

24 January 2019

Davos, Switzerland



Mohammed Hassan Mohamud is the first UN Refugee Volunteer serving with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in East and Southern Africa. (UNV, 2019)

First UN Refugee Volunteer in East and Southern Africa urges world at Davos to empower refugees as agents of change

Mohammed Hassan Mohamud, co-chair at this week's World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, is the first UN Refugee Volunteer serving with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in East and Southern Africa. He supports UNHCR in ensuring a peaceful, sustainable and secure co-existence within the refugee community and towards the host community in the Kakuma refugee camp in north-west Kenya

A Somali refugee who has spent the last 20 years living among 185,000 refugees like himself in the Kakuma camp, Mohammed oversees the subsection Kakuma 1, representing more than 20,000 people with nine different nationalities.

He makes sure that services are running smoothly, with “teachers in the classrooms and water in the taps”. He regularly meets with UNHCR and the Kenyan government to make sure enough support is being provided and works with the Lutheran World Relief Peacebuilding Unit to prevent conflict within the camp.

“The conflicts are two-fold,” he says, explaining that until a few years ago, people from outside the camps would attack refugees at night. “Now we have something called peaceful coexistence. We have meetings with elders and village leaders from the host community and we interact with them to resolve the issues.”

There is also conflict between refugees, mostly over the scarcity of resources, with people sometimes fighting at the food distribution centre and at the water tap. “We need to resolve these things before they escalate because it’s like a matchbox. Everyone here is stressed. So you sit down and just talk to them,” he says.



Mohammed Hassan Mohamud, speaking as co-chair at this week’s World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos. (World Economic Forum, 2019)

Mohammed has no passport, no official date of birth and had never been anywhere outside

the semi-arid climate of Sub-Saharan Africa until now. At the opening of the Annual Meeting in Davos, he said that he and his people feel like they are on the side-lines of the debate over the future of the world economy.

“We have more than [60 million displaced people](#) around the world,” he pointed out, speaking from Kakuma before Davos. “Let us redefine the purpose of refugee camps. It’s high time that refugees are seen as partners in development efforts, rather than a burden to society. We have people with talents who, given a chance, can perform. Let’s move away from this model of handouts and see how we can really empower people to provide for themselves.”

“When people hear the word ‘help’ or ‘support the refugees’, they automatically think of giving out free things. But I think people need to be told that we have labour, we have brains, we have talents. So let’s make use of refugee ideas.”

For years, refugees have been mainly dependent on humanitarian assistance with minimal livelihood and self-reliance opportunities. UNV’s UN Refugee Volunteer assignments, like the one Mohammed has been involved in for the last three months, offer refugees the opportunity to take an active role within the camp, participating in community outreach and social protection activities that not only provide a safety-net for the camp’s inhabitants but also contribute to their wellbeing and development.

Learn more about Mohammed’s story:

[Interview at Davos by Deutsche Welle World Economic Forum video](#)

Mohammed Hassan Mohamud's UN Volunteer assignment was part of a project funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), in collaboration with UNHCR, for a peaceful coexistence amongst refugees and host-community members through volunteerism.

• [UNHCR](#) • [refugees](#) • [UN Refugee Volunteer](#) • [World Economic Forum](#)

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#), [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#)