

UNA-USA Westchester Chapter 2017 Annual General Meeting

“The United Nations At Risk: A Time To Take A Stand To Protect And Support The UN”

Keynote Address by Ambassador Bob F. Jalango,
former Ambassador of Kenya to the United Nations

I wish to thank the President and the Board of the UNA-USA, Westchester Chapter for inviting me to be a Guest speaker during today’s Annual General Meeting of the Chapter and to speak on extremely important challenges facing the UN currently and to our international partners.

One of the Purposes of the United Nations is contained Article 1 of the Charter and states, “the UN is to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. Despite the complexity of current problems, the UN is focused on improving the well-being of hundreds of millions of people around the world especially those in developing countries most of who live in less than \$2.00 a day.

In order to achieve this vast mandate, the UN and all its Agencies and Funds spend a staggering \$30 billion each year or about \$4 for each of the world's inhabitants and yet for nearly two decades, the UN has faced financial difficulties and it has been forced to cut back on important programs in several areas, even as new mandates have arisen. This is further complicated by many member states that have not paid their full dues on time and some major donors like the US, that pays around \$3.024 billion a year towards the UN’s regular and peacekeeping budgets, have cut their donations to the UN's voluntary funds.

In March 2017, UN’s Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination recently told UN’s Security Council that the world faces the largest humanitarian crisis since the UN was founded in 1945 with more than 20 million people in four developing countries (Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and northeast Nigeria) facing starvation and famine that "without collective and coordinated global efforts, people will simply starve to death" and "many more will suffer and die from disease.

As if the above alarm is not serious enough, the Trump Administration made the devastating decision to end all U.S. support to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that works in more than 150 countries, mostly in developing countries, to end child marriage and female genital mutilation and provide critical services like pre-natal care and safe childbirth, voluntary family planning, and midwife training. But the UNFPA says this is an "erroneous claim" and "all of its work promotes the rights of individuals and couples to make their own decisions, free of coercion or discrimination". UNFPA’s programs have saved the lives of tens of thousands of women all over the world and it totally fails to understand this action by the Trump Administration.

Just to mention a few there are other UN organizations that receive significant funding through voluntary contributions from countries like the US and whose operations are mainly concentrated in developing countries around the world. Examples are; the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) that assists and protects over 65 million people fleeing war, famine and persecution; the World Food Programme (WFP) providing food assistance to millions of people in 80 countries; and etc.

Other UN Agencies and Funds provide medical supplies in developing countries for preventable diseases like malaria vaccines, smallpox, TB and etc and rely on major contributors that support the UN and its Agencies. This means that many citizens in the most difficult of situations in developing countries will be greatly affected by these budget cuts.

In a statement made on March 16, 2017 by the US Ambassador to the U.N, H.E Nikki Haley, she reported that budget cuts were based on “a promise President Trump made to the American people and a goal to restore trust and value at the UN.” She added, “In many areas, the UN spends more money than it should, (this is definitely not correct) and in many ways it places a much larger financial burden on the United States than on other countries. It is now time for other countries to step up and pay their fair share”. In response to these concerns, UN’s Secretary General, H.E Mr. António Guterres responded philosophically: “No. I’m only concerned with all the terrible problems we currently face in the world”.

A time has come for us to recognize and support the important work of the United Nations and to ensure it continues to “achieve international co-operation in solving international problems” as stated in Article 1 of the UN Charter I referred to earlier.

One example of UN’s Agencies that will be greatly affected by the budget cuts is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also known as the UN Refugee Agency. According to a current UNHCR report, “the organization is now witnessing the highest levels of displacement of people on record since UNHCR records began”.

The Refugee Agency reports that an unprecedented 65.3 million people (nearly 20% of US population) around the world have been forced from their homes and among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement.

During the Annual Meeting of the Southern NY State Division of our Association held on January 9th, 2017, I spoke at length about the role of UN’s Refugee Agency. You may all be aware of Dadaab Refugee Camp, the world’s biggest refugee camp located in eastern Kenya near the border with Somalia. The Camp has been home to over half a million people in a camp originally set up as an emergency shelter in 1991 and has passed a grim milestone of 25 years in existence.

The refugees receive help with food and shelter, healthcare and education, but the Kenya Government now says 25 years is long enough, and the camp must close due to insecurity caused by Islamist terrorist group al-Shabab.

Kenya also hosts a second Refugee Camp at Kakuma located in northwestern Turkana County of Kenya and was established in 1991 initially to host the 12,000 unaccompanied minors who had fled the war in Sudan. But the current refugee population here of around 190,000 are mostly come from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the DRC, Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda.

UNHCR has noted that when young people are forced to flee from their homes, they are also abandoning their education and it further notes a refugee child that is not educated is a vulnerable child, adrift and at risk of exploitation, is at risk of being harmed, trafficked or radicalized by extreme groups.

These concerns gave rise to a partnership between UNA-USA and UNHCR to establish an education campaign in Kenya called **Adopt-A-Future Initiative** that was further aimed at “preventing a lost generation by giving refugee children the education they need to build a better future”. Our Association (the UNA-USA) a program of the United Nations Foundation is committed to continue leading the Adopt-A-Future Initiative and is focusing on Kenya in 2017. At Dadaab Camp, there are more than 35 primary schools using the education system of Kenya. According to a recent UNICEF report, the problem here is acute shortage of classrooms and teachers. An example is one school that has 4,036 students and just 25 classrooms and only one teacher for every 168 students!! (do the math). As a result, hundreds of students are being forced to work outside in the heat (100 degrees F) and dust because the classrooms are already overflowing and only one third of those children are receiving any kind of education.

At Kakuma Refugee camp, the education covers pre-primary (25%), primary (65%) and secondary education (2%). Currently there are: 11 Early Childhood Development Centers, 19 primary schools and 4 secondary schools where the Kenyan curriculum and Arabic courses are taught. Although there are about 50,000 school-age children at Kakuma, fewer than one in four reach secondary (high school). For girls the odds are even worse: only one in 10 makes it to high school.

Congestion in schools at Kakuma is compounded by dilapidated and under resourced facilities and a lack of trained teachers. UNHCR asserts education is the only source of hope for these refugee children and a way to transform their lives especially at a time when it (UNHCR) plans to register 183,500 children in refugee schools in Kenya during 2107.

Educating a generation of refugee children through our participation can be done at various **Support levels** as follows and all donations are tax deductible:

- **\$750 to train a teacher** in a child friendly and classroom support for children affected by trauma.
- **\$1250 to provide kids** clubs for children in and out of school to learn life skills, do homework and play with friends
- **Individuals** – For \$250 an individual supporter or community partner could provide 10 students with school uniforms (an enrolment requirement) and supplies to a child enrolling in school for the first time.

- **Chapters/Division** – For \$30,000 a UNA-USA Chapter or community partner or Division can build a new classroom at a refugee serving school which would serve the needs of at least 40 children for 10 years.

- **Matching Contributions** – Funds raised will be matched by an international donor (the Educate a Child Fund of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar), and thereby doubling the impact of the initiative.

To conclude, UNHCR therefore needs all the help they can get and I'm fully confident that we can also utilize UNA Foundation's advocacy and public outreach campaigns to support the UN as it faces unprecedented huge budget cuts from major donor countries. The appeals can be made to global corporations, foundations, governments, individuals including members of Congress. My appeal to UNA-USA members individually and or a Chapter is that you can invite organizations, groups, and faith communities you are affiliated with to sign on as partners with fund raising goal pledges. You can also host fundraising dinners, bake sales, silent auctions, car washes or something else and donate the money raised to ensure the success of **Adopt-A-Future Initiative** in Kenya during 2017 and beyond.

My final appeal is for support to the United Nations organization in any capacity including, but not limited to appeals to members of the Congress. Thank you.