Simon Marot Touloung

"A world without poverty and inequality is possible. We must build it now."

Marot is co-founder and Executive Director at African Youth Action Network (AYAN) and, as a former refugee, is committed to working towards SDGs 1 and 4, and for a world free of violence and conflict.

At just 8 years old, Marot was forced to flee for his life. In danger of being recruited as child soldiers by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, Marot and his cousins fled South Sudan to seek refuge in Uganda. For 21 days and 21 nights, the boys walked, fearful for their safety, with little food or water, and reliant on the help of strangers they met along the way. Finally making it across the border to Uganda by September of 2000, Marot and his cousins arrived at the Imvepi Refugee settlement.

The conditions in the refugee camp were extremely difficult – the LRA were on the lookout for children who had escaped from South Sudan, healthcare services were poor and available food often ran out weeks before the next delivery of supplies was due. Despite these challenges, Marot was able to start primary school in Uganda when he was nine, walking fourteen kilometres a day to attend. Whilst he suffered deep trauma from what he had seen of the war, Marot's commitment to his education remained strong: he later won a prestigious DAFI scholarship.

Following graduating from Makerere University in Kampala, Marot became heavily involved in working with young people in refugee settlements, helping them to acquire the skills to help themselves, forge a path in live and contribute to a peaceful world. Thanks to his work with refugees, he was appointed as a member of the Global Youth Advisory Council by UNHCR in 2017 and to the first Youth Advisory council of the African Union in 2018.