

Joint Statement of Refugees in Camps Across the World

“We are requesting that our voice reach to the highest levels”

We are refugees from 27 groups living in camps in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Chad, Greece, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

It is World Refugee Day, and we are requesting that our voice reach to the highest levels.

In the last few weeks, the first cases of COVID-19 have been detected in many of our camps. We know the camps do not have the health infrastructure to respond to this crisis. Where we live, real social distancing is not possible. And after two months of lockdown, we are not only afraid of the virus. We are afraid of hunger.

We have community leaders, whose role is to lead us through difficult times. Most humanitarian organisations have not asked our leaders how they think this crisis should be handled. We have refugee-led organisations, who are providing many of the services on the ground. These organisations are unfunded or under-funded. Some have had restrictions placed on them. They have not been treated as important partners in the COVID-19 response.

Why have our community leaders been excluded from decision making processes about the COVID-19 pandemic, and why hasn't more been done to support the refugee organisations who are working to protect us all? **We are demanding to not be seen as beneficiaries. We are demanding to be seen as partners.**

COVID-19 has crippled almost all our daily activities- our businesses, our freedom of movement, the education of our children. We need services more than ever. **The most important are health and livelihoods.** We do not have enough masks, soap, water, tests or doctors. And everyone, including those who will never get COVID-19, are suffering due to the lack of income.

The need for health and livelihood services could be combined: people in the camp could be trained to be first responders, health assistants, and the people who spread information about COVID-19 to the community. **This would allow livelihood programmes to restart.** We can find a way to do this together, if we are consulted about it.

As the rest of the world starts thinking about coming out the other side of the crisis, in many camps, it is only just beginning. As it was before we left our countries, **life is insecure.** Lockdown conditions present opportunities for tensions, conflict and violence. And without money coming in, we do not know what will happen or how we can continue.

From the international community, we request the following:

1. **Consult with our communities and leaders**, and allow us decision-making power on the way forward;
2. **Increase funding** to refugee-led organisations working on the frontline of the response;
3. Increase our **access to health and sanitation**;
4. Increase our **access to information**, including through community leaders and the internet;
5. **Do not suspend livelihood activities.** Speak to our leaders about the way people in the camp can be involved and employed in providing essential health and information services.

We want the power to make life-saving decisions on behalf of ourselves and our communities.

Bangladesh

Rohingya Women Empowerment and Advocacy Network
Rohingya Youths for Legal Action
Rohingya Peace Initiative
Rohingya Students Network
Rohingya Youth Association
Rohingya Women for Justice and Peace
Education for Rohingya Children
Bangladesh Rohingya Students Union

Cameroon

Central African Republic refugee leaders

Chad

Darfuri refugee leaders

Greece

Iranian, Iraqi, Afghan, Syrian, Chadian, and Congolese refugee leaders

Kenya

African Youth Initiative for Development (AYID)
Dadaab Youth Leaders

Lebanon

Community leader from Al Rahme Camp
Community leader from Camp 046

Malawi

Takenolab

Nigeria

West & Central Africa Refugee Leaders

South Africa

Whole World Women Association (WWWA)
Refugee Women outreach
Africa diaspora women
Omuja for Africa
Union of Refugee Girls
Africa Unit and Mama Africa

Sudan

Diversity Strategic Studies Center (DSSC)
Angola Refugee Coordination

Tanzania

Burundian refugee leaders

Uganda

OneYouth OneHeart Initiative (OYOH)
Hope for Children and Women Victims of Violence (HOCW)
Network of Congolese Civil Society Organizations (NCCSOs)
Young African for Integral Development (YARID)
Refugee-Led Organization Networks (RELON)

Africa

Global Refugee-Led Organizations Network Africa Chapter (GRNAC)

Contact: c.brown@victimadvocatesinternational.org