NGO Statement on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)

Agenda item 5(b)

Thank you, Chair.

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

NGOs would like to begin by recognizing the commendable efforts made by UNHCR in taking the New York Declaration, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework forward since its adoption on the 19th September last year. We agree that these documents mark an important commitment to refugees by the international community, and are committed to supporting both the consolidation of good practice, and moving forward on new ways of working, as outlined in the CRRF. We are looking to UNHCR to show strong leadership in seizing the opportunity that the CRRF represents. UNHCR must push States to proactively engage in transforming the refugee protection regime to ensure that host communities are adequately supported, the self-reliance of refugees is prioritized, third country solutions are made available in an effective and predictable manner, and that safe and voluntary return to countries of origin is possible.

While we recognize that the endorsement of the CRRF already represents an achievement, we feel that the call for a Global Compact in 2018 should be viewed as an opportunity to further strengthen the commitments currently made in the CRRF. This next year should be as much about addressing what is missing from the CRRF, and ensuring that commitments can be tangibly applied going forward, as it is about consolidation of best practice from past experience.

Implementing the Framework

We applaud the immediate establishment of the Task Team for the Framework, and recognize the progress made, particularly in Uganda and Tanzania in laying the groundwork for the implementation of the CRRF. However, we feel that a number of key adjustments need to be made. We encourage the current approach to pilots, or ‘case studies,’ to break new ground to address longstanding gaps in responsibility sharing for refugee protection. Over the next 18 months, the messaging, communication and activities associated with the CRRF and the Compact should improve the way that we protect refugees.

UNHCR and partner staff could benefit from more face-to-face opportunities to learn about the content of the CRRF and consider its potential for transforming their own day-to-day operations. We would support UNHCR’s efforts to increase high-level commitment from its country offices to the CRRF. NGOs are eager to support learning for all around the CRRF,
and the strengthening of responsibility sharing mechanisms for refugee protection. In this regard, we would encourage UNHCR to swiftly adopt a strong, progressive and ambitious agenda for affecting tangible change through this process.

We are encouraged to hear that other refugee-hosting countries in Africa are specifically looking to Uganda to learn from their experience. Moreover, we are pleased to learn that the Uganda authorities have embraced the CRRF, and have dedicated resources within the Prime Minister’s office for working towards its full realization. However, we feel that it is extremely important to broaden the scope of the official pilots beyond the East Africa region. We encourage States to support UNHCR to facilitate the engagement of refugee generating, refugee hosting, and transit countries in the full implementation of the CRRF. Regional diversity in the implementation of the CRRF will be essential for demonstrating the relevance of the Framework to the range of refugee contexts we find globally. While this may be done outside of the ‘pilot’ model, we feel that in order to make the CRRF an effective tool for establishing a Global Compact, lessons must also be learned from these diverse contexts.

NGOs are in a unique position to engage with both the implementation of the CRRF and the eventual elaboration of the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly as a result of our operational expertise. Furthermore, the successful implementation of both the CRRF and the Compact will depend on the participation of NGO partners, implementing programming for refugee responses. While we have a strong foundation and commend UNHCR, it is essential to better integrate NGOs into the process of implementing the CRRF. Until very recently, all work on the Global Compacts has been driven by a select number of people primarily in New York and Geneva. In the spirit of the whole-of-society approach, the two-year transformation of the CRRF into the Compact offers an important opportunity to expand the scope of actors involved in the negotiation, most notably opening the discussion to the countries and regions actually affected by large movements of refugees, and to refugees themselves. Again, NGOs are uniquely positioned in this regard. We have significant country operations in all contexts experiencing large movements of refugees, and are eager to ensure the smooth transfer of lessons learned from the implementation of the CRRF to the global policy discussions in the elaboration of the Compact.

We call on UNHCR to provide its plan for monitoring and evaluating the CRRF implementation, highlighting opportunities for NGO engagement at all levels – from the very local, to the global forums. NGOs participation in the CRRF through briefings, the Annual Consultations, a new Reference Group, and some country-level consultations is welcome. We look forward to amplifying and augmenting these opportunities for engagement at the global, thematic, levels as well as at the country-level. NGOs have much to offer and seek to increase constructive engagement and substantive inputs in the roll-out of the CRRF and the development of the Compact. To this end, we request UNHCR communicate its timeline, workplan, deadlines and opportunities for NGOs to engage.

We also call on states to support UNHCR, NGOs and all stakeholders in the CRRF roll-out process. By signing the New York Declaration, Members States have taken a historic step. This now requires continued dedicated resources and political will. Broadening the scope of the CRRF to new regions also means that Member States should come forward to apply it in new contexts. We welcome the positive statements in this direction made over the past two days.
Thematic Areas

We are pleased that UNHCR is exploring key thematic issues in a more in-depth manner, in its approach to the CRRF. We believe that there are a number of core cross-cutting themes which should be considered in this process:

- **Responsibility-Sharing**: The CRRF commits to responsibility sharing in principle but does little to elaborate how such a commitment should be put into practice. It falls short of developing a global system that ensures that governments share responsibility for welcoming, protecting and assisting refugees, a fair share of such admissions for each country and concrete actions for achieving this. By fully defining this theme in advance of the Compact negotiations, UNHCR can ensure that the original intention of the Global Compact – to fully elaborate the concept of responsibility-sharing for refugee protection – is not lost.

- **Children**: The *New York Declaration* contains a number of important commitments to children. It also contains plans for how to build on these commitments which include the negotiations leading to the adoption of the two Compacts. The next 18 months offer an important opportunity to raise the profile, understanding, implementation capacity and accountability for the rights of children on the move and other children affected by migration, and should be prioritized as a thematic topic to be elaborated.

- **Gender**: It is well recognized in refugee contexts that certain groups of refugees may be more at risk of protection concerns than others. Gender, age, and diversity impact the range of resources and opportunities refugees can access, as well as their vulnerability and capacity to respond to protection concerns. The Global Compact on Refugees must take bold steps to include women and girls, in all their diversity, throughout the framework, making gender an important cross-cutting theme to be fully elaborated.

- **Securitization**: Rhetoric from States around the need for greater securitization of borders, and the “threat” of refugees is becoming increasingly strong. Subsequent action to close borders, and push back refugee flows flies in the face of State commitments both to the Refugee Convention, and now to the New York Declaration and Global Compact. UNHCR should use the Compact elaboration to push governments to review their bilateral and regional agreements to ensure that they not only avoid undermining the protection needs of refugees, but bolster them, and ensure that development aid is not conditioned by agreements on borders, return and readmission.

- **Nationality and statelessness**: The *New York Declaration* acknowledges the nexus between statelessness and forced displacement and encourages States to undertake action to reduce statelessness. UNHCR is campaigning to end statelessness by 2024. The Global Compact must emphasize the need for a better understanding how (risks of) statelessness can be a cause and a consequence of displacement, promote solutions to resolve situations of statelessness in refugee contexts, and ensure that the added vulnerability of stateless refugees are taken into consideration when identifying and implementing durable solutions.

- **Displacement in the context of climate change and disasters**: The New York Declaration acknowledges climate change, disasters and other environmental factors as drivers and root causes of human mobility, including through creating conditions for conflict. It also contains a number of important commitments to i) strengthen
implementation of existing initiatives such as the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda for cross-border disaster displacement, ii) ensure policy coherence with other agendas such as the Sendai Framework for DRR, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sustainable Development Goals, iii) work towards sustainable and timely return in safety and dignity which may be hindered by climate change, iv) enhance resilience and reduce risk of secondary displacement for refugees, and v) address gaps in data collection. Taking these commitments into account, UNHCR should make sure that displacement in the context of disasters and climate change is adequately addressed in the CRRF and well-coordinated with the process related to the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Linkages with the Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

While recognizing the fact that the two Compacts will be elaborated through different means, we feel that it remains critical to ensure strong linkages between the two processes, and final documents. Not only are many of the issues faced by refugees and vulnerable migrants similar, we feel that completely compartmentalizing the two Compacts will prevent important intersections from being identified and effectively addressed.

Conclusion

The implementation of the CRRF provides an important opportunity to translate vague commitments into tangible actions which contribute to refugee protection. NGOs are eager to work with UNHCR to use the CRRF to save lives; to provide safe and regular routes for refugees to leave conflict and persecution; to stop detaining children and their families; to ensure access to protection services and quality education for all refugee children within a few months of their displacement; to provide pathways for refugees at all skill levels to find solutions to their displacement. The core of the challenge is that all governments must respond, and with urgency: not just a few, not only those in regions people move through or to, and not just those with money. The implementation of the CRRF must motivate the world’s governments to change – to build on their experience and change the way refugee protection is approached globally. If done well, the implementation of the CRRF will give rise to such change, and to a Compact that will ensure that we are upholding the rights and improving the protection and support for all people moving within and across international borders.

Thank you chair.