Thank you Mister Chairperson,

We are pleased that partnership plays such a prominent role in the agenda for this March Standing Committee. Meaningful partnerships are indeed a vital contributor to the success of UNHCR and the shared mission of this Committee.

As the world faces unprecedented suffering, the pressure on aid agencies to deliver life-saving assistance has never been greater. Quickly increasing numbers and needs of forcibly displaced persons have stretched agencies and donors alike. NGOs, as partners, are now all the more crucial to UNHCR’s effective delivery of protection, humanitarian assistance and durable solutions. NGOs implement over 1,600 projects on behalf of UNHCR annually, representing over 39% of UNHCR’s budget, and play indispensable, complementary roles to UNHCR, including in advocacy, innovation, and accountability to persons of concern.

In this context, excellent partnerships, characterized by complementarity, equality, transparency and mutual responsibility, have never been more critical. While we believe much has been accomplished to strengthen partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs, a sustained, focused investment in strong partnerships must continue. We call on the new High Commissioner to demonstrate his support for institutional initiatives to institutionalize the Principles of Partnership throughout UNHCR, including into daily application by each UNHCR staff member.

The first vehicle we commend for this deepened commitment is the further global, regional and country-level rollout of the UNHCR-IFRC-NGO Structured Dialogue on Partnership. The Structured Dialogue not only provides practical recommendations for improving partnership, but also creates space at the field level to meaningfully debate and resolve obstacles to partnership. Participants in the recent ICVA organized Asia regional consultation and the InterAction mission to Lebanon re-affirmed the value of this Dialogue, including the helpful role of trusted and knowledgeable interlocutors from both UNHCR and NGOs, and pointed to key priorities that will further strengthen partnerships in these contexts.

The second initiative we would like to highlight is UNHCR’s Enhanced Framework for Implementing with Partners, which is changing how UNHCR selects, engages, and monitors NGOs implementing projects on behalf of UNHCR.

We have observed in previous Standing and Executive Committee meetings an over-emphasis by the Board of Auditors, Office of Internal Oversight Services, and Independent Audit and
Oversight Committee on the “risks” posed by working through NGOs on the ground including scrutiny of administrative costs of partners to better evidence value for money. While we expect UNHCR to exercise due diligence when partnering with NGOs, and the desire for UNHCR to stretch funding across needs, we strongly urge an approach that provides partners with the funding and flexibility they need to effectively and efficiently deliver to persons of concern. NGO staff should spend less time on paperwork and reports and more time delivering actual assistance.

As components of the Implementing Framework are finalised and rolled out we seek:

- increased transparency, predictability, communication and consistency across UNHCR operations;
- faster selection processes that lead to signing agreements with NGO partners before January 1st;
- less paperwork, less verification exercises, less ad hoc reporting and information requests;

We look forward to continuing a dialogue as new policies are finalised and implemented, particularly related to partner personnel costs and procurement. We appreciate the Framework roll out trainings that have occurred to-date and look forward to determining where additional support is needed for UNHCR and NGO staff at the global, regional and country levels. We continue to encourage strong NGO engagement in Country Operations Planning processes.

Regarding the World Humanitarian Summit, the NGO community is looking forward to hearing more on UNHCR plan.

Finally, Mr. Chairperson, in light of increasing needs globally we re-affirm our commitment to partnership with UNHCR in delivering principled and protective assistance to refugees and other persons of concern.

Copies of this statement will be made available at www.icvanetwork.org.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.