

THE 2021 REGIONAL CO-WINNER OF THE UNHCR NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD IN ASIA

BIOGRAPHY

Roukiatou Maiga



Roukiatou Maiga of Burkina Faso is the joint regional winner for Africa of UNHCR's 2021 Nansen Refugee Award. She wins along with Chief Diambendi Madiaga, a fellow Burkinabé. The 55-year-old is president of the Women's Association Djam Weli (Peace is Good), an agricultural association

that has been a lifeline to many internally displaced people since the 2019 outbreak of deadly inter-communal clashes forced thousands to flee their homes.

B I O G R A P H Y

Maiga has hosted internally displaced families in her own house, while encouraging those around her to do the same. The award recognizes her efforts to bring peace by acting as a mediator within inter-ethnic communities. She is in an inter-ethnic marriage.

She advocates for internally displaced people, provides them with food, aid and clothes, and refers survivors of gender-based violence to humanitarian service providers. Through her association, Maiga also offers work to women, enabling them to stand on their own feet and to provide for their families.

“I believe that when you help a woman, you have helped the whole family. It also feels good and fulfilling to know that I contributed to changing someone’s life.”

Maiga had six children but, in 2020, her eldest son was killed by an unidentified armed group, in an act that many of her compatriots believe was orchestrated to discourage her from continuing her work. Despite the tragedy, she is determined to continue her mission.

Since January 2021, more than 23,000 people have been newly displaced by fresh violence in Burkina Faso. Maiga continues to host whoever knocks on her doors, sheltering them, offering them a safe space, and much more.

To local authorities and humanitarian organizations (including UNHCR), she is a reliable community mobilizer, pushing for continued registration of displaced people to avert the risk of statelessness.

By honoring Maiga’s efforts, UNHCR hopes to shed light on the plight of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso and the worsening displacement situation in the Sahel.

“I hope that peace is restored, and every displaced person returns home. I hope that people love one another. I hope that my country is secure, as it used to be. I hope for a better future.”



Roukiatou Maiga conducts an awareness session on early marriage with various tribal leaders and young women (right) in her community.

Background of the displacement situation in Burkina Faso

Since 2012, an uprising that began in northern Mali has ignited violence across the Sahel region. Extremist armed groups have swept across borders, exploiting ethnic tensions, poverty and weak governance to terrorize local populations. The violence reached Burkina Faso in 2015 and has since forced hundreds of thousands of Burkinabés to flee for safety, both internally and across borders.

By May 2021, there were over 1.2 million internally displaced people in the country - almost double the number in 2019. Burkina Faso is also hosting over 20,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Mali.