NGO Statement on the Middle East and North Africa  

Agenda item 3(a)ii

Thank you, Chair.

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

Six years after the outbreak and despite a recent ceasefire, the Syrian conflict remains the defining driver for protection concerns in Syria and across the region. There are 6.3 million IDPs and about 4.9 million people displaced regionally. 13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance, including some 4.7 million people in hard-to-reach locations.

The vast majority of Syrian refugees continue to be hosted by neighbouring countries, namely Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. This is an expression of their solidarity but also of the failure of the larger international community to share more equitably the responsibility of hosting refugees.

Resettlement, one of the most visible forms of international solidarity, continues to be threatened by political trends. Despite three major international conferences focused on responsibility sharing last year, countries have failed to increase resettlement for Syrian refugees. Currently, less than 3% of them have been resettled.

The recent suspension of the U.S. resettlement programme and travel ban for Syrian nationals have further intensified this crisis. We join UNHCR in urging the US government to resume this programme. Protection obligations should be honoured in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Inside Syria, people continue to live under dire conditions, even though the scale of direct military confrontations has reduced after the ceasefire. Ongoing conflict and attacks by ISIL continue to impact daily life in many parts of the country.

As Jordan closed its borders to newly arriving refugees in 2016, significant numbers of Syrians are now stranded in “The Berm” area, between Syria and Jordan where access is

2. UNOCHA update as of 26 January  
4. The 1951 Refugee Convention particularly calls on states to apply its provisions "without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin" and enshrines the principle of non-refoulement.
difficult. About 80% of the Syrian population live in urban host communities, while about 100,000 have to remain in the official Za’atari and Azraq camps. Bureaucratic hurdles have made life difficult for refugees, adding to the high cost of living and the lack of adequate economic resources.

Unfortunately, the issuance of 200,000 work permits to enhance Syrian refugees’ access to work has been slow and complicated. Furthermore, UNHCR should clarify which services refugees may no longer receive once they obtain a work permit.

We nonetheless commend UNHCR for a major advancement in identifying persons with disabilities in Jordan, where the “Washington Group” set of questions were incorporated into refugee registration interviews and vulnerability assessments. Progress shows this approach should be replicated in other countries.

**Lebanon** hosts 1.5 million refugees from Syria, in addition to about 280,000 Palestinian refugees. One in four people living in Lebanon is a refugee from Syria – the largest concentration of refugees per capita worldwide. With a worsening political climate towards refugees and because of administrative hurdles, at least 70% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon lack a permit to stay.

Currently about 3.1 million IDPs in **Iraq** are in need of humanitarian support, in addition to approximately 225,000 Syrian refugees. There is also an expectation that the operation in Mosul has the potential to be the single largest humanitarian operation in the world in 2017.

As the situation continues to deteriorate within **Libya**, nearly half a million people have fled within the country and across the region. Human rights abuses persist and many marginalized IDPs are forced to live in very poor conditions, sheltering in bombed and abandoned public buildings. Although agencies work to alleviate the conditions of IDPs, NGOs and UN agencies have not been able to implement at scale.

We commend UNHCR’s efforts to assist, including through local registration and cash-based interventions. NGOs can support such initiatives and call on UNHCR to make full use of this capacity.

We are deeply concerned about systematic violence against refugees and migrants in Libya. Multiple reports describe the harrowing conditions prevalent in centres where individuals are detained after being intercepted at sea. We are deeply troubled by developing EU plans to transfer responsibility for managing migratory movements to Libya. This can only increase harm and suffering by promoting arrests and detention in Libya. We therefore support the

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5 50,000 such work permits were to be provided by the end of 2016 but c. 38,000 permits have been issued so far.
4 Based on pilot use, UNHCR identified 27% of households with disabilities, well above information currently on-file with UNHCR.
3 Legal entry and stay have been tightened since October 2014. Residence permits are expensive and difficult to obtain, and many refugees are pushed to provide evidence of a Lebanese sponsor.
6 Université Saint-Joseph Institut des Sciences Politiques, Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Full Report (V.1.0), August 2015.
UNHCR-IOM call to “move away from migration management based on the automatic detention of refugees and migrants in inhumane conditions in Libya”.\textsuperscript{10}

Egypt is home to thousands of refugees and asylum seekers\textsuperscript{11} and its Mediterranean coast has become a key departure point to Europe.\textsuperscript{12} Over 3,400 people have reportedly disappeared at sea in 2015. Factors behind increased movements to Europe include loss of hope, deepening poverty, deteriorating psychological and medical conditions, limited livelihood and education opportunities, and aid shortfalls.

Despite being signatory to the 1951 Convention and 1969 OAU Convention, Egypt maintains several reservations, which deprive refugees of access to work and services. This forces them to live on the fringe of society, further isolating them. UN agencies and INGOs lack resources to expand operational capacity.

In Yemen, 18.8 million people\textsuperscript{13} continue to require some form of humanitarian assistance or protection. 3.2 million people have been displaced since March 2015. Civilians have endured the worst of this conflict with recurrent violations of humanitarian and human rights law. NGOs call on UNHCR and the donor community to help ensure IDPs and refugees have access to basic services, assistance, adequate protection and long term solutions.

Concerns about other displaced groups in the region remain. Their protection needs should be addressed. Lack of attention to their needs can lead to protests, as seen with Sudanese refugees in Jordan in 2016.

Forced displacement remains a fundamental cause and consequence of statelessness, a trend which has amplified with the Syrian crisis.\textsuperscript{14} NGOs remain concerned at the low levels of accession to both the 1954 and 1961 conventions on Statelessness and call for steps to ratify these treaties. States should also develop national legislation to ensure the elimination of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. NGOs support UNHCR’s campaign to eradicate statelessness by 2024.

In conclusion, we remind all actors that emergency response in conflict situations must systematically be based on needs and respect for humanitarian principles.

A longer version of the statement will be made available on ICVA’s website at icvanetwork.org

Thank you, Chair.

\textsuperscript{10} https://www.iom.int/news/iom-unhcr-joint-statement-european-council-meeting-malta
\textsuperscript{11} As of end of 2016, a total of 250,671 asylum-seekers and refugees were registered with UNHCR in Egypt.
\textsuperscript{12} According to UNHCR, departures from Egypt now represent 10% of the overall arrivals in Europe.
\textsuperscript{13} Out of Yemen’s 27.4 million inhabitants.
\textsuperscript{14} http://syrianationality.org/