

WHAT IT MEANS TO SEEK SAFETY?

BEING A GUEST LECTURE DELIVERED

By

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MIGRANTS AND IDPS.**

PROTOCOL

Introduction

This year's World Refugee Day, focuses on the right of everyone (whoever they are, wherever they come from and whenever they are forced to flee) to seek for **SAFETY**, meaning for their survival and human dignity and for protection from violent conflicts, persecution, wars, human rights violations and natural disasters. Because refugees are a vulnerable group of persons (including children, women, the aged and disabled men and women) their safety equally means, protecting them against all forms of discrimination, abuse, exploitation, exclusion and disadvantaged in the course of their dangerous journeys across the land and sea to reach a new homeland for both safety and a better life or future.

Your Excellency and Distinguished Audience, permit me to underscore 3 key elements that make seeking safety by Asylum-Seekers and Refugees meaningful.

FIRST, is the protection of the basic rights of Asylum-Seekers/Refugees:- Guaranteed by both International Human Rights and Refugee Laws (especially the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention) that the right to seek and enjoy asylum (as a form of protection or security available to anyone at risk of serious harm or danger in their home country, who must leave behind everything they've ever known in search of safety in another country, sometimes as close as few kilometers across the border, or as long as crossing international boundaries and high seas), is critical for protecting Refugees.

The right is fundamental to an Asylum-Seeker, who having left his/her country, but has not yet received a decision on his or her asylum claim/application for refugee status, is afforded protection and ensured that solutions to the problems of refugees can be pursued.

Until the refugee status claim is determined, the asylum-seeker is entitled to not be returned, according to the principle of non-refoulement, and entitled to benefit from respect for human dignity and humane treatment, enjoy the right to freedom from discrimination on grounds of race, sex, political opinion, religion or nationality.

When Refugees (who fled their home country to another country) seek asylum, the assumption is that they would be given protection/security, because it is too dangerous to their lives and freedom for them to be forced to return home. Accordingly, persons seeking safety are entitled to safe access to national borders and to be accepted when they arrive at ports of entry.

SECOND, is the fact that protecting people forced to flee is a collective global responsibility and a Constitutional Obligation in Nigeria under section 14(2)(b) on the primary purpose of government to promote the security and welfare of ALL PEOPLE.

NB:- The reason being that THE PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE ARE NOT THE PROBLEM: – Rather, the causes for the fleeing and the weak, poor, inadequate or non-existent national responses to the causes are.

Like all of us, refugees are complex and unique human beings, made up of innovative skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, knowledge, experience, team spirit, resilience in character, talented and passionate characteristics, needing the promotion of self-sufficiency and local integration in asylum countries.

As a first step towards local integration, self-sufficiency in catering for their basic needs such as food, education, housing and healthcare, also contributes to the implementation of durable solution later on.

Finally, voluntary repatriation of refugees should take place wholly on a voluntary basis and in conditions of safety and dignity as it remains the durable solution sought by many refugees, though its implementation is complex.

THIRD/LASTLY, Your Excellency, the Executive Governor of Lagos State, I think the choice of Lagos as a Refugee-Friendly State/City is Apt for 3 reasons:- In my view, Lagos is a land of opportunities for all without discrimination for decades; Lagos as a fact not only has a warm climate, but also a government and residents who are warm to visitors and foreigners pursuing legitimate business, and by extension, conducive enough to accommodate asylum-seekers and refugees in accordance with Nigeria's treaty obligations and Nigerian Laws.

In conclusion, no one is safe until we are all safe. And no one should be left behind, whoever they are, wherever they come from and whenever they are forced to flee from danger of persecution, human rights violations, wars, violent conflicts or natural disasters.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING