

PRESS RELEASE, WINGS OF HOPE FOR AFRICA FOUNDATION

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Headline: Calgary charity continues to seek aid for East Africa's massive refugee crisis



Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda. (© Plan International)

Fort McMurray's wildfire that led to the evacuation of more than 90,000 people is a reality that is known all too well to hundreds of thousands of people fleeing Burundi, says Aline Nzeyimana, president of a Calgary charity, Wings of Hope for Africa Foundation. She sympathizes with Fort McMurray residents forced to evacuate quickly following the wildfires that swept through the Northern Alberta city on May 3. Wings of Hope for Africa will be supporting the people of Fort McMurray. "We are waiting for the Canadian Red Cross to give us instructions on how we can help and what is needed most," said Nzeyimana.

While Canadians are pouring millions of dollars in disaster aid relief to help Fort McMurray, Nzeyimana hopes that people will also consider helping Burundians who have fled to southern Rwanda. Fort McMurray families had to evacuate quickly with few or no belongings and not sure what they'd find when they returned. Fortunately, Alberta's wildfire victims have witnessed the generosity of Canadians, as well as matching government dollars and any insurance coverage to help them.

In Burundi, the situation is much more severe. Families have been forced to flee due to violence and persecution, arriving in refugee camps where they'll live for an undetermined time in plastic tents. The situation for Burundians is further aggravated because they don't have the support of various governments and agencies, Nzeyimana said. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) hasn't raised enough money to help them either because the world has largely ignored the crisis.

Wings of Hope for Africa began its fundraising campaign on March 15, 2016, after the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began seeking international financial assistance to help Burundian refugees. The refugee crisis in East Africa has largely been ignored by the rest of the world and was reported by The Guardian in its April 10 edition, <http://gu.com/p/4t86z/sbl>. To date, Wings of Hope for Africa Foundation has raised just \$600 out of its \$15,000 fundraising goal. Its campaign ends on July 1, 2016.

According to the UNHCR, more than 250,000 people have fled Burundi since violence erupted in 2015 due to President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a successful, third term. More than 46,000 Burundian refugees are now living in Mahama Camp, the largest camp in Rwanda which opened in April 2015. Refugees are continuing to arrive since the situation in Burundi remains tense and unpredictable. With dollars raised, Wings of Hope for Africa will buy a variety of much needed essentials — soap, sanitary napkins, food and blankets— to disperse within the Mahama Camp.

Nzeyimana urges Albertans and the rest of Canadians to donate to Wings of Hope for Africa's campaign, even if people think the cause is so far away. "It is all about helping one another and the women there are in distress and need help," she said. "It doesn't matter the distance. We need to help each other."

A volunteer team from Calgary — Nzeyimana, Jordan Gahiza and Amber Hartnett — will arrive in Rwanda on July 6 where they will work with the UNHCR to deliver the supplies. It's expected these items will help 100 families for about a month.

Nzeyimana grew up in Burundi, coming to Canada in 2005 as a refugee. She has lived in Calgary since 2007 and added that she appreciates how Canadians welcome newcomers. After becoming a mother, she decided to form Wings of Hope for Africa. "It was born out of compassion for children and families in need," said Nzeyimana.

Wings of Hope for Africa, a registered Canadian charity based in Calgary, is dedicated to emergency relief, education, sponsoring children in need, and developing self-sufficiency programs like community gardens in order to end poverty in Burundi. Since its creation in September 2011, Wings of Hope has successfully completed more than 30 projects, ranging from promoting education to income generation, healthcare, and disaster relief.

Donations to the project are welcome through the charity's website at: www.wingsofhopeforafrica.ca/donate

For more information, email info@wingsofhopeforafrica.ca, or call 403-815-0037.

For an interview regarding the project, contact Founder Aline Nzeyimana, at 403-815-0037.

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FURTHER BACKGROUND:

The UNHCR requested US\$175.1 million for the humanitarian response in the region, but has only received US\$47.8 million, or 27 per cent. It's making an urgent appeal to humanitarian agencies worldwide, to help with the gap to mobilize additional resources for support, either by money donations or in-kind support.

"This means we are struggling to provide even the basics such as shelter, household items and latrines," says the UNHCR in its April 22 report. "The provision of services such as specialized counselling, care for the disabled and elderly, protection of the environment and even primary health care may also fall by the wayside."

Burundi is one of the poorest countries of the world and is known as the world's "world's hungriest nation" (article <http://qz.com/508774/burundis-political-crisis-is-making-one-of-the-poorest-countries-on-earth-even-worse-off>). The World Happiness Report 2016 Update, released on March 16, ranked Burundi as the world's least happy nation.

For more information on the refugee crisis, the UN Refugee Agency reports, Burundi Situation: Emergency Response January-December 2016 and Regional Refugee Response Plan, have been attached.

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