



Report on

# World Refugee Day 2016

commemoration in Rwanda  
by UNHCR, Partners and Refugees

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## Highlights

- UNHCR and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR) organized commemorations in all six camps, four reception centres and urban locations, namely in Kigali and Huye.
- The national events were organized in Kigali. This included a morning event for 1,000 urban refugees, and an evening event which was attended by the Prime Minister of Rwanda as the guest of honour, including high-level Rwandan authorities as well as members of diplomatic corps, UN agencies, national and international partners and representatives of the refugee communities. The evening event included a panel discussion on the theme “*Rethinking about durable solutions for refugees; the role of good governance and international solidarity*”.
- Refugees, partners and UNHCR shared messages on the results achieved, existing challenges and the way forward through durable solutions for all refugees.
- The oldest camp, Kiziba, marked 20 years of existence. During the occasion 25 refugee couples celebrated their civil marriage.



Panelists during the high-level event in Kigali discuss on rethinking durable solutions and good governance.



Burundian refugees demonstrate traditional drums performance in Kigali.



Refugees born in 1996, the year of establishment of Kiziba camp singing in Kiziba.

This year's World Refugee Day was commemorated throughout Rwanda under the theme *refugees are people like you and me*, reflecting the global UNHCR campaign aimed to build empathy and understanding of people forced to flee. This year is very important because we mark 20 years of existence for Rwanda's oldest refugee camp - Kiziba, and one year of existence for Rwanda's newest and largest camp - Mahama.

Rwanda has consistently expressed commitment to its international obligation to receive and protect refugees fleeing persecution in other countries, including the most recent emergency that erupted in April 2015. Today, Rwanda hosts over 162,000 refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo (51%), Burundi (48.7%) and small number of other nationalities. Rwanda continues to show empathy towards the refugees that have lived in the country for 20 years. Not only are refugees allowed to move around freely and find employment in Rwanda, but recently the first university campus in a refugee camp was launched in Kiziba camp to give refugee youth a chance at a brighter future. This programme will be expanded to other refugee camps, making Rwanda a unique country with such a level of care and attention for refugees.

World Refugee Day is our opportunity to commemorate the strength, courage, and resilience of refugees in Rwanda, and millions of other refugees around the world. The commemoration throughout the country focused on communicating to the public about who refugees are and why they need protection and assistance as well as to emphasize the country's commitment and efficient response to refugees needs.

In Rwanda, World Refugee Day was commemorated in all six camps, reception centres, including Kigali and Huye with urban refugees together with government officials and UNHCR colleagues. Refugees had the opportunity to celebrate their culture, tradition, display their various talents and skills as well as to communicate to the public their main messages and advocate for more efficient response.

UNHCR and the Government of Rwanda gave higher profile of this year's World Refugee Day organizing high level official event in Kigali to discuss on durable solutions for refugees.

## Commemoration throughout Rwanda

### High-level official event in Kigali:

The national event to mark this year's World Refugee Day was organized jointly by UNHCR and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR), which was attended by the Prime Minister of Rwanda as the guest of honour, including high-level Rwandan legislative, executive and judiciary authorities as well as members of diplomatic corps, UN agencies, national and international partners and representatives of the refugee communities.

Several short videos were projected, including UNHCR's 2016 World Refugee Day campaign video as well as locally produced videos by MIDIMAR reflecting on the refugee and returnee response in the country.

UNHCR held an exhibition to showcase items which are provided to refugees, including food and non-food items, as well as handmade crafts produced by both Burundian and Congolese refugees.

A panel discussion on the theme "Rethinking about durable solutions for refugees; the role of good governance and international solidarity" was held. Panelists represented the Government (Hon. Eda Mukabagwiza), scholars (Dr. Usta Kayitesi), independent media expert (Dr. Christophe Kayumba), civil society (Bishop Ruchyahana) and UNHCR (Ms. Louise Aubin). Participants had the opportunity to discuss on global and regional refugee challenges, measures to prevent root causes that force people to flee and conclude on actions related to durable solutions for refugees in Rwanda. The audience discussed on the excellent Rwanda's home grown solutions for assisting refugees, its efficient response to refugee challenges and also on the great work that remains to be done in future, especially on local integration of refugees in Rwanda.

Remarks on the occasion were given by the UNHCR Representative, UN Resident Coordinator, MIDIMAR Minister and the Prime Minister of Rwanda as the guest of honour.



*UNHCR Representative addresses the audience during the high-level meeting in Kigali.*



*High-level guests attending the national event organized in Kigali.*



*Refugee addresses the audience during the panel discussion in Kigali.*



*Showcase of food and non-food items provided to refugees during high-level event in Kigali.*

## Celebration with urban refugees in Kigali:

Urban refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo and from Burundi marked the event by performing traditional dances and competed with UNHCR and partners in a football match in Kigali.

The Minister of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, Ms. Seraphine Mukantabana, UNHCR representative, Mr. Saber Azam and refugee representatives through their speeches emphasized the efforts of the Government in protecting refugees and providing safe and secure life. Refugees highlighted their needs for improving education opportunities and provision of travel documents. The event was held in the morning in Rwanda Red Cross premises. The overall celebration was followed by traditional dances performed by women groups from Democratic Republic of Congo and drumming performance by refugees from Burundi.



*Refugees competing with UNHCR and partners in a football match in Kigali.*



*Refugee women performing traditional dances in Kigali.*

## Mahama refugee camp:

Commemorations in Mahama started in the morning with a parade by refugees, UNHCR staff and partners. Participants walked through the entire camp to the commemoration ground. The ceremony was opened by Burundian drums. Pre-school children through dance and a fashion show passed the message to other children “let’s learn how to write and read for our future development”. They emphasized on the importance of education to all refugee children.

A refugee girl through a poem informed the refugee community to encourage their children to attend school as the only way for a better future and called upon the youth to do constructive activities and refrain from unlawful activities.

The UNHCR Kirehe Head of Office called upon the partners and the Government to stand with refugees by ensuring that they have safe shelter, access to



*Parade by refugees and partners marked the beginning of the commemoration in Mahama camp.*



*Pre-school children performing dances in Mahama camp.*

education and be supported to work within and outside the camp. He urged refugees to respect the national laws of the country.

Refugee leaders expressed their need for additional assistance and shared messages of hope that the violence in their country of origin will soon end and every Burundian refugee will be able to return home. The celebration ended with a friendly football match.

### Kiziba refugee camp:

This year, Rwanda's oldest camp marked its 20th anniversary. The commemoration started with children performing traditional dances followed by a speech of the refugee representative who emphasized the achievements of the Government of Rwanda and UNHCR with its partners to enable safe and dignified life for 20 years.

Refugee youth displayed various sketches and encouraged refugees to attend education and refrain from unlawful activities and called upon parents to enable safe family environment for their children. Refugee youth displayed their skills in martial arts performing Kung Fu demonstration.

The 20th anniversary was finalized with performance of songs and poems by refugees born in 1996, the year of establishment of the camp. After the songs, total of 25 refugee couples celebrated with all audience their civil marriage.



*Refugee couples during civil marriage ceremony in Kiziba camp.*



*Refugee girls group performing traditional dances in Kiziba camp.*

### Kigeme and Mugombwa refugee camps:

The commemorations in Kigeme and Mugombwa refugee camps was organized in a similar manner. In Kigeme, the event started with performances of traditional dances by pre-school children and followed with speeches by UNHCR and MIDIMAR. Elder groups performed traditional dance and the men entertained the audience with drummers. Both groups emphasized the importance of maintaining refugee identity through culture and tradition.

In both camps, refugee representative shared messages on refugee life and called upon continuous support from UNHCR and the Government to enable protection and assistance to refugees.

Refugee youth and children displayed drawings under the theme “dreams for the future” presenting variety of stories of what they would like to become as adults including teachers, businessmen, doctors and many other successful carriers. The celebration ended with football match between refugees and staff of UNHCR and partners.

In Mugombwa camp the celebration started with a football match. Refugee children performed various dances while girl groups performed traditional dances. Refugees shared testimonies on their relationship with the host community and emphasized the efficient protection received in Rwanda. Talented youth acrobats entertained the audience presenting their various skills. The celebration ended with a football match.

### Nyabiheke and Gihembe refugee camps:

In Nyabiheke and Gihembe refugees camps the World Refugee Day was commemorated with traditional dances by refugee groups of women and girls, modern dances, drama and Kung Fu demonstration. The performances were accompanied by speeches by the refugee representative, UNHCR and district officials who emphasized the important results achieved in supporting refugees and provision of assistance. The celebration ended with a football match between refugees, UNHCR and partners.

Refugees temporarily accomodated in the reception centres throughout the country also commemorated the World Refugee Day by dancing, singing and sharing messages on raising awareness about importance of education and hope that will soon return home.



*Refugees performing drama in Gihembe camp.*



*Refugees observing the celebration of World Refugee Day in Gihembe camp.*



*Refugees performing dances in Nyanza reception centre.*



*Refugee women from Burundi dancing in Bugesera reception centre.*

## Public outreach and media coverage

To reach the general public and to raise awareness on World Refugee Day, UNHCR organized a campaign to promote the commemoration and to disseminate UNHCR's global messages through banners displayed in public places in Kigali and through media outreach.

The commemoration of World Refugee Day in all of the locations was covered by many local, national and regional media such as: Rwanda Broadcast Agency online, News of Rwanda, Panorama Newspaper, Imvaho Nshya (Daily Kinyarwanda print newspaper), Izuba Rirashe Newspaper, The Rwanda Focus Newspaper, KT Press (Press Agency), The NewTime Publications (English Daily print newspaper) and many others.

