NGO statement on UNHCR’s engagement with internally displaced persons

Dear Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organisations. It has been drafted through wide consultations with NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

Around 28 million new internal displacements associated with conflict and disasters were recorded in 2018. By the end of 2018, more than 41 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence. With these numbers continuing to rise, and many situations of protracted displacement remaining unresolved or worsening, it is absolutely essential that governments, UN agencies and civil society 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 internally displaced persons. We also urge UNHCR to ensure that IDPs do not slip down its agenda as a number of internal processes and preparations for the Global Refugee Forum get increasing attention.

In 2018 and 2019, UNHCR consulted NGOs widely on the development of its IDP Policy, among other issues, and these efforts were appreciated. We appreciate the most recent update provided, but 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 the policy is issued; and most importantly, on when the Policy will be finalised given it is meant to be aligned with the Strategic Directions 2017-2021.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention). The African Union has declared 2019 the Year of Refugees, Returnees and IDPs: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa. In its support to the African Union on the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Kampala Convention, how is UNHCR working to ensure that the voices of internally displaced people, local, national and international NGOs are considered? As co-chair of the GP20 Plan of Action, what further actions will UNHCR take to ensure stronger implementation of the plan in countries?

With regard to situations in specific countries, in some contexts, governments continue to deny the humanitarian and protection needs and access to rights of internally displaced people and host communities. UNHCR should continue to undertake strong advocacy with these governments on the

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need to allow humanitarian access to affected populations, resolve protracted crises and guarantee the enjoyment of rights of internally displaced people. For girls in particular, heightened risks of gender-based violence such as trafficking, sexual violence, early and forced marriage requires a robust response, coordination from UNHCR and continuous advocacy with governments to strengthen child protection systems and access to these systems. In other cases, major internal displacement crises in some countries – such as Yemen, Somalia, CAR and DRC – are eclipsed by seemingly more urgent refugee crises elsewhere, and 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 countries hosting significant numbers of refugees.

Stronger coherence and integration between programming for refugees and internally displaced people is also critical, in particular to ensure that people returning to their home countries are not displaced on their return, particularly in countries with high levels of insecurity, such as South Sudan, Myanmar, DRC, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq. Closer work with local NGOs and community-based organisation, 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 for both returning refugees and internally displaced people. 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?

A key element of ensuring durable solutions for displaced people will be forecasting risks to the sustainability of returns, including political, socioeconomic and security risks. Conversely, prevention planning and forecasting should be used consistently to assess the risk of future displacements and prepare accordingly. Along with early engagement with development actors at the onset of a crisis, risk planning is critical in preventing displacement situations from becoming protracted. This is relevant in both conflict and disaster displacement contexts, which increasingly are intersecting, for example where resource scarcity associated with the adverse impacts of climate change forces people from their homes and brings them into conflict with other communities. With regard to its role as member of the UN Climate Change Conventions’ Task Force on Displacement, we call on UNHCR to invest in the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force as adopted by the COP24 in 2018, and to do so in a coordinated manner with the other members of the Task Force, the broader UN system and other stakeholders.

There continue to be ongoing challenges in the collection and analysis of data that is timely, accurate and disaggregated by location, age, gender and diversity wherever possible. 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 (including asylum-seekers refugees, returning refugees and IDPs) 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 at this forum in 2018, we welcomed UNHCR and the World Bank’s announcement of the establishment of a Joint Data Centre on forced displacement. Recognising the number of actors working on internal displacement data, and the different existing initiatives and centres who focus 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? With regard to its population data management package, can UNHCR provide updates on the roll-out of the package and lessons learned during the pilot phase?

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 internally displaced people are met.

Thank you very much for your attention.