

My name is Foni Joyce. I am 24 and a refugee living in Kenya.

Leaving your home, and abandoning what you worked hard to build, is not something that anyone does voluntarily. But this was the only choice my parents had. In July 1991, when civil war ravaged my home country, my parents feared for our lives. They knew that we were not safe in South Sudan, as my father was a journalist who was wrongly accused of being an informant and collaborating with rebels.

They trekked through the night towards Uganda and travelled for 17 days until they got to Nimule, a border town. My father still felt the weight of fear that people were pursuing him. By Gods grace, he met a Truck Driver of Kenyan background who had just delivered goods and was going back to Lokichoggio, another border town between Kenya and South Sudan. We had not planned to go to Kenya, but when my father saw this opportunity, he took it.

My story is not unique. War leads to migration. Refugee movements will not reduce as long as the persistent cycles of conflict we see around the world continue. My home country is a tragic example. Fighting in South Sudan that broke out this July between rival factions has forced more than 37,000 people to flee the country to Uganda. It is heartbreaking to see such violence continue for my county, 25 years after my own family made their journey.

The best way to address these challenges is to give refugees the tools that we need to become the engineers of peace, stability, and development to rebuild their nation. In this effort, the potential of refugee youth remains largely untapped. This must change. Refugee youth want the same things young people everywhere want: to be consulted, to be listened to, to contribute, to engage, and to be part of solutions.

This year, I participated in the Global Refugee Youth Consultations, organized by UNHCR and the Women's Refugee Commission with partners. More than 1200 young people in 22 countries contributed to the consultations. Here are actions governments, the United Nations and NGOs can take to ensure that refugee youth are able to grow, develop their skills, and engage in efforts to address the root causes of displacement.

First, work to empower young refugees by facilitating opportunities for youth to voice their ideas, engage in decision-making processes, and develop their leadership potential.

Second, recognise and build upon young refugees' existing knowledge, skills, capacities, and qualifications; support access to learning opportunities, including formal and non-formal education, skills building, and jobs training; and facilitate employment, and livelihoods opportunities.

Third, make sure that young refugees have access to personal documentation, freedom of movement, and protective services that are attuned to their needs and ensure their safety.

Fourth, support young refugees to access services and activities that support their mental, emotional, and physical health and happiness, and their ability to engage and develop socially, physically, spiritually, and emotionally with their peers, family, and community.

Lastly, channel and reinforce young refugees' abilities to build connections and relationships across social, cultural, linguistic, political, and other differences, and support them to contribute meaningfully to peace-building processes.

The solution to addressing large movements of refugees and migrants is right in front of us. We, young people, have so much to offer. Given support, skills-building, and empowerment, we can help mend our homelands to become more prosperous and secure places for the next generation to live their lives.