat of this. The

¹⁸ Q13

¹⁹ Q13

²⁰ Q21

²¹ Q19

²² Q30

²³ Q30

²⁴ Q30

²⁵ <http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/commitment/3095>

²⁶ [OCHA Regional Outlook for the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region](#)

food crisis and displacement in Central and East African needs to be raised up the public agenda.

We heard much praise of DFID and we congratulate your Department in its contribution to the Somalia appeal, providing £110 million – 30% of the appeal which is 46% funded.²⁷ We also recognise the work that DFID has done with its hunger safety net programme focusing on women and children which it is hoped will be renewed when it comes to an end this year.²⁸ Equally the work of the DFID Protracted Crisis Hub has been praised and we encourage its work.²⁹

However there were grave concerns that other donors were not pulling their weight and appeals remained woefully underfunded.³⁰ In addition we heard that although multi-year financing was agreed as a commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit it was yet to work in practice on the ground in East Africa. The IRC told us:

“the commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit were the right ones, in terms of multi-year funding. The reality in East Africa today is that it is very much not universally applied on the ground. For example, UNHCR funding for non-governmental organisations responding there to the huge numbers of South Sudanese and others is roughly three months long and must then be renewed. Far from being multi-year, it is barely multi-month, so this is something that needs to be looked at. In places like Dadaab, our funding is also one-year rather than multi-year.”

It was highlighted that “in Syria we are already seeing that multi-year commitment, so it is possible, we just need to see it more in East Africa.”³¹

We welcomed the UK’s commitment at the World Humanitarian Summit to “increasingly align its funding for large refugee populations to partners who can demonstrate that they are using funds to accelerate sustainable solutions where possible to deliver better outcomes for displaced populations and the communities that host them” but we heard that a “massive paradigm shift” was needed in policy thinking on refugees which was currently “predicated on repatriation from the day they go into exile”.³² This required much “closer working with host communities” and “being more creative in pushing Governments to look at local integration”. It was suggested that the UK Government had a role to play in the “political conversation around what it means to host large numbers of refugees and whether there are ways that local integration can operate.” There was a recommendation that answers could

²⁷ Q32

²⁸ Q33

²⁹ Q33

³⁰ Q33

³¹ Q37

³² Q39

come “from the grassroots up” by finding out “what refugees and host communities want, where they are looking for solutions and how they are managing to survive”.³³

We welcome the UK’s hosting of the Somalia conference next month. We hope that the UK Government uses these opportunities to galvanize other donors into funding the appeals, to ensure multi-year financing and to propose actions for longer term durable solutions to these protracted crises and the resulting displacement by hearing from and working with the refugees and their host communities.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Twigg MP
Chair of the Committee

³³ Q34