Introduction:

Merci Monsieur le président. C’est pour moi un privilège de m’adresser au Comité aujourd’hui. Je ferai cette présentation en anglais mais je serai heureux de répondre à des questions en français si nécessaire.

I work with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, a global network of NGOs. Based in Geneva, I have followed the Compact process closely; sitting at meetings; and exchanging extensively with NGOs, UNHCR and Member States along the way.

I will draw on this experience to present reflections on the Refugee Compact and how it might be implemented. In doing so, I will endeavor to highlight potential implications for Canada’s refugee policy.

Origins of the Compact

The origins of the Refugee Compact are found in the 2015 crises, which highlighted major weaknesses of the refugee regime, particularly:

- the lack of clear guidelines to promote international cooperation in this field;
- the disproportionate responsibility borne by a few States, either as financial contributors or as hosting countries.

All this demonstrated our collective inability to provide predictable, equitable and sustainable responses to refugee situations.

In reaction, UN Member States called for the development of a Refugee Compact and asked UNHCR to implement the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which is now an integral part of the Compact.

This opened up a historic opportunity to reinvigorate the global refugee regime, at a critical time.

How was the Compact developed?
The Compact was developed in 2017-2018 through an inclusive process gathering Member States, UNHCR and other stakeholders – including NGOs. There is therefore collective ownership of this document.

The heart of the process was a series of 6 formal consultations on the basis of draft texts. Each Member State had opportunities to comment, flag red lines, and suggest changes to the drafts. There were also opportunities to provide written inputs to UNHCR and more informal events and discussions, including some organized by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations.

I believe Canadian NGOs provided inputs and Canada was actually very much involved in the process, from the start in 2016 when Amb. McCarney was chairing the UNHCR governing body and later on, through various initiatives.

The Compact is now scheduled for adoption at the General Assembly, in New York, next month. Already last week, UN Member States showed strong support for its objectives.

The final text of the Compact is a prime example of what functioning multilateralism can achieve: despite inherent compromises, a common vision was outlined to address contemporary forced displacement challenges.

**What is the Compact**

The Compact can be seen as a blueprint or a set of guidelines to reinvigorate the refugee regime and implement more efficiently and predictably commitments already made through the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol and other instruments.

As such, the Compact is practical in nature, rather than normative. It reaffirms existing obligations such as the core principle of non-refoulement and details arrangements that States and other actors can activate to enhance assistance and protection to refugees as well as the search for durable solutions.

A major contribution of the Compact is to propose arrangements for more comprehensive and predictable response. Having more organized approaches, avoiding reinventing the wheel each time, would be a significant progress.

Among the main feature of the Compact, I would highlight:

1. Arrangements to **broaden the base of support** and expand responsibility-sharing. This, mainly through a Global Refugee Forum, conceptualized as a new form of regular pledging event, which will be multi-stakeholder (not just about State contributions); go beyond financial contributions, also calling for resettlement places, technical
assistance, and policy changes; bring **accountability** through a follow-up process on commitments made; and an opportunity to showcase and exchange **good practices**. The **success of the Compact will depend heavily on its ability to increase responsibility-sharing**, especially as this will determine actions that can be taken at regional and national level to pursue more efficient refugee policies.

2. The Compact further advances the **global shift away from the camp approach to promote refugee self-reliance and their inclusion** in the communities that host them, in national systems and in development plans. It also calls for constructive cooperation between humanitarian and development actors and is consistent with other international initiatives such as the Grand Bargain and the Agenda 2030.

3. Consistent with the previous point, the Compact places considerable **emphasis on national ownership and leadership in planning and implementing** refugee responses. This is not a totally new dimension but the Compact envisages added support to help governments undertake this role properly, in accordance with international standards and principles.

**How will the Compact be implemented?**

The adoption of the Compact will **not mark the end of the process** but rather the **beginning of collective efforts to realize its full potential**.

First of all because there are elements in the text that will require **further thinking and collective elaboration**. For example, reflections and exchanges are already being set in motion to define how to organize a **successful Global Refugee Forum**. Other elements of the Compact that I cannot dwell on – for lack of time - include the activation of Support Platforms at regional level; the creation of an **Asylum Capacity Support Group** to help national authorities strengthen their asylum structures; **channeling support to strengthen national systems** (e.g. education and health systems) so that they can include refugees and enhance options for durable solutions, including through a **three-year strategy to expand access to resettlement and complementary pathways**.

Let’s also remember that the **Compact is already being implemented through the CRRF**. The implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework over the past two years has demonstrated the potential of new approaches. Over the past two years, new political will and partnerships have been mobilized in many corners of the world, geared towards improving the lives of refugee. **Challenges surely remain, but we can build on positive momentum.**

Finally, I believe that that **partnerships will be at the center** of the Compact’s implementation, bringing the **multiplier effect required** to expand our collective capacity to
respond to refugee crises. The Compact is truly meant to develop multi-stakeholder approaches, including with the participation of refugees themselves.

Implementation will also depend critically on sustained advocacy and support from civil society.

Impact on and Role for Canada

In evaluating the impact the Compact can have on Canada and on us all, it is important to analyze the risks associated with the current deficiencies of the refugee regime. Failing refugees can only lead to radicalization and lost generations. This is in nobody’s interest. Moreover, there are high expectations from host States, which await further support to provide assistance, protection and solutions to refugees. We need better responsibility-sharing and cooperation arrangements to rebuild trust among States and the credibility of the refugee regime. The Compact and other efforts can help doing this.

Globally, Canada is regarded as a leader in refugee policy. Canada is recognized for its major contributions in terms of resettlement and complementary pathways. It is also a champion of refugee education and on the protection and empowerment of women and girls.

NGOs are grateful for all this and would be delighted to see more. Given the dire needs, we do hope that Canada will be a strong contributor to the Global Refugee Forum, through commitments but also through showcasing good practices. Because contributions will not necessarily only mean higher funding levels or resettlement places (although this would be truly great!). It will also mean continuing to lead by example; sharing your experience and expertise; and using your good offices and convening power.

There is therefore a lot that you already do that will bring important contributions to the implementation of the Compact and help bring the needed additionalities. To take a couple of concrete examples:

- Your Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative aims to help and inspire other countries to open new pathways for refugee protection. This is exactly the spirit of the Compact.
- Last summer, the Permanent Mission of Canada in Geneva organized the first meeting around the idea of launching a Solidarity Approach for the People of Rakhine State. Doing so, Canada provided the space to launch an innovative approach which is hoped to help address the plight of Rohingya refugees. This is also the type of initiatives that the Compact envisages.
Canada could also benefit from revived international cooperation. Your country does host refugees and can certainly learn from others’ experiences related to the inclusion of refugees into host communities and national systems.

Conclusion:

NGOs have occasionally questioned some elements of the Compact, for example the lack of consideration for internally displaced persons; the focus on countries of origin and root causes for a document that is humanitarian in nature; the country ownership angle and some emphasis on repatriation. They have also expressed a desire for more binding mechanisms, especially for responsibility-sharing and accountability. The Compact is therefore not perfect and not seen as a panacea.

But overall, NGOs see this instrument as a major achievement that can help re-shape refugee responses. This will not happen overnight. It will require political will and engagement from all stakeholders. NGOs are eager to do their part.

NGOs are actually already working to operationalize the ideals of the Global Compact on Refugee and ready to collaborate with UNHCR, Members States and other stakeholders to make the Global Compact on Refugees a game changer in refugee response.

Thank you.