Thank you Chair,

This statement has been drafted through a wide consultation and attempts to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

Argentina
We express our deep concern regarding the adoption of Decree 70/2017, which modifies Argentina’s Migration Law to link high levels of crime to Argentina’s migrant population, and which threatens the cessation of residence status based upon the commission of low-level criminal offenses. The executive order also limits previous opportunities for family reunification. These modifications make immigrants more vulnerable to rights offenses and weaken their protection.

With respect to the refugee population in Argentina, NGOs welcome the government’s decision to grant humanitarian visas to people affected by the conflict in Syria, through the so-called “Syrian Program”. Yet, the full recognition of the rights of the refugee population in Argentina is still pending implementation of the 2006 “General Act for Refugee Acknowledgment and Protection”.

Brazil
In Brazil we are highly concerned with the militarized border management strategy taking on the west side of the Paraná state restrictive measures. This will have an impact on migrant populations at the borders. Similar to the Southern Border program in Mexico, this will result in the decline of access to rights, making mixed flows of migrants more vulnerable and at risk in terms of organized crime and illegal traffickers.

Canada
We welcome the initiatives taken on by the Canadian government that have resulted in the increase in the number of refugees offered resettlement opportunities. As of 29 January 2017 there have been 40,081 Syrian refugees resettled in various cities. The Canadian government has also implemented an integration plan which aims towards adaption for newcomers, this includes social networks that provide individuals with information to find housing and jobs, improve their
language skills, foster civic involvement, gain critical cultural knowledge and receive emotional and other support.

**Colombia**

We applaud the peace accords reached between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which are an important first step towards lasting peace. In the same way, we congratulate the beginning of peace dialogues between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

However, humanitarian challenges continue, and reductions in humanitarian assistance could harm the transition to peace, jeopardizing the safety and well-being of vulnerable communities. Despite a reduction in new internal displacement in 2016; 4.9 million people still depend on humanitarian aid. There are also very serious protection concerns in areas such as Choco, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo, where the emergence of new non-state armed actors is leading to killings, forced recruitment of children, gender based violence, and lack of access to food, water, sanitation and education. Special protection needs of rural communities, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities must also be addressed. It is therefore vital that the international humanitarian community does not prematurely withdraw its support. While development efforts will be needed to overcome the impact of decades of war, it is critical not to make the mistake of interrupting humanitarian aid and protection efforts before alternative mechanisms are in place.

Finally, Colombia should continue to strengthen its humanitarian responses in line with the Cartagena Declaration, the Brazil Plan of Action, and the San José Action Statement in order to achieve durable solutions.

**Costa Rica**

We are concerned about the need of international protection of migratory flows from Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba as well as from Africa and Asia. Due to the restrictive and migration control policies implemented by governments, there has been a considerable increase of human smugglers affecting vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents and pregnant women.

While UNHCR’s presence at the borders should be increased in order to identify and support people in need of international protection, NGOs welcome the initiative taken by the Costa Rican government to grant provisional documents in order for people to continue their journey.

**Ecuador**

We condemn the collective expulsion of 121 Cuban citizens in July 2016, which was a clear violation of due process, the right to seek asylum, and the non-derogable prohibition on refoulement. However, we welcome the promulgation of Ecuador’s Law of Human Mobility, and call for its swift implementation to ensure respect for the rights of migrants and refugees. We
also welcome that this new law officially joins Peru and Argentina in legally recognizing the situation of statelessness.

As long as the general violence and conflict in Colombia remain a concern, the Government of Ecuador should continue to ensure the recognition, protection and assistance to people in need of international protection from Colombia. The Refugee Commission in Ecuador should also continue to ensure proper refugee status determination procedures while strengthening their ability to consistently conduct RSD within the timeframe established by law.

Voluntary repatriation should only be considered after a thorough analysis of the safety to return. Resettlement or local integration to host communities must remain an option.

Mexico
In Mexico, we are highly concerned about the southern border program because of its border management strategy prioritising militarization, detention and other migration control policies, and the explicit linking of migration and asylum with national security. As a result, people migrating are forced into irregular migration routes and become more vulnerable to human rights violations. While there is an increase in securitization, there is a continuation of policies such as deterring people to seek asylum and massive detention and deportation of migrants, which also include refugees and people in need of international protection.

The ability of the Mexican government to effectively manage the increase in migrants and refugees is reaching its limit. The US President’s proposed wall on the northern border between Mexico and the United States will only worsen the current humanitarian situation. This implies a decline of access to rights, making mixed movements of people more vulnerable and at risk to organized crime and illegal traffickers. When there are more obstacles to safely crossing borders to seek international protection, the result is less protection for migrants and refugees. Such practices contradict both the spirit and letter of ratified international instruments.

The Northern Triangle
The humanitarian fallout from violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras is at a tipping point. As a result, the Northern Triangle may become one of the ten worst humanitarian situations in the world in 2017.¹

High levels of violence persist throughout the region. In 2016, there were 5,278 reported homicides in El Salvador, 5,049 in Honduras and 5,459 in Guatemala. In total, official statistics reached 16,000 murders, but in reality this figure could be much higher. This context of violence has led to increased forced migration and internal displacement. Despite the stark warnings, governments in the region have been unable to prevent the violence or systematically respond to the needs of families forced to flee their homes.

¹ ACAPS, crisis overview 2016 – Humanitarian trends and risk for 2017, p.3
There is a clear association between the current violence in the Northern Triangle and gaps in the response to institutional protection. Moreover, Guatemala and El Salvador continue to not recognize the internal displacement of people due to violence as a serious humanitarian situation, despite a wealth of empirical evidence showing the magnitude of the problem. In Guatemala's case, to deepen knowledge on this matter, the Universidad Rafael Landívar and UNHCR will conduct a study on internal displacement, which we hope will provide an important contribution to this Standing Committee.

The government of Honduras has recognized internal displacement as a serious concern, however it ensures few viable options for internal safety, security and livelihoods of those internally displaced within its borders. We welcome an undertaking by the government to draft a law on internal displacement in 2016. Nonetheless, Honduras should also take comprehensive action to tackle the root causes of displacement and to protect IDPs.

Many donors, while acknowledging the situation, are not able to fund any response, as internal displacement is not part of their regional strategies. This makes it very challenging for humanitarians to find the resources to meet the needs of women, children and young people affected by generalized violence.

**Panama**

Increased needs for protection of migrants and asylum seekers in Panama must be addressed. It is of particular concern that Panama is receiving an increased number of “mixed” flows of refugees and migrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America, Caribbean countries and from outside the continent that require humanitarian assistance and protection. Many of them use Panama as a transit country to reach the United States.

**Peru, Bolivia & Chile**

We highlight the need for international protection of the large mixed migration flows in the borders of Peru, Bolivia and Chile that constitute a majority of Colombian population. Furthermore, we express our concern on these migration routes that have a large presence of human trafficking networks, especially making women more vulnerable at borders. We applaud initiatives taken by authorities to prevent the rejection of asylum-seekers at borders and instead ensuring adequate due process in the refugee status determination procedure.

**United States and its influence in the region**

NGOs from the Americas are deeply concerned with the current changes in US immigration policies. These executive decisions are gravely impacting the right of asylum and international protection for thousands of people fleeing their countries due to violence and instability. By embracing such policies, the United States is violating its international obligations under Refugee Law.
These new immigration policies from the United States are reasons for pessimism and concern. Given the intense focus on increased border controls, the use of detention as a tool of migration management, restricted access to asylum, and other policies of externalized containment, hundreds of families have already been torn apart. Immigration enforcement officials have already begun targeting asylum seekers from Mexico and the Northern Triangle for arrest, detention, and forced return, often with limited or no due process. We see refugees being denied entry into the US, subject to new mandatory detention policies, and increasingly becoming the victims of hate crimes.

Furthermore, the deportation of people in need of international protection is highly alarming. Returning people to their countries of origin, or to other countries where their lives may be at risk, is a grave violation of the non-refoulement principle. Additionally, many countries that receive deported migrants are not prepared to ensure their safety and dignity, especially if they lack public policies aimed towards the reintegration of deported migrants.

The impacts of US policies on human security in the region is also a matter of concern. The proliferation of violent gangs in the mid-1990s coincided with US state and federal initiatives that led to longer and higher incarceration rates for gang members and increased deportations of ex-convicts. The number of deported gang members quickly increased, as did the number of transnational gangs operating in the Northern Triangle. If these measures are repeated, it is likely that criminal gangs will be strengthened and, as a result, human security in the region will further deteriorate.

To build a safe and secure future for the next generation of people throughout the region, governments must create a coordinated regional response to share responsibility, not unilaterally close their borders.

**Venezuela**

The situation in Venezuela is of great concern and threatens to destabilize further the border areas between Venezuela and Colombia. The complex situation in Venezuela represents a threat to the health and security of civilians. The number of people at risk is increasing and civilians are running out of resources to cope with the situation. Food and medicine scarcities have become chronic. Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers are very likely to be the most affected populations if the situation becomes chaotic and violent. Food, health assistance, safe water, protection and emergency education may be needed.

Thank you, Chair.