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

Dear Chair,

This statement was drafted through wide consultations with NGOs.

We appreciate the opportunity for continued engagement in the preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum. We recognize the short timeline to prepare this event, as well as its resource and logistical limitations. Nevertheless, we feel important to mention that two days might not be enough to do justice to the dual objectives of ensuring visibility for multi-stakeholder engagement, including with high-level delegations, and facilitating meaningful thematic discussions. Moreover, holding this event only every four years – notwithstanding the intermediary meetings – sends a problematic message in a time marked by the urgency to address refugee crises worldwide, especially the growing number of protracted situations. As we feel that these limitations will play out during the event, we hope this will result in a reconsideration of the resources and time to be dedicated to future Forums.

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

It is commendable that a day of multi-stakeholder roundtables and side events is proposed on December 16. 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 might be linked to the core GRF programme, especially with regard to follow-up.

Secondly, we suggest changing the order of some of the elements of the GRF to ensure more effective discussions. 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 on how the thematic work from the high-level sessions will be taken forward – focusing on ways to ensure that the circle of participating stakeholders can be enlarged and develop dynamic working relationships after the GRF. The other plenary sessions on the “Compact in Action” could perhaps also be moved to day 2, so that space in the afternoon of Day 1 can already be used to start the high-level thematic sessions.

This also speaks to the content and format of the high-level thematic sessions. We hope and expect that a variety of methodologies will be used to ensure multi-stakeholder interaction, and in particular meaningful refugee participation. It will be important to ensure that refugees and civil society are able to comment on the content of those sessions, and not be relegated to simply being input givers on good practices. Guidance to session moderators and participants should therefore be issued in advance. We also recommend the engagement of external facilitators for these sessions in order to open up the debate.

Regarding refugee participation, 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 certain categories of refugees. Thus, we 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, attention must be paid to AGD and disability considerations to ensure inclusive participation.

In terms of follow-up to the GRF, and as we already recommended at the first Preparatory Meeting, we urge the establishment of dedicated workstreams linked to the high-level sessions’ themes 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 be discussed at the Forum, and reports from the sessions on how implementation is envisioned should be included in the closing plenary.

We hope that the first GRF will provide an important opportunity to bring together diverse actors, including refugees and civil society, and help promote partnerships going forward.

A detailed version of this statement is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.