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OPM and UNHCR joint statement: Uganda maintains its open-door policy for refugees

KAMPALA: The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) want to confirm that Uganda maintains its policy of granting asylum to people fleeing war and insecurity in neighboring countries.

The Government of Uganda has the mandate to register all asylum seekers and refugees in the country. In accordance with the 2006 Refugee Act and 2010 Refugee Regulations, the government is responsible for conducting Refugee Status Determination (RSD), with the support from UNHCR.

More than 1.33 million asylum seekers and refugees are currently in Uganda, with more than 73,000 new refugee arrivals so far this year - mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Burundi.

At present, all asylum seekers arriving from South Sudan and specific regions of eastern DRC who come through officially recognized entry points are granted *prima facie* refugee status.

Other nationalities seeking asylum are required to go through Individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD), conducted by the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC).

In early August, the government began establishing a more robust screening system at border points and refugee transit facilities to ensure that only those who are in need of international protection are granted asylum and benefit from Uganda's generous asylum policy.

This enhanced system entails the establishment of local security committees. Their task is to refer individuals whose asylum claim may not seem genuine to REC for further assessment. Individuals who are found ineligible for refugee status as a result of a REC's decision, will not be admitted into the asylum system.

Furthermore, in the context of Ebola and measles outbreaks in the DRC, it is imperative that all new arrivals undergo a health check as soon as they cross the border to avoid the potential spread of epidemics.

OPM and UNHCR will continue to work together to ensure that individuals fleeing war and persecution have access to the asylum process and that they are protected according to the law.

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