

## Japan pledges \$3.1m for Congolese refugees in Kigeme refugee camp



Japanese envoy Kazuga Ogawa and his wife play with children after the inauguration of the centre. Collins Mwai.

The Japanese government has pledged \$3.1 million dollars for the facilitation of activities in health, education and gender-based violence prevention in the newly established Congolese refugee camp in the Southern Province.

The Japanese Ambassador to Rwanda, Kazuya Ogawa, announced the support during a visit to Kigeme refugee camp, Nyamagabe District yesterday.

Ogawa's visit to Kigeme aimed at inaugurating initiatives under One UN (Unicef, UNHCR and WFP) that the Japanese government has been funding.

The initiatives he inaugurated include the early childhood development centre that will provide services, including daily meals and home-based support to approximately 2,500 children and build capacities for over 30 care givers.

The envoy also officially opened a school, dispensary, disability centre and handed over educational materials provided by his government.

“Japan is committed to supporting refugees from DRC. This support will be utilised for activities in health and gender-based violence prevention in the newly established camp,” the envoy said.

The government of Japan has been one of the main development partners supporting refugees in Kigeme camp and other camps in the country. It has been working closely with Rwanda's Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (Midmar).

Early in 2013, the Japanese government gave \$5.9 million to One UN for various activities such as hygiene, education and environmental protection in the camp that hosts more than 18,000 people, most of them women, children and disabled persons.

Unicef has been using the funds to implement activities such as supporting Early Childhood Development through provision of materials and teacher training. UNHCR, on the other hand, has been providing medicine and health services, strengthening skills for

community health workers and providing materials for environmental protection.

The envoy noted that his country was concerned about the plight of refugees in Rwanda.

The Midmar minister, Seraphine Mukantabana, on behalf of her government expressed gratitude to the Japanese government, saying that Japan's involvement has made it easy for Rwanda to manage the refugee situation.

Rwanda is home to more than 73,000 refugees, the majority of them Congolese.

"They have been facing challenges of limited education and child protection. It would have been such a heavy burden to the Government of Rwanda to address these challenges but your support as partners has eased the situation," the minister said.

She commended One UN for their role in dealing with the refugee issues and asked them to join efforts with Rwanda and the international community to advocate for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"The sustainable solution that we should push for is to have all Congolese refugees repatriated to their home country," Mukantabana said.

Eugene Buturu, the camp president and executive committee representative, hailed the support and called upon the partners to advocate for a peaceful Congo.

"We appreciate the support although the sustainable solution would be to advocate for peace in Congo to facilitate our return home," Buturu said.

Rwanda UNHCR country representative Neimah Warsame commended the refugees for being organised on matters of their own welfare. She said the camp was a model to other refugee camps around the world because of its community-based approach where issues are addressed from the grassroots.