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## 50<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council

# ORAL STATEMENT TO THE 50TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ON UPR- ADOPTIONS, UGANDA

30 June 2022

**Speaker: Ester Wolf**

Mr. President,

The Lutheran World Federation would like to commend the Government of Uganda for its constructive engagement with the UPR mechanism. Uganda's refugee policy is one of the world's most progressive, allowing refugees to live in settlements and providing access to national services, including primary and secondary education.

However, COVID-19 lockdown accelerated teenage pregnancies - including the refugee girls and this led to high school drops as well as early/ forced marriage. Although the government has adopted guidelines for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings, most pregnant refugee girls, and adolescent mothers have not gone back to school due to stigma from teachers, learners, and community members, and no support for child mothers. During the COVID-19 shock, many women in refugee communities experienced challenges that increased their vulnerability to violence including a significant 30% reduction in the food ratio in February 2020, interruption of crucial health services where women can report and receive responses to acts or threats of violence and cash rations reduction that caused a rise in SGBV at the household level in the settlements. Besides, there are also challenges in accessing justice in SGBV cases within the refugee, host, and post-conflict communities. This has been hampered by bribery, intimidation, frustrations, slow processes, long-distance to formal courts, ineffective trials by court session, lack of SGBV shelters, and limited awareness about gender-sensitive handling of cases in the justice system.

We urge the Government of Uganda

- to take proactive measures that reduce teenage pregnancy while enabling pregnant teenagers to stay in school, prepare and sit for their examinations effectively instead of actions that punish the young girls.

- to strengthen the SGBV referral systems in refugee and host communities and build the capacity of relevant actors to respond to the cases
- to increase resource allocation to the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) to expeditiously handle GBV cases through the mobile court sessions within the refugee, host, and post- conflict communities.

The Parliament of Uganda should fast-track the enactment of the National Legal Aid Bill 2022 to streamline legal aid programs and provide a State-funded system that will enhance access to justice for the vulnerable.

Thank you, Mr. President