NGO statement on UNHCR’s engagement with internally displaced persons

Dear Chair,

This statement was drafted through wide consultations with NGOs and aims to reflect a diversity of views.

Around 28 million new internal displacements associated with conflicts and disasters were recorded last year. By late 2018, over 41 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence. With numbers rising and many situations of protracted displacement remaining unresolved or worsening, governments, UN agencies and NGOs should work together to improve both responses and planning to address internal displacement and the plight of IDPs. NGOs appreciate UNHCR’s ongoing efforts to enhance its engagement with IDPs. We, however, caution that they should not slip down UNHCR’s agenda as a number of internal processes and preparations for the Global Refugee Forum get increasing attention.

In 2018-19, UNHCR consulted NGOs on the development of its IDP Policy. We those efforts as well as the most recent update provided. We also seek clarification on whether the substantial feedback provided to UNHCR by NGOs has been integrated into subsequent drafts; whether there will be any further consultations before issuing the policy; and most importantly, on when the Policy will be finalised given it is meant to be aligned with the Strategic Directions 2017-2021.

As 2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Kampala Convention, the African Union is celebrating the Year of Refugees, Returnees and IDPs. In its support to the African Union on the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Kampala Convention, we encourage UNHCR to explain how it will ensure that voices of IDPs and NGOs are considered? Moreover, as co-chair of the GP20 Plan of Action, what further actions will UNHCR take to ensure stronger in-country implementations of the plan?

In country situations, governments sometimes continue to deny humanitarian and protection needs and access to rights of IDPs and host communities. UNHCR should continue to undertake strong advocacy with these governments to allow humanitarian access to affected populations, resolve protracted crises and guarantee enjoyment of rights. Particularly for girls, heightened risks of GBV require a robust response, UNHCR’s coordination and continuous advocacy with governments to strengthen child protection systems and access to those. In other cases, major internal displacement crises in some countries, such as Yemen, Somalia, and DRC, are eclipsed by seemingly more urgent refugee crises. UNHCR should continue to push governments and the international community to address these crises. UNHCR should also continue robust advocacy against forced and/or premature return of IDPs to their places of origin and continue to engage strongly in IDP situations in large refugee hosting countries.

Stronger coherence and integration between programming for refugees and IDPs is also critical, especially to ensure that people returning to their home countries are not displaced again upon return,
particularly in countries with high levels of insecurity, such as South Sudan, Myanmar, DRC, Syria, Iraq. Closer work with local NGOs, community-based organisations and stronger monitoring of returnees – measuring the success of their return over appropriate timeframes – is therefore important to ensure their needs are understood and supported in UNHCR’s programming, and to promote truly durable solutions. Linking humanitarian and development programming will also be critical to ensure integrated responses across different affected populations. How is the new Division of Resilience and Solutions working to ensure internal displacement is integrated across its work?

Forecasting risks to sustainability of returns, including political, socioeconomic and security risks is a key element of ensuring durable solutions for displaced people. Conversely, prevention planning and forecasting should be used consistently to assess the risk of future displacements and prepare accordingly. Alongside early engagement with development actors, risk planning is critical in preventing displacement situations from becoming protracted. This is relevant in both conflict and disaster displacement contexts which are increasingly intersecting, for example where resource scarcity associated with adverse impacts of climate change forces people from their homes, bringing them into conflict with other communities. As a member of the UN Climate Change Conventions’ Task Force on Displacement, UNHCR should invest in the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force as adopted by COP24, and do so in a coordinated manner with the other members of the Task Force, the UN system and other stakeholders.

There are still challenges in the timely and accurate collection and analysis of data, which should be disaggregated by location, age, gender and diversity. Lack of disaggregation makes it difficult to understand and address the specific needs of different displaced groups through targeted interventions, which risks leaving people behind. Improving efforts to ensure that data collected on different populations is interoperable – that is, that different data sets can speak to each other – is crucial to understanding the drivers and linkages between different forms of displacement, and to promoting durable solutions.

In our statement here last year, we welcomed the establishment of a Joint UNHCR-World Bank Data Centre on forced displacement. Recognising the number of actors working on internal displacement data, and the different existing initiatives and centres focusing on improving humanitarian and development data, can UNHCR discuss how the Joint Data Centre will engage agencies and civil society partners to promote interoperability, support collaboration and ensure complementarity and coherence of efforts to improve the evidence base on internal displacement? Concerning its population data management package, can UNHCR provide updates on the roll-out of the package and lessons learned during the pilot phase?

Dear Chair Person, we look forward to continuing our work with UNHCR to improve responses to internal displacement. Through meaningful partnerships between UNHCR and NGOs on policy development, data collection and analysis, and operational responses across the whole spectrum of displacement, we can together help address, prevent and resolve displacement crises and ensure the needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs are met.

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

Thank you.