NGO statement on the Global Compact on Refugees and the preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum

Dear Chair,

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

This statement has been drafted in consultation with a wide number of NGOs.

The Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December of this year represents the first major opportunity to turn the Global Compact on Refugees into action. As civil society representatives, we are eager to contribute to the preparation process to ensure it delivers tangible improvements in the lives of refugees and their host communities on three different levels. **First, the GRF Member States and other stakeholders should pledge concrete contributions based on actual needs. Second, there needs to be a consistent way to keep track of pledged contributions over time and align them to GCR objectives. Third, refugees and host communities must be engaged before, during and after the Forum in ways that support meaningful participation.**

I. **GRF Member States and other stakeholders should pledge concrete contributions based on collectively identified needs**

We welcome the Global Refugee Forum as the first high-level gathering to primarily focus on refugees and the many challenges they face. In this regard, the 2019 GRF will be the first conference of its kind. At the same time, we are acutely aware of the risk that the outcome of the Forum might replicate the dynamics we have witnessed in other previous conferences, namely that pledges will be either too vague or left unchecked to make a difference. For the GRF to signal the step change refugees and their hosts so desperately require, it will be essential to encourage pledges that are concrete, specific and time-bound.

To do so, we strongly recommend anchoring individual pledges in the four objectives of the GCR, as well as its ultimate goal of making responsibility-sharing more predictable and equitable. Pledges should also meet needs identified at the local, national and regional level through extensive multi-stakeholder consultations. **NGOs stand ready to support national governments in assessing needs and urge UNHCR and international actors to sustain these preparatory efforts,** which should happen sooner rather than later. To date, however, GRF preparations at the country level have yet to start and regional consultations either will only briefly touch on the GRF or have been scheduled in the latter part of the year. The GRF preparatory process seems therefore limited to global discussions in Geneva with no information on what actually needs to happen on the ground. We still have time to reverse this trend but we must act quickly. On our part, we NGOs are reaching out to UNHCR Country Offices to inquire about GRF consultations and look forward to sharing our preliminary thinking on the final day of the UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations in early July.

With regard to co-sponsoring arrangements, we recommend UNHCR set up a transparent system to share information on potential and confirmed co-sponsors by GRF theme online as quickly as possible, as recently
announced at the informal GRF briefing. We also ask that UNHCR disclose whether future financial pledges are new or renew past commitments.

II. There needs to be a consistent way to keep track of pledged contributions over time and align them to GCR objectives

NGOs appreciate the challenges in mobilising adequate support for the Global Refugee Forum in the coming months, particularly at a time when the public narrative on refugees is far from positive. Pledging contributions to the GRF, however, should not disregard all the work that has been done to build a credible system to monitor GCR implementation, including commitments that will be made at the GRF. NGOs have made a steady and constructive contribution to the design of GCR indicators since last year and we remain eager to support their development in the lead up to the GRF. In this regard, we note that the GRF pledging format that has recently been made available does not include any mention of GCR indicators, nor of any follow-up and review mechanisms mentioned in para. 103 of the GCR – particularly the mechanism for tracking the implementation of pledges and contributions. We would therefore like UNHCR to clarify two things: first, how the GRF pledging process is supposed to align to the GCR monitoring system so that pledges can coherently contribute to the achievement of GCR objectives and outcomes; and second, when the mechanism for tracking the implementation of pledges and contributions will be made available in the lead up to the GRF? Reporting on GRF commitments does not need to be burdensome and can contribute to a system supporting States and other stakeholders in fulfilling their commitments made at the Forum. However, it does need to be consistent to the ultimate purpose of the GCR or we will end up with a plethora of promises that are impossible to track. In this regard, only pledges that can be provably tracked should be regarded as official contributions to the Forum.

On the GCR indicators more specifically, we welcome some of the revisions circulated by UNHCR at the beginning of June. We hope the final version of the monitoring framework will include robust indicators that speak to refugee protection and help measure outcomes, rather than inputs or short-term outputs for refugees and their hosts. We also recommend finalizing indicators before the GRF, rather than having an iterative process, which would jeopardise the credibility of the overall GCR monitoring by continually shifting the goalposts and the baselines required to track progress.

III. Refugees and host communities must be engaged in the Global Refugee Forum in ways that support meaningful participation.

NGOs welcome UNHCR’s plans to include refugees in the GRF preparatory process. We particularly applaud the decision to include refugee representatives in national delegations and to take into account the outcomes of preparatory meetings organised by refugees themselves. Going forward, it will be important to adopt a variety of other innovative approaches to ensure a broad consultation with refugees. UNHCR will also need to establish a transparent and inclusive mechanism to ensure these consultations feed into the pledging process. At the national level, similar mechanisms will need to be put in place by the country government to allow for meaningful dialogue with refugees and their host communities on possible contributions to the GRF. The option of having refugees and host communities co-sponsor a specific theme should also be pursued as a way to promote their agency, particularly in the case of women and girls.

In conclusion, NGOs wish to reiterate their firm support for the first Global Refugee Forum. We believe concrete pledges, robust accountability and inclusive participation will be the key ingredients of its success. We are determined to do our part to support the GRF preparations and urge UNHCR, Member States and other stakeholders to do the same as quickly as possible.

Thank you.