

GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS: SEEKING A PERMANENT SOLUTION

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Abstract

Recent upsurge in armed conflicts and the degradation of human rights has resulted in the astronomical rise in the number of refugees around the world. Sadly the international community have failed to hold up the enactments of the United Nations 1951 convention as relating to the rights of the refugees. The authors notes that the United States of America along with her allies have contributed immensely in escalating the crisis in the Middle East through their strategy of providing armed and professional support for terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in the cases of Libya, Iraq and Syria. These conflicts have further increased the number of refugees in the world. In places like Europe, barbed wire fences have become the welcome sign to these refugees. Europe and some western states have rather deployed strategies to stop the refugees from crossing the seas rather making arrangement on how to welcome and resettle them. In seeking a solution to this menace, the Pope has called for renewed solidarity and cooperation among the leaders of the world as a step in alleviating the plight of the refugees. The pontiff called for interdependence between countries and the assimilation of migrants irrespective of religious or political believes. The authors in this paper believe that the global refugee crisis in the world could be abated if the western powers respect the sovereignty of other countries and also stop the provision of arms and professional support to terrorist groups. This move will reduce the rate and severity of armed conflicts in the world. The authors also recommend the adoption of sincere collaborative effort among world leaders toward the assimilation of refugees around the world.

Introduction

Never before has it been seen, the kind of humanitarian crisis that is presently plaguing the world since the Second World War. The magnitude of these crises either from the war in Syrian, the war in Yemen, the activities of ISIS in Libya and the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria have resulted to the displacement of a large number of people from their home and countries of birth. This fact is accentuated by Metcalfe-Hough (2015) who reported that approximately 800,000 people have arrived at European Union (EU) borders through irregular channels, fleeing conflict and violence at home or in search of a better life abroad since 2014. Similarly, Hansen (2015) observed that since 2014, almost 14 million people were displaced from their homes and, in total. Hansen further noted that there are now at least 59.5 million displaced persons globally. This figure according to Hansen includes 19.5 million refugees (including 5.1 million Palestinians), 38.2 million internally displaced persons, and 1.8 million asylum seekers (United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Trends 2015). As at September, 2016, 65 million people have been displaced from their homes, mostly by war, half are children (Crisis Group, 2016). Despite these huge numbers, it is still not a clear representation of the total amount of persons displaced daily all over the world.

According to Makwana (2016), the 1951 Refugee Convention, which was implemented in response to Europe's last major refugee crisis during World War II, states that governments need only safeguard the human rights of asylum seekers when they are inside their territory. However, we have seen a clear violation of the agreement of the UN refugee convention. This is evident in the negative disposition of some European countries towards accepting refugees. Makwana (2016) opined that the response from most European governments has been to prevent rather than facilitate the arrival of refugees in order to minimise their legal responsibility towards them. Furthermore, Makwana noted that the EU has even gone so far as making a flawed and legally questionable deal with President Erdogan of Turkey to intercept migrant families crossing the Aegean Sea and return them to Turkey against their will.

There has also been a hypocritical attitude of some countries towards accepting these refugees. One would argue that the British vote in support of the "Brexit" is a direct indication of their intentions not to be involved in taking responsibilities towards ameliorating the plights of the refugees because in this case there are no resources to exploit. There have been claims and counter claiming from Europe that it is couldn't afford the resources to see to the plight of the displaced

refugees rather seeking to dump these refugees on Turkey and some other Africa countries. It portends that Europe as well as some countries in the west are only interested in involving themselves in global crisis when it suits them and looking for whom to pass on the burden when it appears not to suit them. However, these claims that refugees are financial burden to the host countries have been debunked by evidence from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Makwana (2016) who revealed that immigrant households contribute \$2,800 more to the economy in taxes alone than they receive in public provision. In the UK, non-European immigrants contributed £5 billion (\$7.15 billion) in taxes between 2000 and 2011. They are also less likely to receive state benefits than the rest of the population, more likely to start businesses, and less likely to commit serious crimes than natives. While OECD (2015) suggested that in the short run, processing and supporting such large numbers of asylum seekers will be costly. It also noted that in the long-run, it will depend on how well successful asylum seekers are integrated. This will require early and intensive efforts to provide language training, assess individual skills, provide school access, address health and social problems, and work with employers to help boost refugees' chances of employment. This is why it becomes paramount to adopt new strategies or build on existing and successful strategies and mechanism which would help fast track the integration of the refugees into their host countries

It appears that these views are largely elusive or purposely ignored by the leaders of some member states of the European Union. According to Hathaway (2016), "denying mobility rights to refugees is a strategy that appeals to states that would prefer to avoid their international duty to protect refugees. While not willing to accept the political cost of formally renouncing the treaty, states with the economic and practical wherewithal have for many years sought to ensure that refugees never arrive at their jurisdiction, at which point duties in here." On the same vein, Metcalfe-Hough (2015) averred that the failure of the international community to address conflicts, violence and human rights violations in countries of origin has been another key factor in the surge in irregular migration to Europe. There is no international political framework for ending the Syria conflict and no clear international strategy for addressing the related conflict in Iraq. Afghanistan is still far from any real stability despite years of international intervention, and the international community seems to be out of ideas on how to end the decades-long conflict in Somalia. Efforts to address the chronic poverty, inequality, weak governance and climate and environmental changes that

constitute 'push' factors in many developing countries like Nigeria have also been inadequate. On that note, it is important that there exist a high level of coordination co-ordination between different levels of governance in the international community. This according to the OECD (2015) is paramount to preventing local communities from being overwhelmed by the number of the refugees. It is against this backdrop that this paper sought to review the global refugee crisis through literatures with a view to proffering control measures for curbing the menace.

Conceptualizing Refugee

In order to make a clear meaning of who a refugee is, it is pertinent to know the events that brought about the clear definition of who a refugee is. In 1951 the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was negotiated after World War II. The Convention was originally limited both geographically and temporally: to Europe and to precipitating causes that occurred before January 1, 1951. The 1967 Protocol, however, removed both these limitations. Currently, 145 states have signed the 1951 Convention, 146 states have signed the 1967 Protocol, and 142 have signed both (UNHCR, 2013).

A refugee is an individual who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (UNCHR, 2011). The Convention definition states that protection is reserved only for those who have left their country of origin. As such, an individual deciding to cross an international border undergoes a transformation into an 'object of concern' under international refugee law, for that individual is missing or has been denied protection in their country of origin and is in need of alternative sources of protection (Helton, 2003). The issue of having crossed an international border is the inherent component of what establishes one as a refugee.

As articulated by UNHCR, whole groups may be considered as 'prima facie' refugees: 'Situations have arisen in which entire groups have been displaced under circumstances indicating that members of the group could be considered individually as refugees. In such situations the need to provide assistance is often extremely urgent and it may not be possible for purely practical reasons to carry out an individual determination of refugee status for each member of the group.

Recourse has therefore been had to so-called “group determination” of refugee status, whereby each member of the group is regarded prima facie (i.e. in the absence of evidence to the contrary) as a refugee’ (UNHCR, 2011).

The increasing waves of wars and terrorism globally have re-emphasized the need to redefine the criteria that qualifies one a refugee. There are many categories of the displaced beyond those who are, from a legal point of view, refugees. It is also worthy to note that there are millions of people who fled drought, famine, natural disasters, and terrorism. These categories of people have been classified by some writers and authors as refugees, but as they fall outside the main international legal instruments designed for refugees, they are not technically such. In the context of this paper, these groups or categories of person have been classified as refugees. According to Hansen (2015), internally displaced persons (IDPs) are individuals whom states drive from their homes or who flee persecution, violence, and/or political breakdown, but who do not cross a border. In 2014, 2.6 million Iraqis fled ISIS but remained within Iraq, thus becoming IDPs (UNHCR in Hansen, 2015) and the Number of IDPS in Nigeria, as at 31st December, 2015 was 2,152,000 Nigerians. Hansen posited that IDPs outnumber refugees two to one worldwide and certainly deserve attention in their own right. It is therefore important that efforts are made across board to adopt effective measures that will help to ease the plights of these categories of displaced person with a view to integrating them into the society. This will assist in ensuring better quality of life and economic liberation for the refugees.

Violent Conflicts Major Driver of the Global Refugee Crisis in the world

The global refugee crisis is in its crescendo since World War II. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, in Ojeifo (2016), this is the first time in the organisation’s history that the threshold of 60 million displaced persons has been crossed. The commissioner noted that more people are being displaced by war and persecution. Violent conflicts in the form of wars, persecution and revolt has been the major drivers of the global refugee crisis in the world.

In the case of armed conflict, Syria is a major driver of the global refugee crisis. It has been reported that over 12 million Syrians have been uprooted by the conflict since 2011 – including 4.9 million registered refugees, 6.6 million internally displaced people and nearly 250,000 asylum-seekers. The cease fire agreement

between Russian and the United States of America which has automatically collapsed has further worsened the volatile situation in Syria leaving the people of Syria at the mercy of divine intervention. Years of continuous conflict have made Somalia the third largest source country of refugees. Some 1.12 million Somalis have sought sanctuary abroad, and just as many have been displaced inside the country. Ongoing attacks by the Islamist insurgency Al-Shabaab make them reluctant to return to their homes. South Sudan has suddenly become a leading source of refugees. According to the Crisis Group (2016) South Sudan refugees stood at a gaping 778,700 at the end of 2015, and it is believed that, the number could pass the 1 million mark in 2016 if the current trends continue. The majority of refugees have fled to Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. More than 1.6 million people are internally displaced. The UN is sheltering around 200,000 people at six sites across the country designated for the Protection of Civilians, although these sites have repeatedly come under direct attack. International agencies report that the country is facing a humanitarian crisis, including an unprecedented level of food insecurity. Though the main warring parties signed a peace deal in 2015, implementing the agreement has proved highly contentious. As of September 2016, South Sudan stood at a risky impasse (Crisis Group, 2016).

More than four decades of war and unresolved conflict in Afghanistan have displaced millions, with the vast majority living in Pakistan and Iran in often precarious circumstances. In addition to the 2.7 million Afghan refugees registered by UNHCR, another 3 million undocumented Afghans are estimated to be living in the region. Ongoing violence is a major push factor. Today, the Taliban is expanding, controlling more territory than before; militants, particularly the Haqqani network, are responsible for successive attacks in major cities, including Kabul; and the Islamic State has established a presence in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar.

The case is not different in political repression in Myanmar where there are over 451,800 people living as refugees or in refugee-like situations, mostly in Thailand and Bangladesh. Several hundreds of thousands more are internally displaced, with many living in appalling conditions in camps where they have very little access to protection or government services. Even larger numbers have left Myanmar to join the migrant labour pool, particularly in Thailand; many are economic migrants, but a significant number fled conflict and repression (Crisis Group, 2016).

These cases are also peculiar to other countries like Nigeria where there were over 2, 152, 000 displaced persons which has resulted from the activities of the armed group Boko Haram. This has led to many Nigerians in the Northern States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa seeking refuge internally in the country and in other countries like Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Similarly in the Central African Republic the number of refugees has risen to about 470,000 out of the country, mostly to Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Another 421,000 people have been internally displaced. Colombia is another country which has contributed to the increased rate of refugee crisis in the world, this has been helped by decades of war between the government and the FARC rebels, and this war has resulted in the displacement of 340,200 people. However, in August 2016 there has been a peace agreement between the government and the rebel forces. Hopefully this will put an end to decades of conflict in the country. This will ultimately lead to the reintegration of the people to their communities/countries.

The Hypocrisy of the West and the Syria War

The position of the western powers especially the United States of America to support known terror groups in bids to unseat sitting presidents of sovereign states has continued to escalate the spate of conflicts in the Middle East, therefore heightening the level of the refugee crisis. According to Carley (2016), United States leaves its footprints everywhere, along with those of the British and French, you will find ruins and victims. Iraq and Libya are in chaos and infested with Al-Qaeda terrorists. War drags on in Afghanistan after fifteen years. In the Ukraine the US-backed fascist coup d'état has only partially succeeded and a crisis there could erupt at any time. This clearly shows that the United States of America have not been true and sincere in its efforts to end the conflicts in the Middle East. The strategy of providing ammunitions and war equipments to terrorist groups has never helped to resolve conflicts in these countries where the United States has fuelled revolt through armed struggle. Supporting, Van Auken (2016) revealed that a vital factor in the rebel advance in October, 2015 was as a result of cooperation between mainstream rebel groups, some of which have received covert arms support from the United States, and the jihadist organization formerly known as the Nusra Front, which was affiliated with Al Qaeda. The hypocrisy of the United States is further highlighted in *Fisk (2016) who opined that "while Qatar and Saudi Arabia arm and fund the rebels of Syria to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's Alawite/Shia-Baathist dictatorship, Washington*

mutters not a word of criticism against them. President Barack Obama and his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, say they want a democracy in Syria. But Qatar is an autocracy and Saudi Arabia is among the most pernicious of caliphate-kingly-dictatorships in the Arab world. Rulers of both states inherit power from their families – just as Bashar has done – and Saudi Arabia is an ally of the Salafist-Wahabi rebels in Syria, just as it was the most fervent supporter of the medieval Taliban during Afghanistan's dark ages.” It has also been alleged that the Al Qaeda forces had received not only massive amounts of weapons, but also professional military training. According to Becker (2015), the United States and its NATO and regional allies have funneled weapons and money to right-wing armed sectarian groups since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. This quickly morphed into the dominance among the armed opposition in Syria of the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and other groups.

Sadly, the western backed media have not also helped in providing sincere reportage on the events happening in Syria. The western media have continually given negative reportage on the activities of the government in power in Syria. It is sad to see a situation where rebel activities in Syria are celebrated by news agencies in the United States. The Western media have gone so far as to celebrate the exploits of “rebel” suicide bombers for providing a strategic “advantage” for the Western-backed militias. Among the most dishonest and duplicitous accounts of the recent fighting are those that have appeared in the pages of the *New York Times*, whose news coverage and editorial line are carefully tailored to serve the predatory aims of US imperialism (Van Auken, 2016).

Solidarity and Co-operation: A solution to the Refugee Crisis

In the midst of this crisis, there have been increased calls by world leaders to look into the state of the refugees. This call was prompted because of the inhuman conditions in which the refugees are kept. In the words of Ojeifo (2016), “some world leaders, from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Pope Francis have been in the forefront of highlighting the plights of refugees. On April 16, 2016 Pope Francis paid a symbolic visit to refugee camps on the Greek island of Lesbos. On his return to the Vatican, he came back with three Syrian Muslim families, 12 members in all, including six children. The pontiff performed this gesture to highlight the tragedy faced by hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking to reach Europe. He rescued Muslims, not Catholics, because his message is that we are all God’s children.” Pope Francis in his 2015 message

regarding the plight of the refugees stated that “*the Church stands at the side of all who work to defend each person’s right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one’s country of origin. This process should include, from the outset, the need to assist the countries which migrants and refugees leave. This will demonstrate that solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the earth’s goods are essential for more decisive efforts, especially in areas where migration movements begin, to eliminate those imbalances which lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environment.*” It is obvious that the Catholic Church calls for sincere and conscious efforts from every member of the society irrespective of political and religious affiliation. It is important that the leaders of the west should as a matter of urgency; consider the plight of the starving women and children who are caught in the mist of the Syrian crisis. This call appeals to the good conscience of the world leaders to increase co-operation and solidarity in terms of opening up their borders and assimilating the refugees into their communities. Like the Pope Francis elucidated, “*God’s fatherly care extends to everyone, like the care of a shepherd for his flock, but it is particularly concerned for the needs of the sheep who are wounded, weary or ill.*” The pope enjoined members of the church to see the migrants as brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planet’s resources which are meant to be equitably shared by all. This perspective of the Roman Pontiff aligns with the Igbo-African philosophy of Igwebuiké, which in the contention of Kanu (2016 & 2017) understands the other as *Ibem* (a part of me), and thus a complementary part of the whole. Therefore, treating the other afflicted with hunger, poverty, injustice, etc., with love and kindness becomes a responsibility one owes to the self.

In light of the above, the solution to the global refugee crisis requires solidarity and sincere cooperation by world leaders. Europe in co-operation with their allies should make effort in putting policies in place which favours the assimilation of refugees into their host communities. It therefore becomes important to view refugees not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare. When these refugees are given asylum, they should be made to be accepted by the members of the community where they seek refuge. Concern for fostering good relationships with others and the ability to overcome prejudice and fear are essential ingredients for alleviating the plights of the refugees.

Measures for controlling the Global Refugee Crisis

It is clear that the European Union's attitude towards the refugee has been shabby and uncoordinated. This is evident in the decisions by some of its members to raise barb wired fences to halt the advances of the refugees. However, these barricades have not restrained the refugees from trooping in their thousands to Europe and America. It is important that measures which are aimed at tackling the problem from the source are adopted. Some of these measures include:

1. There should be a spirit of true solidarity and co-operation amongst world leaders. World leaders (especially USA and the European Union) should develop a spirit of human consciousness in order to realize the pain and suffering encountered by migrants in their search for a safe heaven.
2. Stop arming militias and rebels: It is saddening to see humans dying in their thousands daily as a result of combat actions by armed groups and militias. There is no doubt that some of these conflicts are funded by some governments and few highly placed individuals. This situation is very bad and needs correcting. More so, the "drama" between Russia and America over Syria is a case in point. It appears that some of our leaders have lost all moral consciousness; they do not care about the children and women who are major victims of these crisis. Efforts should be made by parties involved towards instituting participatory dialogue where all parties involved will be ready to make some sacrifices or the other for peace to rein. According to Amnesty International (2015), "ending conflicts and widespread human rights abuses are objectives that states should pursue, but they are difficult to achieve. However, individual states and the international community as a whole must recognize that they can lessen the devastating consequences of the refugee crisis on people."
3. Protection of the rights of the refugee is very paramount. The United Nations must ensure that the protection of all refugees, but particularly women, children and other vulnerable groups, irrespective of their migration status, is the basis for their decision-making and action. Providing appropriate protection for migrants does not mean that governments should allow blanket access (European Commission, 2015). Rather, it means identifying those who are in need of international protection and affording them such protection accordingly, and, for those

whose asylum claims are rejected, ensuring their humane and appropriate treatment, including safe return to their country of origin.

4. **Instituting participatory democracy in troubled Countries:** When participatory democracy is enshrined, citizens will have an input in the issues of government. Participatory democracy will improve the quality of decision making in all areas of governance in the troubled countries. It will give the citizens a sense of belonging. This will curb any form of revolt or uprising.
5. **Curb Human Trafficking:** Efforts should be made by countries to take affirmative action against human traffickers. Effective actions should be taken to investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs. There should be a corresponding action from the countries towards the victims of human trafficking. These countries should offer protection and assistance to victims of trafficking and ensure they have access to refugee status determination procedures and/or resettlement opportunities.
6. **Sharing responsibilities for the welfare of the refugees:** The international community must share the responsibility for assisting and hosting refugees, including by resettling refugees who need it and adequately funding humanitarian programmes in other countries (Amnesty International, 2015). Similarly, Makwana (2016) postulated that unless countries collectively pursue a radically different approach to managing forced displacement, international discord and social tensions will continue to mount and millions of additional refugees will be condemned to oversized and inhumane camps on the outer edges of civilisation. Hence, the need for collaboration between countries in managing the refugee situation as it is witnessed in the world at the moment.

Conclusion

The global refugee crisis is no doubt a momentous problem that is facing the world at the moment. However, it appears that the international community are prioritizing the not so relevant issues while giving less attention to the relevant issue. It is no secret that the global refugee crisis is a product of armed conflicts and humanitarian abuse in some countries. It is also very worrisome to note the role the United State and her allies play in escalating the violence in some countries in the Middle East which has further increased the number of refugees in the world. The international community appear to have chosen to neglect the victims of this crisis. Thus, ignoring the provisions of the United Nations Refugee

Convention which was facilitated to protect people from being returned to countries where they risked persecution and human rights abuses. It is imperative that efforts are made by the international community to arrest this ugly development. By arresting this development efforts should be made through collaborative and individual actions by the states to end the conflicts in the troubled states and by improving the humanitarian in the states.

Recommendations

In order to curb the escalation in the number of refugees, the following recommendations were made:

1. Respecting the sovereignty of other countries. The policy of the United States of America in conjunction with their allies to depose sitting head of states in some countries in the Middle East and Africa have escalated the rate of armed conflicts in these regions and portends the escalation of more crisis in future if this unfortunate situation is not checked.
2. Developing a sincere collaborative action amongst countries towards ending armed conflicts all over the world. If the armed conflicts and human rights oppression stops, it will drastically reduce the number of refugees all over the world. Countries should come together and seek lasting solution towards ending these conflicts and oppressions. All parties should come to the table with complete honesty and sincerity.
3. Curbing human trafficking. The issue of human trafficking is another menace that needs to be combated radically. Countries should set in motion taskforces that will investigate and prosecute trafficking offenders. Efforts should be made to provide support for victims of trafficking.
4. Establishing a global refugee fund that will see to the plights of refugees all over the world. The fund should be committed to helping alleviate the plights of refugees and to support countries like Turkey who house a huge number of refugees.
5. Encouraging the enshrinement of participatory democracy in the conflict torn countries this will in a long way give the people a sense of belonging.
6. Countries should show commitment towards the resettlement of displaced persons. Bringing refugees directly from refugee camps and urban areas to Western countries is another durable solution to alleviating the plights of refugees.

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