NGO Statement on Emergency Preparedness
Agenda item 3 (d)

Thank you Mme. Chair,

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

Remembering that the New York Declaration asserts that the scale and nature of refugee displacement today requires us to act in a comprehensive and predictable manner\(^1\) and pledges ‘work in every way possible for the…prevention of conflict,’\(^2\) there are a number of aspects needs to be highlighted in relation to emergency preparedness. The NGO community would like to stress five of them.

**First, preparedness has to go beyond life-saving mechanisms.**

Experience gives clear evidence that within hours after the occurrence of an emergency affected populations are in need of dignified living conditions and secure access to basic services in full respect to their rights. We are therefore encouraged by plans to apply the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework as a mechanism to include longer term approaches from the onset of an emergency.

**Second, local networks in predictable emergencies must be further strengthened.**

In natural disasters, complex monitoring systems feed into advanced simulations and give experts very accurate projections of how populations may be affected, allowing natural disaster management to operate with greater accuracy and predictability than ever before. Several comprehensive early warning mechanisms have also been developed by a number of agencies to look at man-made disasters and conflict-related emergencies. A deeper look into

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forced displacement also shows clear long-lasting patterns of displacement in and around so-called fragile states and regions.³

Unexpected emergencies have therefore, in principle, become less and less likely, giving all actors more time and better understanding to increase their preparedness efforts. However, there is still a strong need to foster local capacities and include local actors more actively into emergency preparedness efforts. Much more should be done to incorporate such actors into wider mapping and preparedness efforts, also linking to new actors, such as the private sector or diaspora organizations.

Efforts towards strengthened partnership need to be a central element of all preparedness efforts and we register with appreciation related initiatives, such as UNHCR’s workshop, last year, on Working in Partnership on Emergency Preparedness: Joint Priority Actions, and its High Alert List on Emergency Preparedness, (HALEP). Making available the simplified HALEP information to partners would contribute to better joint preparedness.

There is also a need for more trainings and joint capacity building and we appreciate UNHCR’s efforts to include NGOs in these, such as “in-country” trainings.

Third, information should be better shared between actors

Despite the progress made on predictability of emergencies the need for increased and more accurate information remains. Field experience gives little evidence that significant progress is made in incorporating domestic or local scoping mechanisms into preparedness efforts, especially in more complex urban settings.

Actors on the ground lack clear analytical tools to integrate these dynamic aspects into their preparedness efforts at intra-community level and therefore remain focused on a rather narrow individual needs-based approach.

Despite some general assurances towards joint assessments and planning, reality shows that key documents are used for fundraising and internal planning efforts.

All actors that agreed to the core principles of humanitarian work at the World Humanitarian Summit must now turn these commitments into action. NGOs have taken due notice of UNHCR’s commitment to accountability as stated in UNHCR’s Strategic Directions and look forward to the action ahead.

Fourth, the capacity of proven instruments must be maintained. Specifically:

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Several agencies maintain different forms of rosters and stand-by mechanisms for experienced staff and teams to be deployed to emergencies at very short notice. There is countless evidence of the relevance of this instrument. Yet, NGOs report increasing administrative problems in obtaining visas, travel permits and other obstacles to properly deploying staff. We appeal to all states to carefully examine their requirements and align them for emergency responses to the absolute minimum.

While cash programming allows fast and efficient response mechanisms, it remains necessary to maintain some core capacity in stock-piling. Unfortunately, the NGO community reports a considerable decrease of donors’ support to such an approach, undermining one of the most successful response mechanisms to emergencies.

Fifth, NGOs are increasingly concerned about “return-related” emergencies.

Many NGOs note with great concern a growing acceptance by the international community of displaced communities and individuals returning into situations similar to emergencies. The narrative of sending people back gains momentum over the understanding that any return of refugees shall happen voluntarily, in safety and dignity. But returnees regularly end up in a situation characterized by a state of emergency where they lack home, income, health or educational services.

The NGO community appeals to all actors to uphold the key principles related to return of refugees. Moreover, sufficient preparedness is necessary during return planning to ensure that local emergency response networks are not overburdened with basic protection needs.

In conclusion, we welcome UNHCR’s sustained commitment to emergency preparedness and note the need for dedicated resources to support it. We look forward to the finalization of a people and action oriented UNHCR Emergency Policy and to regular joint discussions and responses to key emergencies. As we all work towards the Disaster Risk Reduction objectives under Agenda 2030 Goal 1, it will be up to all stakeholders to turn words into action.

The full version of this statement will be made available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you, Mme. Chair.