



THE COMMEMORATION OF WORLD DAY AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2021

July 30th is the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, commemorated internationally under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. This year's commemoration theme - [Victims' Voices Lead the Way](#) - sought to place victims of human trafficking at the centre of the campaign and to highlight the importance of listening to and learning from survivors of human trafficking. The recently released US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report (June 2021), while commending Uganda's incremental efforts to fight against human trafficking, still maintains Uganda on [Tier 2 Watch List](#) as the Government of Uganda reportedly has yet to meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking-in-persons cases.

More than 80 percent of the world's forcibly displaced are hosted in countries in the global South (30 percent live in [sub-Saharan Africa](#)). With Uganda host to the largest refugee contingent on the continent, her experiences of simultaneously managing intra-refugee community and refugee-host relations are no doubt both pertinent and worth evaluating in wider global efforts to contend with displacement-induced vulnerabilities, including human trafficking

To be sure, the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, of unprecedented proportions since the 1918 Spanish Flu, has worsened existing vulnerabilities born of forced displacement. With labour markets and regular migratory routes still greatly disrupted globally and across the country as the pandemic rumbles on, a great many households continue to experience loss of livelihood and income. The resulting effects exacerbate vulnerabilities of both urban and rural poor in general, and of refugees, internally displaced persons, and their hosts in particular—a situation replete with opportunity for human traffickers.

The Refugee Law Project of the School of Law at Makerere University, in 2019 joined the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland - Galway in a 3-year research project under the title '*Human Trafficking, Forced Migration and Gender Equality in Uganda*'. Key stakeholders engaged with in the course of this project to date have acknowledged that, notwithstanding the enactment of Uganda's Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act in 2009, TIP in situations of forced displacement remains little identified or documented, poorly understood, and correspondingly barely addressed in current investigations, prosecutions and convictions of TIP offenders in Uganda. How then, in the absence of strong data and the prevention and response mechanisms such an evidence base would enable, are victims' voices to lead the way?

In addition to building a better evidence base, what further changes are required to the current regime of TIP prevention and response as we move into the third decade of the Palermo Protocol? A great deal of scholarly and policy critique of the 2000 Palermo Protocol supplementing the [UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) has underscored the rigid focus on prosecutorial justice as *the* route with which to combat the crime of TIP, and critiqued the assumption that the bid to prevent and suppress TIP in the post-2000 world could ever be won simply by *punishing* human traffickers.

This year's theme of commemoration shifts the focus from offenders to victims and survivors. Yet, the continued focus on women and children (as already captured in the very title of the Palermo Protocol) inadvertently ushers in, on the one hand, the feminisation of the prevention and suppression of TIP, and the masculinisation of punishing it, on the other. As the critique rages on, one of the preliminary findings stemming from our ongoing research project is that a gender-inclusive prevention-through-response approach would offer far greater benefits in the fight against TIP. This, in our context, will first and foremost mean challenging the political economy structuring humanitarian aid, human rights and international criminal law industries in ways that some practitioners work on human trafficking issues, others on forced migration refugee matters—and rarely do the two meet, let alone synergise. As we commemorate this year's World Day against Trafficking in Persons, and its important aspiration to centre victims and survivors' voices in the equation, it is also important to bear in mind that the crime of TIP occurs thanks to tight-knit networks of daring and sophisticatedly purposeful agents; it will therefore have to take equally, if not even more sophisticated networks of responders to bring it down.

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