STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER’S PROGRAMME
66th Session
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NGO Protection Statement
Agenda Item 2a

Thank you Mister Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. It has been drafted in consultation with, and aims to reflect the diversity of views of, the NGO community.

NGOs thank UNHCR for its summary of international protection issues and would like to draw the Standing Committee’s attention to the following key areas for follow-up.

1. The Centrality of Protection

At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), UNHCR committed to ‘continue to fulfill its core task of ensuring international protection and assistance and seeking permanent solutions for refugees and other persons of its concern.’ Maintaining the centrality of protection and upholding International Humanitarian Law in these efforts is imperative. We call on UNHCR and Members States to enhance protection and find durable solutions for those fleeing persecution and violence.

2. Stateless persons

We welcome:
• the inclusion of statelessness in Sustainable Development Goals 16.9 and 10.
• Commitments made by states through the Brazil Declaration;
• The Economic Community of West African States Declaration to Eradicate Statelessness; and
• The adoption of the first ever conclusions on statelessness by the European Council.

NGOs also call for remedial action by the more than half of European states that currently fail to properly meet their obligations to grant nationality to children born on their territories who would otherwise be stateless. We urge all states to put in place dedicated statelessness determination procedures which are critical in protecting stateless migrants from detention and a range of other human rights abuses. We encourage further participation in the UNHCR led #Ibelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024.
3. Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs)

We are cognisant that, in 2015, 40.8 million people were internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence, the highest number on record.\(^1\) This is twice the number of refugees globally. At last week’s annual partner consultation High Commissioner Grandi committed to increasing UNHCR’s focus on IDPs. We ask how this commitment will lead to tangible action in 2017?

4. Children & Youth

NGOs commend UNHCR’s initiatives on youth in partnership with NGOs, including the global refugee youth consultations and last week’s UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations. What are UNHCR’s plans related to youth in the short- and long-term?

We welcome UNHCR’s continued support to Education Cannot Wait – A Fund for Education in Emergencies and call on Member States to increase new funding for education and child protection needs and to advocate for policy changes to address the economic pressures that often lead to high drop-out rates. We also look forward to the December High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Children on the Move.

5. Solutions

NGOs welcome the increased refugee resettlement commitment by Canada, Australia and others, but we are concerned that the commitments still fall short of the needs. We urge UNHCR to use resettlement strategically to improve protection for both the resettled and non-resettled populations, especially in the Africa and Asia Pacific regions. NGOs are also concerned about unnecessary delays in resettlement processing due to the increasing prioritization by states of security concerns over protection. NGOs in Australia continue to express concern about changes to domestic law that allow individuals who were resettled to have their permanent protection visas or citizenship revoked, opening up the potential for refoulement. NGOs are also concerned for those found to be refugees on Nauru and Manus Island and where nonviable resettlement options have been found.

6. Main Protection Concerns

A: Europe

We support UNHCR’s efforts in Greece to uphold the right to protection, and its difficult decision to suspend many activities when the refugee processing centers effectively became areas of detention in March 2016. We remain disappointed, however, in the failure of some of

\(^1\) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
the richest and most powerful States to live up to their humanitarian ideals and obligations during this crisis.

NGOs note with extreme concern the protection ramifications of the EU/Turkey deal, as it contradicts EU principles of the right to seek asylum and instead attempts to push people and their suffering far from European shores.

**B: Africa**

NGOs note with concern a number of cases in which refugee and IDPs camps are being closed without respect for national and international legislation. Whilst we commend Kenya for the Kalobeyei initiative which aims to reframe the hosting situation for 100,000 refugees in Turkana, we consider Kenya’s announcement of the closure of its camps this year and the possible forcible relocation of the camps to be deeply troubling.

In March 2016, IDP camps in North Kivu, DRC, were abruptly and forcibly closed, resulting in the eviction of a total of an estimated 42,000 IDPs. Such acts violate commitments to both the African Union Convention for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Of further concern are the attempts in Nigeria to relocate IDPs and induce IDP returns to areas that are not yet deemed safe.

**C. Americas**

We note with concern the detention of Central Americans in the United States and Mexico as well as refoulement; inadequate due process; and unaccompanied children left to navigate the complex United States legal process alone. Refoulement resulted in the deaths of as many as 83 migrants deported between January 2014—October 2015. We acknowledge UNHCR’s efforts to open offices in the Northern Triangle in recent months and renewed efforts by the governments of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico to protect these persons of concern.

**D. Middle East and North Africa**

Protection needs remain particularly acute with populations under siege in Gaza, Libya and Yemen, where people in 21 of 22 governorates have fled their homes. In Syria and Iraq, we are conscious of the growing evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity and systematic efforts to destroy the cultural heritage in Daesh-controlled territories. Political solutions to these conflicts are long overdue.

**E. Asia Pacific**

We remain concerned about the protection of Rohingya persons pushed back to sea by

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Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. We note the challenges in receiving aid and proving property ownership stateless people face in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake.

Finally, to conclude, protracted displacement has become the predominant model, posing specific protection challenges to all actors. It requires new models of response. We call on Member States to find political solutions to these conflicts, and to Member States and UNHCR to ensure the protection and dignity of refugees to redouble efforts that will uphold the protection needs of the most vulnerable in full respect of international law.

A full version of the statement is available on ICVA’s website at icvanetwork.org

Thank you Mister Chair.