

**Keynote Address for the Refugee Law Project Anniversary Dinner**  
**Speaker: Prof. Tarsis Kabwegyere, Minister for Relief and Disaster Preparedness**

Distinguished guests, development partners, representatives and members of the donor community, members of the diplomatic corps, civil society, faith leaders and the media, distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Office of the Prime Minister, I warmly welcome you all to the 10 year anniversary celebration of the Refugee Law Project, a community outreach project of the Faculty of Law, Makerere University.

I would like to take this opportunity not only to congratulate the Refugee Law Project on its record of legal and psychosocial assistance to refugees, rigorous research and tireless advocacy on behalf of forced migrants in Uganda, and training of our police, immigration officer and other governmental duty bearers on the need to recognise and promote the rights of forced migrants. I would also take this opportunity to highlight some of this country's achievements in ensuring that the rights of those affected by conflicts both domestic and foreign are recognized and respected.

Initiatives such as the PRDP are indication of the government's commitment to lasting peace and protection of human rights throughout the country. In 2009, the government pledged to provide 30% of the overall PRDP budget, and has since negotiated a contribution of Shs319 billion by the UK government to support rehabilitation programmes in the northern region for five years. With increasing stability in the region, former IDPs are now able to return home. Since 2006, 171 IDP camps (71%) have been closed. Speaking on behalf of the Office of the Prime Minister, our commitment now is to ensuring that those who return are provided with adequate means to re-establish their lives, and that those few who are unable to go home find a durable solution in their current place of residence. We are committed to upholding the legal rights of forced migrants in rural and urban areas alike, and to ensuring that Uganda meets its international obligations to protect those fleeing war and persecution.

To this end, the Refugees Act 2006, passed by Parliament in 2008, emphasizes a rights-based approach to forced migration, explicitly recognizing refugees' right to freedom of movement, employment, and a durable solution, including eventual naturalization as a citizen of Uganda. The Act also broadens the basis on which protection may be granted to explicitly recognize gender-based persecution. Along similar lines, the government of Uganda was instrumental in spearheading the drafting of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons, hosting the AU Summit during which the Convention

was adopted in October 2009. Once domesticated, the Convention will further strengthen the rights of all internally displaced persons, including their right to freedom of movement. Having regard to the East African Cooperation treaty, we are committed to ensuring that adequate mechanisms are put into place to provide continued protection for refugees fleeing within the region.

The government of Uganda works hand in hand with Civil Society institutions such as the Refugee Law Project to assist those in need of protection. I salute the Project for its commitment to providing continued legal representation to individual refugees and asylum seekers as well as for its efforts to, through research and education initiatives, bring to the attention of decision makers existing gaps in protection. The Project has been instrumental in making the connection between issues of forced migration and transitional justice, and in advocating for a comprehensive Transitional Justice process in Uganda which would be capable of addressing the root causes of past conflicts and contributing to the lasting peace which is necessary if forced migrants are to reach truly durable solutions.

In this regard also, the Refugee Law Project is aligned with the goals of the Ugandan government which has repeatedly stressed its commitment to a domestic transitional justice process that promotes justice while meeting Uganda's international obligations. Most recently, this commitment found expression in the passing of the ICC Bill, which paves the way for fully operationalizing the War Crimes division of the High Court. It should be said that through its research and advocacy work the Refugee Law Project has been instrumental in keeping issues of transitional justice at the forefront of the public agenda.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many contributions of forced migrants to their communities and to this country. Many refugees are resourceful, creative individuals who become actively involved in the life of their host country through business initiatives, education, and cultural associations. It is a strength of this country that we are able to recognize such contributions and to welcome our brothers and sisters when they come to us seeking protection. On behalf of the Office of the Prime Minister I wish to thank all those involved in promoting and protecting the interests of peace and justice in Uganda, and to express the hope that the future will bring further opportunities for strengthening partnerships between the government of Uganda and civil society actors such as the Refugee Law Project.