Thank you, Chair.

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

Most members of the NGO community consider that saving lives in the face of natural or man-made disasters is their core mission and the backbone of their humanitarian identity. While images of aid delivery in such crisis settings are frequently reported, all aid practitioners know by experience that response is very closely related to emergency preparedness. The better humanitarian actors are prepared for the task at hand, the faster, better targeted and more efficient the response is. Remembering that the New York Declaration asserts that the scale and nature of refugee displacement today requires to act in a comprehensive and predictable manner\(^1\) and pledges to ‘work in every way possible for the...prevention of conflict,’\(^2\) there are a number of aspects that need 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 with secured access to basic services in full respect to their rights.

It is therefore important to include all these aspects of a dignified response from the onset and ensure a protection-centered preparedness that covers a wider scope of needs and includes

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marginalized populations. We are therefore encouraged by the ambitions of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to be applied also to emergencies as a means to include longer term approaches from the onset of an emergency.

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

Modern technology has a positive impact on emergency preparedness. As for 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 forced displacement also shows clear long-lasting patterns of displacement in and around so-called fragile states and regions, as confirmed by a recent World Bank report.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.

We, the NGO community, sense a need for continued efforts to reinforce trust and collaboration between governmental, UN, international, national and local civil society actors to avoid parallel or uncoordinated response mechanisms. 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). Mindful that this is an internal UNHCR tool, making available 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 their trainings, such as so-called “in-country” trainings.

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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.

More collaborative efforts among all actors are therefore strongly needed for improved information sharing and joint planning in order to ensure a more efficient and adequate response. All actors agreed to the core principles of humanitarian work at the World Humanitarian Summit and it is now up to all of us to turn these commitments into action and hold ourselves accountable to people of concern. 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.

Having responded to emergencies over decades, the international community has developed a number of stable instruments and tools for proper emergency preparedness. Here, two of those shall be highlighted because of the challenges faced:

- 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 visa or travel permits, work permits and other obstacles delaying or even impeding proper deployment of staff. We appeal to all states to carefully examine their requirements and align them for emergency responses to the absolute minimum.

- Equally effective is the stock-piling of necessary items in relative proximity or accessibility to potential emergencies. 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. Mainly due to political considerations, the narrative of sending people back gains momentum over the understanding that any return of refugees shall happen voluntarily, in safety and dignity. Instead, 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.

This being said, we see emergency preparedness on the brink of bringing considerable change and progress through the use of modern technology and the development of new tools and models for further scenario planning, while challenging some long lasting patterns of humanitarian work. It will be up to all stakeholders to take words into action. In this perspective, we welcome UNHCR’s sustained commitment to emergency preparedness and note that this requires continued dedicated resources and related support. We look forward to the finalization of a people and action oriented UNHCR’s Emergency Policy and to regular joint discussions on this policy and responses to key emergencies. As we all work towards the Disaster Risk Reduction objectives under Agenda 2030 Goal 1 it is up to all stakeholders to turn words into action.

Thank you, Chair.