

BUILDING BRIDGES

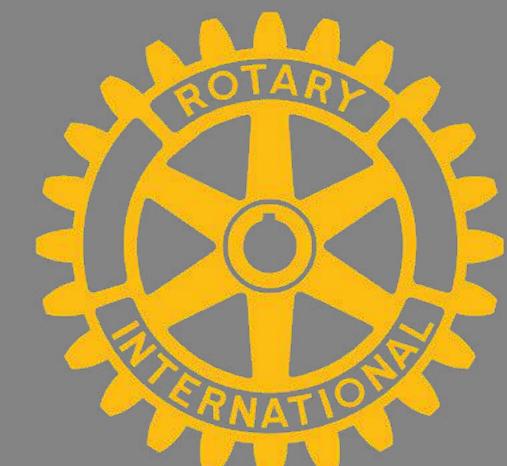
TOWARDS AN INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN EAST AFRICA AND POLAND

During World War II, up to 20,000 Polish refugees (predominantly women and children) upon their evacuation from the Soviet Union found refuge in the countries of East Africa: Uganda, Kenya and Tanganika (today's Tanzania). The local communities welcomed them with kindness and warmth. Today the story is little known in Poland, but the memory of the Polish refugees in Africa is still alive. Our project aims to restore memory of an important page in Polish and Ugandan history and contribute to a social climate of openness and intercultural empathy.

BUILDING BRIDGES - part 1

The project has been conducted by the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association in cooperation with the Rotary Peace Center at the Makerere University, Kampala (Uganda)

Rotary



Makerere
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Center



"NEVER AGAIN"
ASSOCIATION
neveragainassociation.org

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QUOTE: POPE JOHN PAUL II, SPEECH IN KAMPALA, UGANDA, 8 FEBRUARY 1993

BUILDING BRIDGES – PART 13

PARTNERS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EXHIBITION

The mobile exhibition (also available online) presents the history of the Polish refugees in East Africa, with a special focus on Uganda. It includes unique photos taken at the former settlement of the Polish refugees in the village of Nyabyeya near Masindi, the capital of the historic kingdom of Bunyoro, where until today there is a Polish cemetery and a church built by the refugees. The exhibition also showcases additional information about historical links between Uganda and Poland going back to the 19th century. The exhibition is available in English and Polish as well as Runyoro (the language of the Banyoro ethnic group living in the Masindi region).

Europe and Africa, Poland and Uganda,
separated by distance,
united by historical links



WORKSHOPS

The accompanying workshops are based on a toolkit prepared in the frames of the project. During the workshops, the history and reminiscences of the Polish refugees in Africa are presented alongside the contemporary experiences of Africans in Poland, based on data collected by the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association. During interactive sessions, the participants are encouraged to reflect on the issues of refugees, migration, intercultural communication as well as counteracting racism and xenophobia. The participants receive educational materials inspiring them to further study these issues.

The attractive workshops are designed for participants of all ages and levels of education.

WHERE IS UGANDA?

Uganda is a landlocked country in east-central Africa, along the shore of Lake Victoria, Africa's largest freshwater lake, at its southern border. Its area is 241,038 square kilometres and it is inhabited by more than 47 million people.

The Crested Crane is the national emblem of Uganda. It is also the national bird and appears on the Ugandan flag and coat of arms. Uganda is populated by dozens of ethnic groups. There are at least 32 languages spoken in Uganda, English and Swahili are the official languages. Most Ugandans can understand several languages.

Uganda is a member of the United Nations, African Union, Commonwealth of Nations, and the East African Community. It also holds membership in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

BUILDING BRIDGES – part 2



WHERE IS POLAND?

Poland is a country in east-central Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea to the north.

It has a total area of 312,696 square kilometres, inhabited by around 38 million people.

Poland's primary national symbol is the White Eagle set against a red shield. This emblem is featured on the coat of arms.

In contemporary Poland, the vast majority of the population identifies as ethnically Polish. Polish is the official and most widely spoken language. Poland is a member state of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).



IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM AND THE STRUGGLES FOR INDEPENDENCE

Poland had been an independent state since the 10 th century when it was baptised. In the 15 th century it entered into a union with Lithuania and it became one of the biggest powers in Europe as a multi-cultural nation.

Since the late 18 th century, Poland was divided between the neighbouring empires: Russia, Prussia (later Germany), and Austria (later Austro-Hungary). Poland regained its independence after World War I in 1918. Throughout the 19 th century, the Polish people initiated several uprisings aimed at regaining their national freedom. The uprisings were violently crushed and a system of imperialist domination was established.

As a result, numerous Poles became refugees in other countries, especially in France, including many notable figures such as the poet Adam Mickiewicz and the composer Fryderyk Chopin. Some former Polish revolutionaries and exiles made their mark on the history of the region of the Indian Ocean neighbouring the Eastern coast of Africa: Maurycy Beniowski in Madagascar and Adam Mieroslawski in Mauritius.

BUILDING BRIDGES – part 3

THE PARTITIONS OF POLAND, THE UPRIISINGS AND THE POLISH EXILES



Map of Poland: the Partitions

BRITISH RULE AND ANTI-COLONIAL UPRISINGS IN UGANDA

On the territory of today's Uganda kingdoms like Buganda, Bunyoro, and Toro existed for centuries before the arrival of European explorers and missionaries in the late 19th century. In 1894, Uganda became a British protectorate, leading to British colonial administration. Uganda gained independence on the wave of decolonisation of Africa in 1962.

Uganda experienced numerous anti-colonial uprisings during the British colonial period, fuelled by resistance to British rule and its impact on local communities. These uprisings ranged from popular rebellions in various regions to more organized resistance in kingdoms like Bunyoro. Bunyoro-Kitara, a powerful kingdom, fiercely resisted British expansion. King Kabarega led sustained military resistance from 1893 to 1895, challenging British authority and their African allies.

Rebellions and popular uprisings occurred in various parts of the protectorate, including Kigezi, Teso, Lango, and Acholi, as local populations resisted colonial rule.

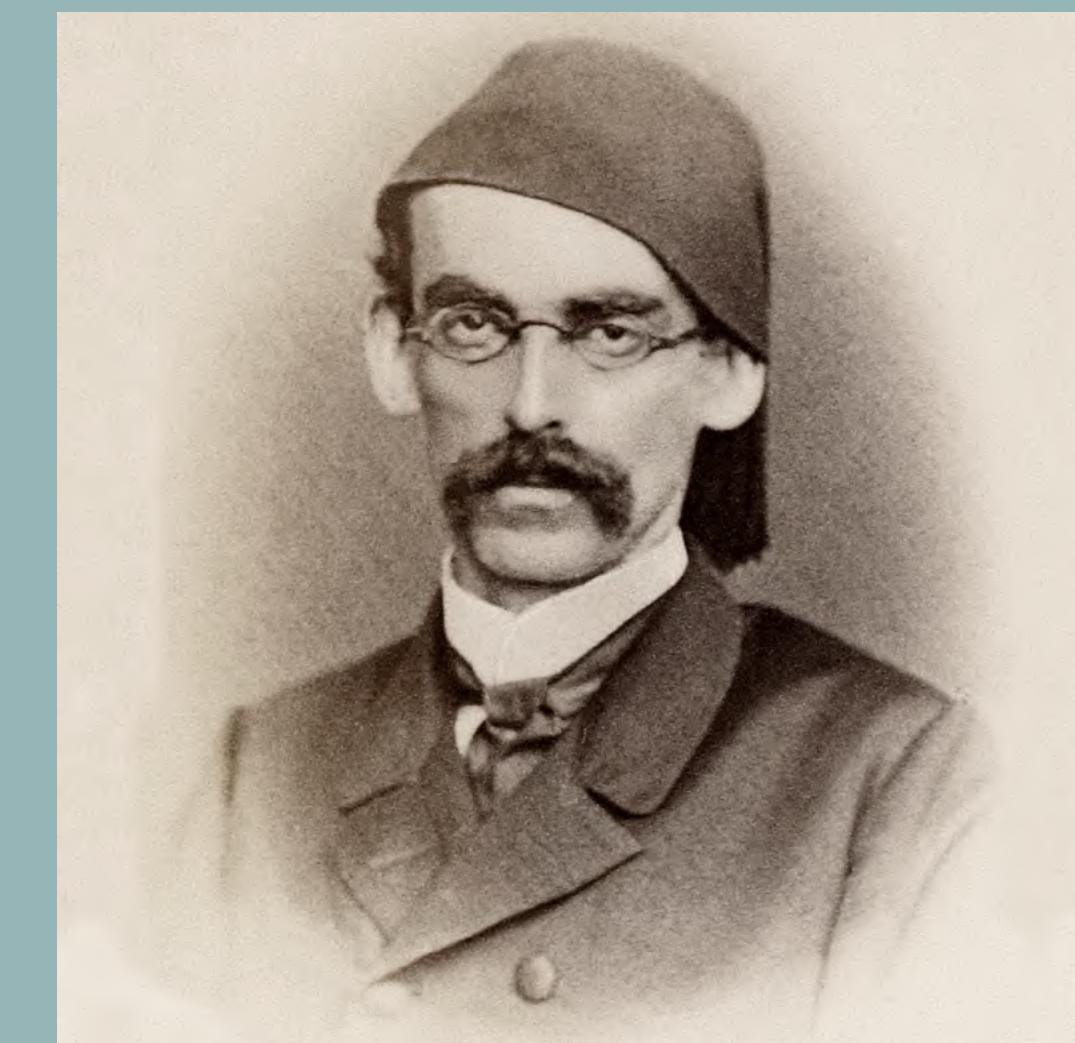


Map of Uganda under British rule

Mehmed Emin Pasha (1840-1892) played an important role in the history of East Africa, including the lands of today's Uganda. Few people, however, realize that he had been born and raised in Opole in present-day Poland (at that time, the region was a part of Prussia). He came from a German-speaking Jewish family and his original name was Isaak Eduard Schnitzer. He was, however, raised as a Christian (Lutheran) and used the name Eduard Carl Oscar Theodor Schnitzer. In the 1860s he left for the Ottoman Empire and in 1875 he arrived in Khartoum (Sudan) where he took the name Mehmed Emin. In the service of British administrators, in 1876 he was sent on diplomatic missions to Bunyoro and to kabaka (king) Muteesa I of Buganda to the south, where he became popular and fluent in the local language (Luganda). In 1890, he participated in the Battle of Kampala Hill during a conflict between Catholics and Protestants, a turning point in Ugandan history.

He was known as an opponent of slavery and died at the hands of Arab slave traders. He added greatly to the scientific knowledge of Africa and published valuable geographical papers.

EMIN PASHA: FROM OPOLE TO KAMPALA



Emin Pasha



Map: Opole in Poland

IMAGINED TRAVELS: TOMEK WILMOWSKI

A different, imagined type of historic link between Poland and Uganda is presented in a popular novel for youth, "Tomek's Adventures on the Black Continent", first published by Alfred Szklarski in 1958, with many subsequent reeditions. The plot of the book is set in the early 1900s.



A map of Tomek's travel from the book "Tomek's Adventures on the Black Continent"

The main character, a Polish teenager named Tomek Wilmowski, travels with his father and two other Polish explorers through Kenya, Uganda and the Congo, aiming to catch wild animals for a zoo in Europe. In the process, they encounter and confront a cruel slave trader, Castanedo. They reach the court of the young kabaka of Buganda and Tomek becomes a friend of the young king.

The novel contributed to spreading knowledge about Africa and building a sense of empathy with Africans among the young readers in Poland.

Book cover:
“Tomek’s
Adventures on the
Black Continent”

Alfred Szklarski

PRZYGODY TOMKA NA CZARNYM ŁĄDZIE



Wydawnictwo „Śląsk”

WORLD WAR II OF POLAND

On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. The Polish army fought bravely, but it was overwhelmed after a few weeks.

On 17 September, the Soviet army entered the eastern territories of Poland and the country was subsequently divided between the German and Soviet regimes, a legacy of the so-called Ribbentrop-Molotov pact.

Motivated by the racist ideology of Nazism, the German occupation resulted in millions of deaths. The Jews were singled out for a particularly cruel treatment and genocide. Six million Jews from various European countries were murdered by the German Nazis in extermination camps located in Poland such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka.

The Polish government in exile moved to London and Polish forces continued to fight Germany alongside the Allies across Europe and North Africa.

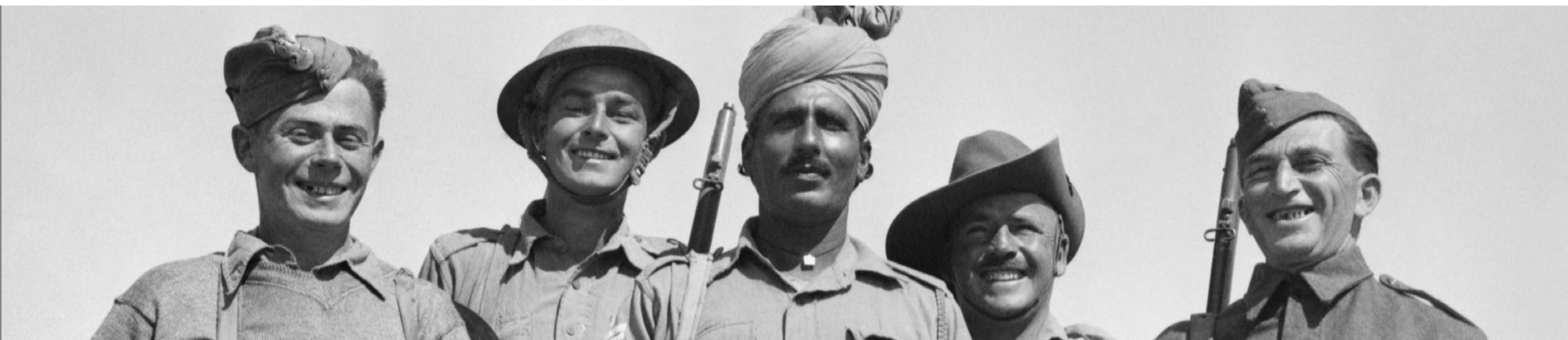


Photo of Polish, British, Indian, Australian, and Czech soldiers in Tobruk, Libya, 1941

BUILDING BRIDGES – part 5

SEPTEMBER 1939, THE NAZI OCCUPATION AND DIVISION



- Borders of Poland as of 1 September 1939
- GERMAN OCCUPATION:
 - Areas incorporated directly into the Reich
 - General Government
- SOVIET OCCUPATION
- Wilno region granted by the USSR to Lithuania and incorporated together with it into the USSR in 1940
- Slovok occupation
- The dividing line between the USSR and Germany:
 - line defined in the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 23 August 1939
 - demarcation line defined on 28 September 1939

Map of Poland divided after September 1939

During World War II, Uganda, as a British protectorate, was deeply involved in the conflict, contributing significantly to the Allied war effort.

Over 77,000 Ugandans enlisted in the British Army, serving both in support roles and on the front lines. Many served in East Africa and other theatres of the war, including the East African Campaign, fought primarily in Italian East Africa (present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia) in 1940–1941. Uganda also played a role in providing food and resources, including 11,000 tons of food to Kenya during a famine.

The war influenced Uganda's political and social landscape, contributing to the push for independence.



Members of Uganda's 7th Battalion arrive in Nairobi, Kenya, after their tour of duty in Burma

THE POLISH REFUGEES

After the annexation of the Eastern Polish territories by the Soviet Union in September 1939, their inhabitants were subjected to Stalinist repressions.

The Soviet authorities forcibly deported more than one million people from Poland to Siberia and other distant parts of the Soviet Union and made them work in slave labour camps. It is estimated that almost half of them died, mainly due to harsh conditions (including freezing winters) and mistreatment.



Gulag – Soviet labour camps

BUILDING BRIDGES – part 6

“Even today when I close my eyes I can still hear the rhythmical clatter of the wagon wheels and the announcing whistle of the engine as we passed through different stations.... There was no means of washing or changing for the night, no food and, cold and hungry, we felt like animals caught in a trap, unsure what the next day would bring.“

Henryka Łappo (Utnik),
a Polish deportee

On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. On 30 July that year, the Polish government in exile and the Soviet government came to an agreement about creating a Polish Army in the East, formed to fight the common enemy, Germany. Pursuant to the agreement, the Soviet authorities granted amnesty to many Polish citizens on 12 August 1941, from whom a 80,000-strong army was formed under General Wladyslaw Anders. In 1942, the Anders army was moved to Iran. Eventually, the Polish soldiers and civilians who gathered with them were allowed to leave the Soviet Union and to enter British-controlled territories. The unit travelled through Iran, Iraq and Palestine, in 1944 it fought in the Italian Campaign, including the Battle of Monte Cassino.



More than 100,000 Poles, including 36,000 women and children, managed to leave the Soviet Union with General Anders' army. The women and children found refuge in Iran, India, Palestine, New Zealand, Mexico as well as Africa.

Evacuation route from Buzuluk.
From: Józef Czapski
"Inhuman Land: Searching for the Truth in Soviet Russia, 1941-1942": first published in 1949.

Altogether, there were up to 20,000 Polish refugees across the countries of Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa. One of the biggest groups – around 6,500 people – found refuge in Uganda.

Upon their arrival in Uganda, a large group of Polish refugees was settled in Nyabyeya near Masindi in the western region of Uganda, where the British authorities had allocated land for their temporary settlement. Another, smaller group was settled in Koja in the present-day Mukono District in the central part of the country, close to Lake Victoria. For them, life in Africa represented a big contrast to the conditions they had experienced in Soviet Russia. They faced the challenge of adapting to a new climate and environment.

The Polish refugees in Nyabyeya and Koja engaged in farming, set up schools, and established community centres. The community thrived, the Polish community maintained the national traditions and cultural practices which helped them deal with the trauma of displacement.



Polish refugees in Iran 1942

MASINDI

The town and district of Masindi is located approximately 214 kilometres northwest of Kampala, Uganda's capital. It lies on the way from Kampala to the Murchison Falls National Park.

Masindi is the capital of the historic Bantu kingdom of Bunyoro (also known as Bunyoro-Kitara). Ruled by the Babiito dynasty of Luo origin, Bunyoro was one of the most powerful kingdoms in Central and East Africa from the 16th century to the late 19th century.

In the second half of the 19th century, explorers like John Hanning Speke, James Augustus Grant, and Samuel Baker explored the region, leading to the so called discovery of Lake Victoria and the source of the Nile River. Samuel Baker, who had visited the kingdom together with his wife Florence in 1873, stated that the people of Bunyoro "have become the most advanced nation in Central Africa; they are well clothed and clean in their persons, courteous and dignified in demeanour, and susceptible of enlarged political organization."

In the 1890s, King Omukama Kabalega of Bunyoro resisted the British who aimed to take control of the kingdom. However, in 1899 Omukama Kabalega was captured and exiled to the Seychelles, and Bunyoro was subsequently annexed to the British Empire. The Banyoro revolted in 1907 and the revolt was put down, but the local identity and traditions have survived until today.



The Masindi District
on the map of Uganda

KOJA

The village of Koja is located in the present-day district of Bukono in the historic kingdom of Buganda, around 50 kilometres to the south-east of Kampala.

Buganda's history as a kingdom goes back to the 13th century. Ruled by the Kintu dynasty, it became one of the largest and most powerful states in East Africa during the 18th and the 19th centuries. During the Scramble for Africa, and following unsuccessful attempts to defend its independence against British imperialism, Buganda became the centre of the Uganda Protectorate in 1884, but it retained a degree of autonomy. Under British rule, Buganda became a major producer of cotton and coffee.

Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, a British explorer, botanist and artist, wrote about Buganda in 1906: "Perhaps one of the best organised and most civilised of African kingdoms."

Koja is near Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa and chief reservoir of the Nile. Formerly known to the Arabs as Ukerewe, the lake was named by the British explorer John Hanning Speke in 1858 in honour of Queen Victoria of England.



The Bukono District
on the map of Uganda

The life of the Polish refugees in Nyabyeya and Koja centred on several institutions which provided a sense of belonging and hope to the community. Both camps were remote geographically, far from Uganda's urban areas. This choice was made intentionally by the British administration. With the help of African labourers, the refugees built their own schools, hospitals and churches. The refugee settlements were managed by the British protectorate government and guarded by Ugandan soldiers, known as "askaris". The Polish refugees lived in huts built in African style rather than colonial mansions.



Polscy uchodźcy w Ugandzie

The children attended school lessons, which were taught in Polish and based on a Polish curriculum. A Polish missionary who had lived in Uganda already before the war donated school supplies. The young Poles in Nyabyeya also had a youth club with a gramophone and a piano transported from Kampala. Many of the young people were members of "harterstwo", i.e. girl guides and boy scouts.

The legacy of the Polish community in Nyabyeya contributed to the development of education in Uganda. The buildings of the camp were later used by the Nyabyeya Forestry College, a renowned school for environmental specialists. The "Forest School" in Nyabyeya has provided forestry education and become an important element in Uganda's educational landscape.



Nyabyeya Forestry College

The refugees – with the help of the local population of Nyabyeya – also constructed a new Catholic church serving as an important factor in the life of the community. The church is dedicated to Our Lady Queen of Poland Church and it serves the local community until today. It is adjoined by a cemetery. Constructed primarily from the local materials available at the time, the church symbolizes resilience and community spirit. It serves as a historical landmark that highlights the global impacts of World War II and the interconnected histories of Poland and Uganda. Visiting the church offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the themes of exile, resilience, and the universal quest for peace and sanctuary.



Polish cemetery at Nyabyeya

The Polish Church in Nyabyeya is more than just a historical site; it is a symbol of hope and human endurance. Its presence in Uganda not only enriches the cultural tapestry of the region but also serves as a bridge between continents and histories.



THIS CHURCH HAS
BEEN BUILT IN HO-
NOUR OF THE
BLESSED MARY
EVER VIRGIN, CROWN-
ED QUEEN OF PO-
LAND BY THE POLES
IN EXILE ON THE
WAY TO THEIR LIBE-
RATED HOMELAND.

Our Lady Queen of Poland Church
at Nyabyeya

EVERYDAY LIFE IN POLISH REFUGEE CAMPS

The refugees, primarily women and children, adapted to the tropical environment, developing a self-sufficient community through farming. They faced challenges posed by disease and adapting to a new climate. Some of them were initially terrified by the prospect of moving to Africa, fuelled by stereotypes and fears of an unhealthy climate. Many refugees had been already weakened from their journey and previous hardships, had to contend with Uganda's tropical climate, succumbing to diseases like malaria and dangers from insects and wild animals.

The Polish community's observances were centred on their own cultural practices and religious holidays, such as Catholic festivals. These community observances were a way for the refugees to maintain their cultural heritage in a new land.

BUILDING BRIDGES – part 9



Peanut planters in Masindi, Uganda, circa 1943.
Papaya trees make up the backdrop.

QUOTE FROM THE BOOK “KAROLINA REMEMBERS”,
AS TOLD BY KAROLINA UCHMAN SADEK
TO F. GERRY SZYMANSKI CIERPILOWSKI

“The weary refugees arrived in Africa at the port of Mombasa, Kenya, with renewed hope. They were transported by buses to Masindi, Uganda, over sooty, winding, dirt roads. Because the vehicles were crowded, hot and odorous, windows had to be opened, resulting in a lot of coughing from the clouds of dust pouring in. It was also a nerve-racking ride. The passengers clutched their rosaries and prayed for the driver as he skilfully maneuvered the curves on this narrow and treacherous stretch, often hugging a mountain on one side while avoiding a precipice on the other. Later they learned that fatal accidents along this route were not uncommon.

At first Karolina and her mother were not particularly awed by the new scenery of this exotic continent, nor were their fellow travelers. After seeing so many different landscapes in so many lands in less than desirable circumstances, they were simply looking forward to settling in one place with sufficient food and roofs over their heads. In such a reliable haven, they could better start thinking of the future.

Arriving at their destination on the outskirts of Masindi, they felt great relief”.



Trzy przyjaciółki w obozie Masindi, z lewej Karolina Uchman, z prawej Jania, która zmarła w trakcie pobytu w Masindi.

“In general, the Poles who spent several years in Africa have mostly good memories of this sojourn. The camps housed individuals from all walks of life: farmers, builders, carpenters, seamstresses, shoemakers, teachers, doctors, nurses, morticians, and even a priest. Since the people realized they were now settled here until after the war, they soon began using their respective trades, establishing small businesses. Before long one could have clothing or shoes made, or get something repaired; the tradesmen could earn extra money; and, the community began to have a semblance of normality”.

*As told by Karolina Uchman Sadek to
F. Gerry Szymanski Cierpilowski*

Karolina Remembers

A Polish family's true story
of courage, perseverance, and faith
before and during World War II

The cover of the book „Karolina Remembers: A Polish Family's True Story of Courage, Perseverance, and Faith before and during World War II”

The relationship of the Polish refugee communities with their Ugandan neighbours belongs to the most interesting aspects of the story.

The British colonial authorities intentionally tried to maintain a degree of isolation between the European (“white”) and the native African populations. Remarkably, in many cases the presence of the Polish refugees disrupted the established colonial dichotomies and hierarchies of “race” and privilege. The Polish people often did hard manual work, they were actively involved in cultivating the land and producing their own food such as the traditional Eastern European red sour soup “barszcz” (Borscht) – something that few, if any, Europeans did in East Africa in that period.

The refugees interacted with their social environment. They engaged in trade and exchange of goods. Moreover, they relied on the help of African labourers in executing projects such as the construction of the Polish Roman Catholic church in Nyabyeya.

The Poles were frequently unaware of, or simply rejected, many colonial-era customs and rules. Thus, the Luganda-language newspaper “Matalisi” praised the Polish people for their non-discriminatory conduct toward Africans in an article published in October 1942.

On many occasions, friendships were established, especially among young people. In fact, there were also cases of romantic relationships between Polish girls and young Africans such as the askaris (soldiers). This phenomenon in particular drew scorn of British officials.

As a result of numerous interactions, some members of the Polish community learned local languages and it was not uncommon for the African neighbours to learn and speak Polish, too. For many years after the refugees' departure from Uganda, there were reports of local people being able to communicate in Polish.



Polish refugees
with Ugandan neighbours

QUOTE FROM THE BOOK “KAROLINA REMEMBERS”,
AS TOLD BY KAROLINA UCHMAN SADEK TO F. GERRY
SZYMANSKI CIERPILOWSKI

“Generally speaking, the Poles were not fearful of their native African neighbours, but rather interested in their unique culture. Sudden drumming in the distance and black, semi-naked natives running barefoot through the settlement sparked their curiosity.

From the start, the refugees had seen the natives working for the British, usually engaged in the most difficult labour. However, their private lives were alien. Soon the Poles learned that these dark skinned people were mostly friendly.

The Africans lived nearby in villages of their own. Their huts, close together, were constructed totally of straw and appeared as if they were inverted cups with the roofs sloping into walls. Karolina and her friends would wander over to the village when they heard singing and drumming. Standing on the periphery, they observed the men, painted in bright colours with bells on their ankles, taking part in tribal dances while all the villagers voiced the strange-sounding chants and songs. The performers would show off even more when they noticed their rapt, foreign audience.”

“Some of the Poles peeked into the huts and saw large circular rooms with belongings mostly on the ground. The women cooked outside with pots and pans which they probably had received from the British, but these were poor people whose meals consisted mostly of sweet potatoes and bananas. Dried termites supplemented their diet. With hands outstretched, the children would often come begging to the Polish settlement and were readily given bread, as well as other food. It wasn't very long ago that the givers had been beggars themselves.

At first, the natives wore little clothing, the young ones commonly naked and the women without tops. However, as world charities poured more and more clothing into the camps, these items were shared, and before long, the blacks were sporting more garments.”



Polish refugees
with Ugandan children

As World War II was nearing its end, the situation of the Polish refugees remained precarious.

In general, Poland after World War II was ruined, suffering catastrophic destruction of its cities and infrastructure, along with massive population losses. As a new post-war world order was emerging in 1945, their hopes of returning to their liberated homeland seemed increasingly unrealistic, not least due to the changes of borders in Europe and the Cold War.

Firstly, a majority of the refugees had come from the former territories of Eastern Poland, which were (again) annexed by the Soviet Union (today these territories belong to the independent states formed by the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine). Secondly, the post-war Polish state, in its new borders, was heavily dominated by the Soviet model of authoritarian communism – until the restoration of democratic freedoms in 1989. Having recently experienced Stalinist repressions and deportations at the hands of the Soviet authorities, the refugees knew they had little hope of going back to their old homes and previous lives.



Changes of Polish borders in 1945

Therefore, numerous Polish refugees remained in Uganda and other African countries for a few more years until other options were found. The United Nations International Refugee Organization (IRO) assisted in their resettlement. They moved to countries like Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom and a small number decided to return to Poland. However, a few thousand were still in East Africa by 1948.

The Nyabyeya settlement closed down in 1948 and the Koja settlement closed down in 1952, with the remaining refugees finally leaving Uganda after a decade of Polish presence in the “Pearl of Africa”.

QUOTE FROM A DIARY OF MARIA – DELEGATE FROM THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE

“The majority of civilians here in Africa are women, children and teenagers. (...) In all of these settlements Polish schools, churches, hospitals, community centres and co-operatives have been established. Polish culture is also flourishing. We even have Polish language programs on African radio and a Polish press. (...)

Compared to the temporary camps in Iran, there is really a sense of normal life here and a sense of longevity, at least until the end of the war. The young people in particular really seem to be flourishing and enjoying life in a communal environment.

As for what will become of the Polish refugees after the War... it is difficult to say.

Everyone prays for a return to an independent and free Poland and being reunited with their loved ones fighting at the front.

But tomorrow I am leaving Koja”.



Celebrations on 3 May,
Poland's Constitution Day in 1943



Since World War II the international community has pledged to protect human rights, including the rights of refugees. Nevertheless, wars and humanitarian crises have occurred across the world resulting in many people seeking refuge in other countries.

In 2025, there were an estimated 42.7 million refugees worldwide, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Trends report.

UN REFUGEE CONVENTION

In July 1951, a diplomatic conference in Geneva adopted the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1 of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”



Podpisanie Konwencji ONZ o Uchodźcach w 1951 r.

The cornerstone of the 1951 Convention is the principle of non-refoulement contained in Article 33. According to this principle, a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.

Other rights contained in the 1951 Convention include:

- The right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions (Article 32)
- The right not to be punished for irregular entry into the territory of a contracting State (Article 31)
- The right to non-discrimination (Articles 3 and 5)
- The right to decent work (Articles 17 to 19 and 24)
- The right to housing, land and property, including intellectual property (Articles 13, 14 and 21)
- The right to education (Article 22)
- The right to freedom of religion (Article 4)
- The right to access to justice (Article 16)
- The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26 and Article 31 (2))
- The right to be issued civil, identity and travel documents (Articles 12, 27 and 28)
- The right to social protection (Articles 23 and 24 (2-4)).

These rights are under threat in many countries, where xenophobia and chauvinism are on the rise.

REFUGEES IN UGANDA

Uganda has maintained its “open door” refugee policy. As of 2025, it is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and the sixth-largest in the world, with a population of almost 2 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Uganda is widely praised for its progressive refugee policy, which includes providing land and rights to work.



South Sudanese refugees in Uganda

REFUGEES IN POLAND

Since 2022, Poland has hosted refugees from war-torn Ukraine, with the number of those residing in the country at around 1 million by early 2025. The initial influx was met with vast public support, although attitudes and policies have evolved over time. Non-European refugees, including those from Africa, face difficulties with Poland's restrictive asylum policies and societal attitudes. The 'NEVER AGAIN' Association has been actively supporting the rights of refugees and the fight against racism.



Refugees Welcome demonstration in Warsaw, Poland

**QUOTE: POPE JOHN PAUL II, SPEECH IN KAMPALA,
UGANDA, 8 FEBRUARY 1993**

“Praise is due to the families and villages, the communities of believers, the regions and nations in Africa which have so generously extended hospitality to the dispossessed, at no little cost to themselves.”



John Paul II in Uganda, 1993

This exhibition invites you to reflect on the plight of refugees in the world today and on our shared humanity.

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY ROTARY PEACE CENTER

The Makerere Rotary Peace Center is hosted by Makerere University, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Africa.

It is the first Rotary Peace Center on the African continent. It is the seventh Rotary Peace Center in the world that offers Postgraduate Diploma in Peace-building, Conflict Transformation, and Development hosted by the Makerere University Peace and Conflict Studies Program (PCS).

Up to 40 fellowships are awarded annually for the Professional Development Certificate program at the Makerere Rotary Peace Center.

'NEVER AGAIN' Association

The 'NEVER AGAIN' Association is an independent civil society organization founded in Warsaw in 1996. It has campaigned against racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia, for peace, intercultural dialogue and human rights across the world.

The 'NEVER AGAIN' Association cooperates with online volunteers from all over the world, we welcome diverse backgrounds and cultures.



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY
Kampala, Uganda

**Makerere
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The Polish church at Nyabyeya,
Masindi region, Uganda, today