

## What Refugees Can Teach Us about War and Peace

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The small town of Kakuma in northwestern Kenya hosts about 200,000 refugees, who are fleeing conflicts in South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, DRC, and elsewhere in Africa. They are but a fraction of today's 100 million displaced people, a number that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has called a "seemingly unimaginable," all-time high.

Some years ago, I visited Kakuma to participate in a workshop conducted by Jesuit Refugee Service there. Let me tell you something of what the displaced people at Kakuma taught me about war and peace today.

*First, the sufferings of displaced people are among the gravest evils caused by war.* The people at Kakuma have virtually nothing. War is the main source of their problems. Permanent peace is essential to overcoming problems such loss of homes, separation of families, violence to women, stunted education, and, most radically, the loss of hope. The conditions faced by people at Kakuma show us the evil of war.

*Second, Judgments about the morality of war must pay much closer attention to harms done to displaced people than has been common in the past.* The just war norms of proportionality and noncombatant immunity are often judged in terms of how many people are killed or wounded. This is surely

important. But it can overlook the harms to those who survive as refugees. If we pay attention, their suffering will teach us to see forced migration as a fundamental challenge to the use of military force.

*Third, the hopes of refugees for peace are stronger than contemporary sources of conflict. By sharing their hope, faith communities can become effective agents of peace today.* Most of the people at Kakuma are religious believers, Christians and Muslims who long for peace. They know that the god of any religion that causes war is not a god worthy of worship. They know that the true God wants peace and wants believers to make peace. Thus, they have much to teach us both about peace and about God. Refugees' longing for peace can show faith communities, governments, rebel groups, and the international community that peace is achievable if we are creative in our efforts.

We should borrow some of the hope and courage of the people at Kakuma to strengthen our work for a world where war creates fewer refugees.

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