NGO Statement on Follow-Up to the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection
Agenda item 6(a)

Thank you Mr. Chair,

We welcome the decision to move this topic to the March Standing Committee agenda. The NGO community appreciates the opportunity for further discussion around the importance of understanding and addressing root causes of displacement.

We remember the previous High Commissioner’s words in December. He said, “Prevention, protection and solutions are three things that are strongly interlinked, to the extent that if one fails, the others will not be able to deliver adequately.” The NGO community supports this view, that prevention, protection and solutions are three notions that cannot be viewed in isolation, and would like to stress three points on the subject.

First, preventing displacement is about understanding the context and the communities. The identification of different causes that are at the root of forced displacement is required. Prevention also requires recognition of the different challenges and responses to displacement caused by conflict compared to natural disasters, as well as their common drivers and linkages.

Any response to displacement must be informed by a comprehensive and contextualized analysis of the multiple factors that drive it. More accurate and comprehensive data across all phases of displacement and across all situations is needed in order for the global picture to be complete and for policy and operational actors to have the tools they need to prevent and address displacement in a targeted way.

In parallel, thorough analysis and sound knowledge of the context requires governments to adopt an inclusive approach, partner with various stakeholders, and promote a full and equal
participation of women, children, elderly persons and disadvantaged groups, as well as locally driven programming. We have seen the preventative roles that key actors can play with the inter-faith platforms in Central African Republic to raise public awareness on the importance of peaceful cohabitation and mutual respect, as well as maintaining communication between communities and reporting abuses and rights violations. NGOs can offer support to their governments through technical advice, training and information.

In this regard, the NGO community calls on governments to further partner with civil society actors in order to better prevent conflict.

Secondly, protection must be at the centre of all initiatives seeking to address root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration.

Forced displacement is, by its nature, rooted in protection concerns in home countries and/or on the move from and within their home countries. Principles of protection are critical to vulnerable and high-risk communities such as women, unaccompanied minors, LGBTI individuals, stateless people, persons with disabilities, as well as youth. It is important to simultaneously maintain sustained attention and funding to protection of internally displaced persons since internal displacement is often the precursor to cross-border displacement.

The NGO community welcomes the Regional Refugee and Migration Response Plan (RRMMP) for Europe that places protection and protection principles at the centre of the response plan.

More broadly, protection of displaced communities is key to preventing further displacement.

Asylum is the cornerstone of international protection and discussions on root causes and durable solutions need to recognize the prevalence and scope of protracted displacement situations today. Hosting countries and authorities need to ensure the dignity of all forcibly displaced, in which all their human rights are respected, and countries that have limited capacity need to be supported in order to deliver on this obligation. In this regard, we call on states to uphold the right to freedom of movement, including the exploration of legal alternatives and pathways for migration and integration, such as labour migration schemes, education visas, accelerated family reunification and the implementation of the
Alternatives to Camps policy. Building fences and closing borders, or putting refugees into camps, is not a solution; it forces refugees to take risky journeys and makes them more vulnerable to trafficking and people smuggling.

The NGO community welcomes the 30th March 2016 high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees.

And thirdly, political commitment is essential to finding solutions.

The primacy of politics is crucial to governance and leadership at national and global levels in order to tackle root causes of displacement. States must take on the responsibility of finding political solutions to causes at the root of displacement. This has to be done in tandem with the pursuit of justice and accountability in order to strengthen the rule of law and redress human rights violations.

Refugees and internally displaced persons can impact positively on local communities when they are provided real opportunities to contribute economically and culturally. There is a continuing need to include refugees and internally displaced persons in national development action plans, and displacement should be recognized not only as a humanitarian, but also as a development issue. Access to real opportunities does not go without access to education. In the case of humanitarian and protracted crisis contexts, ensuring a safe and quality access to education for children is the requisite to train the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Increasing resilience to enable a transition from dependency towards self-reliance is possible with the creation of partnerships among stakeholders, a model similar to the one the Solutions Alliance developed, and that the NGOs strongly support.

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

Thank you Mr. Chair.