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**RWANDA**  
Unity in Diversity

# Refugee Bulletin

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**UNHCR RWANDA**



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



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## New Official Refugee Statistics Released

On Monday 27th of August, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, the Department of Immigration/Emigration, UNHCR, and WFP released the official updated statistics of all refugees living in Rwanda.

These results were published following the completion of the comprehensive registration and verification exercise, which was carried out in all refugee locations.

*... for further details see page 2*

## New official Refugee Statistics

...continued from page 1

The final statistics show that there are 57,976 refugees currently living in Rwanda, majority of whom are from the Democratic Republic of Congo .

The statistics is broken down by age, gender, and by location, and for the first time in Rwanda, the registration was carried out through biometrics and finger-printing. The figures also reflect the protection needs of the vulnerable population.

“ [...]We have spoken to each and every refugee, we have taken their photos, determined their places of origin, their family composition, the reasons for their fleeing their countries of origin ”

said MIDIMAR's Permanent Secretary



Permanent Secretary MIDIMAR, WFP Country Representative, UNHCR and Immigration Officials

“**This is a great achievement for all partners,**” said MIDIMAR's Permanent Secretary after he officially signed the new refugee statistics, on Tuesday the 28th at MIDIMAR offices. The revised statistics will enable all partners who work in the camps to have up-to-dated, accurate, and detailed information on all refugees in Rwanda.

Following the renewed influx of Congolese refugees to Rwanda that commenced in Rubavu on April 27<sup>th</sup> this year, the registration team continued the registration of new refugees at Nkamira Transit Centre. MIDIMAR and UNHCR have also developed and agreed on mechanisms for continuous registration of refugees .

“**This exercise enables UNHCR and all partners to tailor assistance to refugees in a targeted manner,**”

said Richard Ndaula, Head of Field Office Byumba



## Interview with... Dr. Mukesh Kapila

During his 10-day visit to Rwanda, Special Representative of the Aegis Trust for the prevention of crimes against humanity, **Dr. Mukesh Kapila**, visited Kigeme camp and held a separate meeting with the UNHCR Country Representative in Kigali. An inspiring interview took place afterwards.



**Refugee Bulletin: This is not your first time in Rwanda...**

**Dr. Mukesh Kapila :** This is my first return. I was last here in 1994 in the heat, dust, and blood of the genocide aftermath. It took me a bit of courage to return, because the memories of those days in late 1994 are so edged in my mind and heart that I could not feel that I could return earlier. But I'm glad I did, 18 years later. What is striking is that in those short 18 years, because 18 years may sound long but it is actually a very short time in the life of a nation that has been totally devastated by the most hideous crime on Earth and on such a massive and industrial scale.

**R.B.: What are your impressions years later?**

**MK:** Now I'm thinking back to a time when it was a country that was exporting refugees and importing peacekeepers. Now it's reversed: it is offering safety and hospitality to refugees. Rwanda is now contributing to international peacekeeping in other troubled spots of the world. And that is a remarkable transformation in less than a generation.

The progress is visible in terms of the physical development that one sees around the country—whether it is in the infrastructure, in the services provided or in terms of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. People are also growing. They are beginning to understand and assimilate the past as they think of the future. So if you are a Rwandan refugee somewhere outside the country, wondering about whether or not to come back, I have no hesitation in advising you to return. This is your country. It is a country that needs you. Come without fear and come to help celebrate and build for the progress.

**R.B.: What do you think about the life in the camps you have visited?**

**MK:** You don't need to see necessarily figures and statistics and big reports to know whether or not a camp is being well run. An excellent job is being done in terms of pulling together the different partners working in the different areas with the services they are bringing. The relationship with the government authorities is absolutely vital. And I could see that it is working in harmony. This has to do, I think, with establishing a long-term basis for the relationship so that there is trust as well.

**R.B.: What will you remember from your visit in the Kigeme camp?**

**MK:** The thing that struck me most was the participation of the refugees themselves into the organization of their lives in the camp, whether it was in the Food distribution that we saw for ourselves or in some of the camp cleaning work and the water sanitation work, the health care provision and the work being done with the children. The protection work that UNHCR is doing there, is in my opinion, very impressive.

**R.B.: Do you think that we can reach durable solutions and how ?**

**MK:** I would also like to emphasize that we need sustainable solutions. UNHCR should continue to collaborate with the international community to find durable solutions. Enough political action has to be taken so that people can go back to their homes in safety and dignity. But in the meantime, it is very important that the humanitarian needs of the growing number of refugees—both the old refugees and the newly arrivals—are properly addressed. At the same time as relationships with the host communities maintained.

**“If you are a Rwandan refugee somewhere outside the country, wondering about whether or not to come back, I have no hesitation in advising you to return. This is your country. It is a country that needs you. Come without fear and come to help celebrate and build for the progress.”**

## Exams at Nkamira Transit Center too !

12.33 pm. Fifty seven minutes to go. Pencils scratch paper, invigilators patrol the room, and no one looks up when photos are taken. This is no regular exam hall, however. There are no piles of books or last minute revision notes outside the room; the students are not in uniform. These 169 Congolese teenagers are sitting their Test national de fin d'études primaires (TENAFEP) or junior school leaver's exams in a Rwandan high school, a stone throw from the congested and noisy Nkamira Transit Centre.

The host school hasn't yet broken up for the long holidays, and curious local students mill around the open windows and doors of the exam classrooms. Nonetheless, the candidates' concentration belies their years. These students, between 12 and 15 years old, have had to grow up overnight, fleeing their towns and villages in frightening circumstances, amid violent clashes between government and rebel fighters. School books for revision were the last thing on their mind as they grabbed a bundle of essentials and began the long trek towards safety.

"I haven't been to school for one month and one week now," explains Emerance Mwiza, 13, "so my friends and I missed the crucial revision period."

Her favourite subject is maths – examined today alongside French, History, Geography, Science and General Knowledge. Despite the impossibility of revision and the chaotic atmosphere of the Transit Centre, currently hosting over double its capacity of 5000 people, Emerance concedes that the exams went ok – her new classmate Faustin Turatsinze, 15, from Kiroliro, is somewhat more upbeat. "It was as easy as drinking water," he proclaims to a giggling group of students, his bravado disguising the fact that he had to leave behind his parents and sister in Congo.

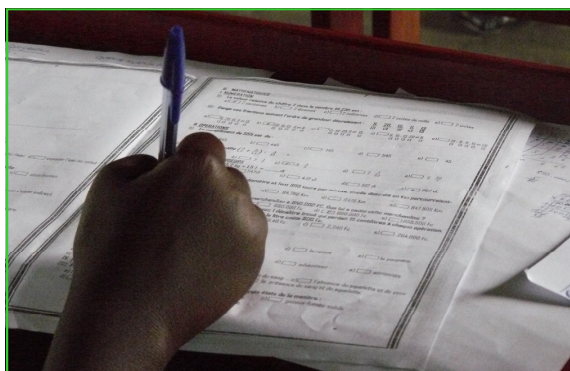
Faustin wants to be a mechanic when he grows up (or an engi-

neer), whilst Emerance dreams of becoming a journalist.

### Uncertain future

"I'm worried if I'll pass the exam or not," she wonders aloud, like any regular student, though there are greater concerns on her mind as well. Will she ever be able to return home to Congo? How will she continue on to secondary school? Already there are **13,000** refugees of secondary school age in Rwanda, whose continued education UNHCR and partners cannot fully cover – her prospects are therefore slim. Indeed her older siblings will likely not be able to sit their **final** high school exams, as these can only take place in designated exam centres – the only such place being the *École Congolaise* in distant Kigali.

The sheer perseverance and hope of these young refugees however, determined to pass their exams despite the turmoil around them, is inspiring. Twenty six had even left their place in the food distribution line that morning in order to attend the TENAFEP. Their emotional rendition of the Congolese national anthem, prior to entering the classrooms, while assembled under the school courtyard's fluttering Rwandan flag, paid testimony to the overriding defiance of these, and many other refugees: carrying on with life as normal, against all odds.



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## Remembering the first transfers to Kigeme

On the afternoon of Sunday 10th June, Kigeme camp, Nyamagabe district, was a hive of activity.

Local labourers rushed to complete the installation of pit latrines, and to erect the final tents ready for the first convoy of Congolese refugees to arrive from Nkamira Transit Centre. **“We are very happy to receive them here,”** stated Froduald Sekamondo, who had been working to set up the hilltop camp for the past week. **“We remember the Burundians. The Congolese are welcomed.”** Until 2009, the site was home to 2100 refugees fleeing violence in Burundi, and who have now repatriated. With over 15,000 refugees waiting in Nkamira Transit Centre, and space for an estimated 6000 individuals only in Kigeme, every metre counts. The pit latrines border a steep drop down to a road, and tents and communal cooking areas sit back to back.

### Many families uprooted

The sun is setting as the convoy carrying the first 141 refugees pulls up to the foot of the hill. The initial jostling for a first glimpse of their new home gives way to a calm dis-



© Paola Del Bosque / UNHCR

embarkment from the trucks, with Rwandan Red Cross volunteers helping carry the youngest children down, and planting their feet firmly on the new ground. Many families, such as Rahab Nyirabakobwa’s, have been uprooted since the outbreak of the fighting in eastern DR Congo two months ago. She and her four daughters fled to Rwanda, after escaping from her house when unknown soldiers came knocking in the night. **“They came to kill me,”** she said. **“As I was running away, I saw a woman with a baby on her back get killed. I managed to make it here with four of my children only.”** Her husband, along with another two of their children, are still in Congo, and she has not managed to make contact with them.

*“Yesterday, UNHCR told me that the Red Cross can help me find them. I am worried.”*

Rahab’s initial impression is that they have been well received in the new camp, but she reserves judgement, understandably wary of settling in an unfamiliar land. **“I have heard there is no war in Rwanda, and that I should have nothing to worry about here.”**

**“We feel welcome here”, Elie Gafishi, a new refugee in Kigeme camp.**

These sentiments are echoed by Elie Gafishi, from Bibwe, whose family was the very first to enter their

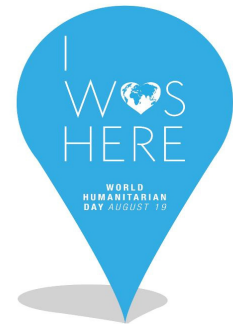
new tent in Kigeme. **“Here; there is no fighting. My wife is at ease: she won’t be raped here, and we hope our kids can go to school.”** The site overlooks the local primary school, and if the refugees are still here by the time classes resume in September, their children will be able to attend alongside their Rwandan counterparts. UNHCR is aiming to avoid the establishment of parallel services in Kigeme camp, instead negotiating with local authorities to provide primary education and healthcare to the refugees.

Relocation to Kigeme has picked up pace, with 500 refugees per day now making the 6 hour journey south to their new homes. The refugees themselves are assisting with the set up of tents and hangars for the next arrivals, whilst UNHCR staff work to prepare all aspects of camp life, from ensuring lighting goes up near the latrines, to avoid the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) or other abuse at night, and to planning the Operation’s inevitable new office in the area. The sun sets behind the camp’s hilltop, and one hundred and forty one refugees prepare to spend the night in yet another new location. This time however their stay will be longer, a thought of little comfort to those adjusting to life outside their homeland, with no certainty as to when they will be able to return.



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## Celebrating World Humanitarian Day through sport in Gihembe



WHD-IWASHERE.ORG

WHD was celebrated on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August in Gihembe Camp, Byumba. A football match between refugees, humanitarian partners, Donors and MIDIMAR was the main event. The friendly match was won by refugees who completely crushed the partners by scoring six goals to two.



In the margin of this match the Deputy Chief of Mission of US Embassy also seized the opportunity to tour the camp and held discussion with partners and UNHCR.



## Good news from Jolie and her family !

By Paul Kenya, Resettlement consultant, UNHCR Rwanda

**“It is with great joy and a sense of relief that I write to inform you of the departure of Jolie** (an emergency medical case) and her family to Oslo, Norway. As KLM flight 535 plunged into the skies of Kigali on the 05 of September at 2020 hrs, it carried with it a family whose prayers had been answered. A family on a journey which began on the wards of Butare Hospital, in Rwanda two months ago!

**Jolie departed to Norway on a medical emergency** case due to Kidney problems and prior to her flight, she had already undergone a surgery in Butare where one of her infected Kidneys was removed. Her departure is of great significance to the UNHCR operation and our partners who followed up on this case tirelessly, contributing from their own pockets in order to ensure she received dialysis treatment, thrice a week, a procedure which kept her alive until her departure. Prior to her departure, Jolie’s family lived in the Gihembe camp in Byumba where her medical condition caught the eye of UNHCR staff and partners working in the camp. Jolie had to initially be transferred to Kigali and later Butare Hospital,

three hours away from the camp. The Kigali and Byumba resettlement team worked in partnership, conducting interviews both at the camp and at the referral hospital before submitting the case to the UNHCR Regional Support Hub.

**My sincere thanks go to all of you colleagues who took time to think about her and contribute to her welfare in cash or kind.** I thank the doctors of our implementing partner (AHA) and those at Butare Hospital for their active follow ups. I thank my colleagues at UNHCR Rwanda/Uganda/RSH/HQ and IOM for ensuring that we fulfilled our roles in the timely preparation, submissions and procurement of travel documents to facilitate the out processing. Kudos to you all!!

As the world carrier touched down in Oslo, at 11:00hrs on 06 September, our hope is that it was the dawn of a new page in the lives of SAFARI Celestin’s family. We wish Jolie the best as it’s not over until the surgery is done. **This collaboration is a true demonstration of the accomplishments that we can achieve when we work as a team. “**

## STORIES FROM OUR PARTNERS

### Rwanda: mobile refugee team in the service of the most in need

By the Jesuit Refugee Service\* (JRS) .

Kibuye, 18 June 2012 – *"We're refugees and we live in difficult circumstances. But there are refugees who are more vulnerable than us in the camp, older people, orphans, those with medical conditions. We believe in God and it's our duty to help and be close to them"*, said Dieudonné Niyileiyi, who along with 18,000 Congolese refugees has lived for more than 15 years in Kiziba camp in Western Province of Rwanda, participates in the JRS pastoral services programme which seeks to welcome and accompany refugees in the most vulnerable circumstances, and promote solidarity among refugees in the camp.

The pastoral services team comprises 10 catechists: six men and four women, all refugees. In addition to prayer and catechisms services offered to the 19 religious communities based in the camp, they carry out home visits to refugees in vulnerable circumstances to listen to their problems and seek ways of resolving them.

Dieudonné immediately signed up to the mobile refugee team which is a group of catechists who meet every Friday morning to examine and discuss the most urgent needs arising from their grassroots pastoral activities with the community. Afterwards they divide into groups and head towards the camp to meet a family or an individual.



#### Promoting solidarity among refugees, taking care of neighbours.

*"The basis of our service is to raise awareness in the community about what we do in the field. Thanks to this, people understand that believing in God, above all, means taking care of your neighbour and they inform us of cases of older people, orphans or those with a medical condition who are in need of assistance, like in the cases of young children"*, said Dieudonné Niyileiyi.

The interventions undertaken by the mobile team include the accompaniment of the ill to hospital, and manual work, the restoration of houses or the construction of external kitchens, in priority for older people who would not manage this sort of work alone.

*"In addition, as part of our public awareness activities in the church, we collect goods for those most in need. Everyone in the community gives up a little bit and we distribute it. It is a way we have of helping each other so that a sense of solidarity and hospitality prevails in the refugee community, even though the conditions in which everybody lives are difficult"*, added Dieudonné Niyileiyi.