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## AFRICA

# Uganda Requests More International Aid for Refugees

May 12, 2017 10:18 AM Jill Craig Halima Athumani

NAIROBI — Uganda, a country known for its "progressive" refugee policy, is hosting more than 1.2 million refugees and asylum seekers, with about 920,000 of them from South Sudan. And so the government is asking for international assistance.

Uganda's prime minister, Ruhakana Rugunda, said his country has been receiving an average of about 2,000 refugees per day for the last six months.

"The above numbers are placing a huge strain on our already stressed ability to cater for the full water, sanitation, health and educational needs of the refugees and their host communities," said Rugunda.

So next month, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the U.N.'s refugee agency are hosting the Solidarity Summit on Refugees, with the aim of securing \$2 billion per year for the next four years to help meet the funding gap.

As the refugees pour into Uganda, they bring a host of medical needs, further highlighting the need for additional resources.

Dr. Martina Fuchs is the CEO and founder of Real Medicine Foundation (RMF), the humanitarian aid and development organization tasked with providing much of the health care in Uganda's Bidibidi, now the largest refugee settlement in Africa. The settlement hosts more than 272,000 South Sudanese refugees.

“The largest disease burden is malaria, a very large percentage, especially in children and then also pregnant women with malaria,” said Fuchs. “So malaria is the highest. And then, gastrointestinal tract infections — diarrhea, watery diarrhea — then, respiratory tract infections, pneumonia. And then, in smaller amounts, HIV/AIDS.”

According to RMF, malaria rates in children and adults arriving at medical facilities range from 65 percent to 80 percent, fluctuating upon whether it is the dry or rainy season.

Fuchs said severe and moderate acute malnutrition is another problem. Refugees are also dealing with mental health issues as a result of the trauma they have experienced.

“There is research that trauma actually lowers your defense, your immune system,” said Fuchs. “So any kind of emotional, psychological trauma will interfere with your immune system, so you’re more vulnerable when you are traumatized than if you are not.”

Rosa Malango, U.N. resident coordinator and the U.N. Development Program’s resident representative for Uganda, said in addition to catering to the refugee population, Uganda’s host communities must not be overlooked.

“It is imperative to note that these 12 districts have some of the country’s highest levels of poverty and the lowest levels of human development indicators,” said Malango. “If we want to help ensure and maintain that asylum space in Uganda, the voices and contributions of these communities must be supported.”

By the end of 2017, authorities estimate that an additional 400,000 refugees and asylum seekers will have arrived in Uganda.

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