

# GOVT **SUSPENDS** OPEN-DOOR REFUGEE POLICY

By Ivan Tsebeni

Government has temporarily suspended its long-standing *Prima Facie* Refugee Recognition policy, citing concerns that the framework risked being misused amid a drastic decline in daily refugee arrivals. Officials say the sharp drop in inflows has made the policy less necessary, prompting a shift toward more controlled and individualised processing of asylum seekers.

The Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Lillian Aber, confirmed the development, noting that the policy, once critical in managing mass influxes, has become less relevant under current conditions.

"We are responding to realities on the ground," Aber said in an interview. "The numbers have significantly reduced and our systems can now manage arrivals on a case-by-case basis without invoking the *Prima Facie* framework."

Aber was presiding over the 25th annual steering Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework meeting held at the Sheraton Hotel

## ABOUT

The *Prima Facie* policy, introduced during periods of mass arrivals, allowed asylum seekers from specific countries to be automatically granted refugee status without undergoing individual status determination processes. Uganda has for decades operated this policy, one of the most progressive globally, and currently hosts over 1.9 million refugees primarily from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.

Kampala last week.

## NEXT MOVES

Aber said the government remains committed to refugee protection even as it recalibrates its approach.

"This is not about closing our borders," she emphasised. "It is about using the most appropriate tools for the current situation while maintaining our humanitarian obligations."

As Uganda navigates this transition, the focus is expected to shift toward strengthening long-term integration and resilience for refugees already within its borders, an effort that will require sustained collaboration among government, donors and local communities.

"Since November last year, we have seen daily inflows drop

from about 1,000 individuals to fewer than 20. Such numbers can be effectively managed through regular refugee status determination procedures," said Patrick Okello, the Commissioner for Refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister. He emphasised that the suspension is temporary and subject to review, should the circumstances change.

## UGANDA COMMENDED

Humanitarian partners have largely welcomed the move, describing it as a sign of improved stability in the region while urging continued vigilance and support for existing refugee populations.

Jason Hepps, representing the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said Uganda's decision reflects



L-R: Okello, Hepps, Aber, Albjerg and Sadek during the 25th annual steering Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework meeting held at Sheraton Hotel Kampala, recently

both progress and the need for evolving strategies.

"This is a positive development that indicates reduced pressure at the borders. We commend the Government of Uganda for its adaptive and responsible approach to refugee management," Hepps said.

However, he cautioned against complacency, stressing the importance of sustainable support systems.

Jan Sadek, the Ambassador of European Union to Uganda, also praised Uganda's continued openness to refugees, describing the country as a model for refugee protection globally.

"Uganda has demonstrated remarkable leadership in refugee management. As partners, we remain committed to supporting both the Government and host communities to ensure dignified living conditions for refugees," said Signe Winding Albjerg, the Danish Ambassador to Uganda.

## ARE WE SAFE?

Uganda's refugee response model has historically depended on donor funding, which has in recent years faced significant shortfalls. Officials and partners alike warn that declining global humanitarian financing could strain social services in refugee-

hosting districts.

In northern Uganda's Yumbe district, one of the largest refugee-hosting areas, local leaders say reduced aid is posing challenges to both refugees and host populations.

"Life has become increasingly difficult; food rations have been cut, access to basic services is shrinking and opportunities for livelihoods are limited. Both refugees and host communities are struggling," said Moses Lomuron, the district's refugee welfare committee chairperson. He warned that without sustained investment, the progress made over the years could be reversed.