NGO Statement on Follow-up to the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges

Agenda item 6(a)

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

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

In December 2016, the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges addressed the crucial and very timely topic of children on the move and we were encouraged by the outcomes. The Dialogue provided a unique opportunity for refugee children and youth to make their voices heard at the global level. They made a strong call to the international community to listen to them and include them in the solutions. If we do not act now, we face a real risk of seeing an entire generation lose hope in the future.

The next 18 months will see the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework as well as the development of a Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. We must now focus on ensuring that the outcomes of the Dialogue inform and shape this work and translate the New York Declaration commitments into action. We therefore encourage Member States, UN agencies, civil society and the private sector to join forces, involving affected children and youth, to improve the response to the needs and protection of children on the move and to include a strong child rights focus in both Global Compacts.

To this end, a broad coalition of organisations, including the UN and NGOs have come together to promote an inter-agency initiative called “Child Rights in the Global Compacts”, to ensure that both Global Compacts include coherent and harmonized child focused goals, targets and indicators similar to, and in line with, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We encourage Member States to join us and support this initiative.

This common child rights agenda should follow an overall ethics of care and protection, based on the core principle that children on the move are children first and foremost, independent of their status. Their best interests must be the primary consideration at all times.

We call on Member States, UNHCR and other stakeholders to uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and to champion the rights and needs of children and youth on the move by taking the following concrete steps:
1. **Guarantee a child’s right to a legal identity**, including the right to birth registration, nationality and documentation, and recognize that no child should be stateless.

2. **Prioritize data collection on children and youth and ensure greater utilization of child and youth-specific data and research** on drivers and impacts for evidence-based action.

3. States and UNHCR should urgently **invest in strengthening child protection systems** responding to the specific needs of boys and girls on the move, including strengthening systems for best interest determination, ensuring child-friendly and protection-sensitive approaches for the reception of children on the move and strengthening cross-border coordination and cooperation, through the allocation of adequate financial resources and qualified child protection specialists.

4. **Strengthen access to age-specific and appropriate solutions information across borders** to facilitate children and young people’s self-protection and informed decision-making.

5. **Prioritize reunification of children** with immediate and extended family members in resettled countries.

6. **End the immigration detention of children.** The detention of children on the basis of their or their parents’ migratory status is never in their best interests. Right-based alternatives to detention must be developed, enshrined in legislation and implemented in practice.

7. **Ensure access to essential services** to all children on the move, particularly to quality education within 30 days of their initial displacement.

8. **Promote diversity and tolerance**, and actively combat xenophobia and discrimination

Finally and most importantly, as we heard several times during the Dialogue, children and youth on the move are critical partners in finding the right solutions to respond to their needs and we should include them in a discussion on all policies and decisions that affect them. We therefore welcome the High Commissioner’s suggestion of establishing a Youth Refugee Advisory Board as well as the initiative of opening an online portal for sharing good practices and referring to the **Seven Core Actions for Refugee Youth**, identified as an outcome of the Global Refugee Youth Consultations in 2016, to guide and ensure their meaningful engagement and accountability. Such initiatives need to be adequately resourced and planned. We look forward to working with UNHCR on this.

The NGO community looks forward to continuing their collaboration with UNHCR, Member States, and all other stakeholders in stepping up the ambition to ensure greater protection of children and all people on the move.

The statement will be made available on [icvanetwork.org](http://icvanetwork.org).

Thank you, Chair.