NGO statement on agenda item 2: Structure for the Global Refugee Forum

Dear Chair,

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

We appreciate the opportunity for continued engagement in the preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF). We are cognisant of the extremely short timeline for preparing this event, as well as its resource and logistical limitations. Nevertheless, we feel it is important to register at the outset our concern that: (a) two days is not enough time to do justice to the dual objectives of ensuring visibility for multi-stakeholder engagement, including with the involvement of high-level delegations, and facilitating meaningful thematic discussions; (b) holding this event only every four years – notwithstanding the high-level officials’ meetings in the interim – sends a problematic message in a time marked by continued urgency to address the many refugee crises around the world, especially and including the growing number of protracted situations.

We feel that, despite the good intentions behind the first GRF, these limitations will play out during the event and become apparent to participants, and we hope that this will lead to a reconsideration of the resources and time to be dedicated to future iterations of the GRF.

Regarding the details of the proposed GRF structure, first of all, we welcome the mix of different formats, which we hope will encourage both visibility for the issues, in-depth discussion, and progress towards resolution. However, we feel that some efforts could be made to tweak the suggested arrangements to allow more space for thematic debates.

It is commendable that a day of Multi-stakeholder roundtables and side events is being proposed for the 16th of December. We are concerned, however, that one day may not be sufficient to cover the wide range of issues to be addressed. We also wonder how the content of these discussions is to be effectively linked to the core programme of the GRF itself, especially with regard to follow-up (more on this below).

Secondly, we would suggest changing the order of some of the elements of the GRF in order to ensure more effective discussions. We think it would be beneficial to allow enough space to conclude the different thematic discussions before assessing the outcomes of the GRF. Thus, the suggested plenary session with refugee representatives from the co-sponsorship groups would ideally take place at the end of Day 2, rather than Day 1. The reflections on outcomes should also include an indication of how the thematic work from the high-level sessions is going to be taken forward – focusing on ways to ensure that the circle of participating stakeholders can be enlarged and develop dynamic working relationships after the Global Refugee Forum. The other plenary sessions on the “Compact in Action” could perhaps also be moved to Day 2, so that the space in the afternoon on Day 1 can already be used for starting the high-level thematic sessions.

This also speaks to the content and format of the thematic high-level sessions themselves. We do hope and expect that these will make use of a variety of methodologies to ensure multi-stakeholder interaction, and in particular meaningful participation from refugees themselves – including refugee youth (males and females). It will be important to ensure that refugees and civil society are able to comment critically on the content of these sessions, and not be relegated solely to being input givers on
good practices. Guidance to sessions moderators and participants could be issued in advance in this regard. We would also recommend the engagement of external facilitators for these sessions in order to open up the debate.

Regarding the participation of refugees, while we support the suggestion of including refugee contingents in government delegations, we are also concerned that this may not be pursued in all cases, and that this may also lead to an under-representation of refugees from countries and regions where their rights are most significantly restricted. Thus, we would recommend, as an additional measure, reserving a specific contingent for refugee representatives at the GRF, whose attendance should be facilitated by UNHCR. In all cases, due attentiveness must be paid to gender, age, diversity and disability considerations in order to ensure inclusive participation.

In terms of follow-up to the GRF, and as we already recommended at the first preparatory meeting in March, we would urge the establishment of dedicated workstreams linked to the themes of the high-level sessions to enable a focus on scaling up, improving, and promoting cross-regional exchanges in between Forums. The content and working mechanism of these workstreams should already form part of the discussions at the GRF, and reports from the sessions on how implementation is envisioned should be included in the concluding plenary discussion.

We hope the first Global Refugee Forum will provide an important occasion to bring together various actors including refugees and civil society, and will help promote diverse partnerships going forward.

Thank you.