

UoN Celebrates World Refugee Day

The University of Nairobi, Yesterday, 17 June, 2015 led the country in celebrating the World Refugee Day.

The event held in collaboration with the UNHCR and the Kenya Red Cross drew participants from across the country and refugees living in Kenya. The theme for this year's event was "Get to know refugees-Their Role in the country."

In a key note address, the Kenya Red Cross Chairman, Mr. Abbas Gullet said that Kenya currently hosted over 586 000 refugees of different nationalities mainly at the Dadaab and Kakuma refugees camps in Northern Kenya. Majority of the refugees are from Somalia while the others are from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo, Rwanda and South Sudan among others.

While praising Kenya for being hospitable, Mr. Gullet urged Kenyans to treat refugees with dignity since they were ordinary human beings like the rest. "In refugee camps there are good people and bad people as well thus there is need for us to invest in refugee welfare." The Kenya Red Cross Chairman called upon the government to create an enabling environment for refugees. "There is need for better engagement between the government and refugees in terms of proper management, policy issues, provision of humanitarian needs and refugee empowerment."

Representing the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Production, Prof Lucy Irungu observed that refugees played a crucial role in the social and economic welfare of our country. "Refugees are actively participating in trade activities and provision of professional services like teaching and medical services." Prof Irungu also added that the University of Nairobi played a crucial role in advancing refugee affairs in terms of research output and provision of training and education to the refugees. "The UoN student body is enriched by a pool of refugee students who actively share their experiences, culture and expertise with the entire university community."

The Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS) director, Prof. Maria Nzomo observed that there was need for change in perception towards refugees. "Not every refugee is a terrorist and they just are just affected as much as we are." Said Prof. Nzomo.

On his part, the UNHCR country director, Mr. Rafik Mazou observed that, "We are living in unique times when the community is more fragmented than ever and we need to be more supportive." Mr. Mazou praised the Kenyan people for welcoming refugees and that the partnership between the government and the UNHCR would hopefully grow stronger.

Apart from the speeches, the audience was treated to tantalizing poems, songs and dance performances from the refugee community and the University of Nairobi choir members among others. The audiences also had an opportunity to sample and buy various exhibitions by refugees at the Great Court. Some of the items on display included, artifacts, photographs, clothes, footwear, jewelries, drinks and foods.