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Meet our new Uganda country director and Geneva representative

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Fr Frido Pfluger SJ, center left, and Fr Kevin White SJ, center right, at a celebration with JRS Uganda staff. (Jesuit Refugee Service)

Kampala – We say Goodbye to Fr. Kevin White SJ and heartily welcome Fr. Frido Pflueger SJ as the new Country Director for JRS Uganda. On Friday, 19th of October, JRS Uganda celebrated with all staff members, friends, the Jesuit Community, and invited guests from partner organisations.

Christina Zetlmeisl, Programs Officer for JRS Uganda, spoke with both men about their new assignment:

“Every beginning is a new chance”. Which chance do you see in your new assignment?

KW: I look forward to contributing to various conversations in Geneva where there are lot of policy makers. I have experienced the resilience and the needs of refugees in my eight years working in the field, first in South Sudan, now in Uganda, and even in detention centers, working with JRS USA. I’m looking forward to the chance to advocate and bring some of that experience to these conversations.

FP: I’ve been working in Germany for 6 years now, focusing on legal and advocacy work mainly for migrants. After six years, I think it is good to change. I’m just looking forward to work in the field and to meet the people, to meet the staff, and to work together with them to help improve the situation of the people who are living here and don’t want to move to Europe or USA, but are waiting until they can go back to their home country.

Although he was not planning for it, Jesuits must be available to go wherever they are needed, and Kevin is continuing his mission in a new career. What are you looking forward to in your new life in Geneva, Kevin?

KW: One of the things that gives me joy about this new position in Geneva is I'll have an opportunity to travel to the field at least twice a year, getting a better sense of JRS around the world. I know JRS East Africa and JRS USA quite well. Now there is an opportunity to learn more about the work of JRS in other regions. So I look forward to that very much.

What will you miss from Uganda?

KW: I will miss the day to day life in Africa, I really consider Africa my second home. But it is really the people that I will miss, some really good colleagues who do great work, and the beneficiaries especially. I've just found it very enriching. I'll be honest, sometimes I get frustrated and angry, that's all human, but at the heart of it, it's really a joy to be in the field, as we say in JRS.

Frido, what are your expectations for your new assignment as Country Director in Uganda?

FP: That's a difficult question. I have some expectations because I have been in Eastern Africa, and I have been in Adjumani for three years. But that was long time ago. I think I have some experience, but there are many newly developed things, and there are also new people around. That is already

enough challenge to look forward to in this work. I trust that there is a good team here in Kampala and also in Adjumani, which gives me a lot of confidence that I can do good work even with all my weaknesses.

How will your past experiences in various leading positions in JRS help you for this new job?

FP: Most importantly, I will not be shocked by anything because I have experienced so many different situations which were unknown and new to me. I know that, together with the staff and the people, we can always find a solution to everything. That is our vocation. Our main aim is always to dissolve our projects in the hope that there are no refugees one day. But that might be a bit far away.

I think I have the ability to work together with people in a good way...to encourage them to bring together all their capabilities...to make one big, colourful picture of

the work of JRS to help those in need

FR FRIDO PFLUEGER SJ, JRS UGANDA COUNTRY DIRECTOR

Where is the importance for you in your work with JRS?

KW: I can't imagine a mission that I would rather have as a Jesuit than with JRS. I love the work, I love the opportunity of working with my brothers and sisters, who are, for whatever reason, underserved and struggling. It really is what I wanted to do since I entered as a Jesuit. We, as Jesuits in JRS, work with wonderful collaborators, and we have the ability to put into use the wonderful generosity of so many donors and benefactors who are sharing in our mission in different capacities

FP: The most important, but also most difficult work for me working with JRS is to accompany. Because that means to live side by side with the people we serve, and not to work for, but to work with them, and to share their lives. And I feel that is a huge challenge for my own life. How can I live at the side of those in need? The life of those in need which I have seen just now in Adjumani is very difficult, very poor, and very challenging. And what I have always seen, all these years, is that people never give up. That they still continue with their hope even after 5, 10, or 15 years. I think after 15 years I would have given up. So

the real teachers for my life are the people who do not give up, and these are mainly refugees. They have this strong resilience because they believe in God, and that is the faith I also have to struggle with. They are my teachers and I'm very happy that I can learn this lesson here.

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have had, he will be richly blessed.
So I wish him happiness and joy

FR KEVIN WHITE SJ, JRS GENEVA REPRESENTATIVE

Kevin, what do you wish for Frido in his new assignment as Country Director in Uganda?

KW: If Frido has half the happiness that I have had, he will be richly blessed. So I wish him happiness and joy. I know he is more of a veteran in this work than I am, so I don't have any worries about him and the great job that he'll do here with JRS Uganda. My wish is that he continues to bring his passion for JRS and

he just takes this work to another higher level. The needs are enormous. I think we have done good work in the past three and half years. But there is much more to do.

Frido, what do you wish for Kevin in his new appointment?

FP: Kevin, you have a lot of experience with people in the field. You met many people. You have seen the direct needs, and now you go to another level. Another level which is more political, which is more legal and advocacy work. And I hope you will find fulfilment in that work, as you normally do when you deal with people directly. It's a bit more complicated, I think, to find this fulfilment on that level, but I think it is possible because you also will see the fruits of your work. So I wish you all the best and I wish you a lot of Holy Spirit for that new work.

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