Honorable Deputy High Commissioner, Chairperson, NGO colleagues, and UNHCR,

I would first like to express my sincere thanks to the UNHCR’s Inter-Agency Unit and ICVA for their incredible support in preparation for the Consultations. I would also like to thank the many focal points, session rapporteurs and individual participants for their meaningful contributions. With this year representing the largest UNHCR-NGO Consultations ever, it is difficult to do justice to the breadth, depth and diversity of topics covered. I therefore request your understanding if I only cover some of the issues and I encourage you all to read the final report of the Consultations where all of the sessions will be summarized in full.

This year’s Consultations have sought to focus on Women’s Leadership and Participation. This theme is particularly important, as women and girls continue to face significant obstacles in claiming and enjoying their rights. As we have heard this week, displacement all too often serves to exacerbate existing inequalities, amplifying the discrimination and hardship faced by women and girls. We have heard from countless dynamic and powerful women and girls, who have reminded us that women are not just survivors, but also committed leaders, advocates and allies. We have also heard from men and boys who are critical champions of women’s empowerment. The High Commissioner himself stressed the importance of empowering women and girls and called for "a meaningful commitment from all of us to do everything possible to make this empowerment happen."

Taking up the High Commissioner’s call to action, I would like to recall the 2001 Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the nine areas of concern that came
out of the 2011 Dialogues with Refugee Women. They are just as relevant now as they were when they were drafted, but they should also be expanded to reflect the world in which we live today, including other forms of forced migration, such as internal displacement, and statelessness. There is an urgent need to put in place time bound action plans and measurable goals in order to meet the full implementation of the Five Commitments in next five years. Let’s be bold and hold ourselves accountable to updating these commitments and working together to make them a reality.

**Commitment #1: To Meaningful Participation**

We have heard this week, that meaningful participation remains elusive, particularly in the face of large-scale displacement and the proliferation of conflicts – from Syria, to Central African Republic, to South Sudan, and most recently Iraq. Participants have clearly stated that meaningful gender-balanced participation is not just a development issue. It must be integrated into the earliest phase of emergency response and continue well into the achievement of durable solutions. NGOs have emphasized that empowerment cannot be imposed. We must provide women and girls with both the opportunities and the tools to succeed. Women and girls must define empowerment on their own terms. We have also heard from young people about their desire to not only participate, but also play a leadership role in their communities, calling for more participation of displaced youth at next year’s consultations. This leadership starts with education. With only 12% of refugee girls enrolled in secondary school, we are a long way off the vision that post-primary education be a promise not a dream. The Asia Bureau reminded us that meaningful participation of women and girls also requires that men create space for women to not only participate, but also lead. Meaningful participation is just one step toward empowerment. It’s about changing norms and challenging inequality.
Commitment #2: on Registration and Documentation

NGOs expressed serious concern about the continued plight of stateless people, recalling that in many places, statelessness is caused by gender-blind and gender-biased laws. The High Commissioner himself noted that in 27 states women are not legally allowed to pass on nationality to their children. In concrete terms, the MENA Bureau reminded us that if Syrian refugees lose their fathers, they risk losing their ties to Syria. We were inspired by incredible individuals and national organizations led by women, campaigning for women to have the legal right to pass on nationality to their children. We welcome the launch of the International Campaign to End Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws launched yesterday by UNHCR, UN Women and civil society. The launch of this campaign offers hope that if we band together, and challenge discriminatory laws, we may very well achieve the dream of eradicating statelessness by 2024.

Commitment #3: on food and non-food items management and distribution

NGOs and UNHCR challenged traditional assumptions around protection and assistance for all displaced persons, calling for a total re-writing of this commitment, particularly in light of the effort to move away from encampment towards non-camp refugee hosting arrangements. NGOs highlighted the increasing role of cash programming in meeting the needs of displaced women, and challenged us to question the targeting of women on the basis of assumed vulnerability, as opposed to clearly identified needs. NGO participants and UNHCR also encouraged us to look not only at management and distribution, but also at the impact of cash assistance on family dynamics, power relations and decision-making at the household level. We also know increasingly that the protection and assistance of displaced persons is not just about food and non-food items. It’s also about meeting countless other needs and rights, including those less ‘visible’, such as access to mental health services and psychosocial support.
Commitment #4: on Economic Empowerment

We are seeing exciting progress in efforts to promote self-reliance and livelihoods, including for women and girls. NGOs and UNHCR both recalled that this is not just about 6 month vocational training schemes. Instead, it’s about prioritizing displaced women as decision-makers, putting them in the driver’s seat and providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to identify their own livelihoods strategies, while also helping to link women and girls, as well as men and boys to the market and private sector. Self-reliance and livelihoods is fundamental to preventing the negative coping strategies that we are seeing play out in emergencies and protracted refugee situations around the world, including survival sex, early and forced marriage and child labour. NGOs also highlighted the need to advocate for refugee work rights, calling for the creation of Refugee Work Rights Coalition. The Protection at Sea session reminded us that we must also look at the whole continuum of displacement, including an understanding of the drivers of forced migration, such as the absence of livelihoods opportunities in areas of origin and transit. Resettlement colleagues recalled that resettlement alone does not offer a durable solution if refugee women are not provided the opportunities to restart their lives, highlighting the important role of cities in successful integration. The Africa Bureau reminded us that in the face of new emergencies and unresolved protracted displacement situations resources are more stretched than ever, with self-reliance and livelihoods at risk of being forgotten.

And finally, commitment #5, on Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Sadly, despite the fact that more than ten years have passed since the Five Commitments to Refugee Women were drafted, sexual and gender based violence remains a critical issue of concern. Building on the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, participants at the consultations cited countless examples that demonstrate the necessity for urgent action. We heard terrible stories of women’s experience of violence during flight, including the staggering statistic that 6 out of 10 unaccompanied girls fleeing to the United States are
survivors of SGBV. We were reminded that we not only need to consider the risks faced by women and girls, but also by men and boy survivors, as well as the specific risks faced by young women, elderly, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQI displaced persons. Presentations also highlighted the importance of creating a dignified space for community-led protective action, supported by partners and UNHCR alike.

To conclude, it is clear that we have more work to do. That change will only come when men, women, boys and girls stand together in support of the empowerment of displaced women and girls. We must continue to break the silence and ensure that we strive to support women and girls in the pursuit of the full realization of their rights.

I will end with a quote from Katrina Maliamauv, from the Asia Bureau Session:

“Let’s connect.
Let’s challenge.
Let’s be uncomfortable.
Let’s deconstruct.
Let’s build.
Let’s light the fire within and
Let’s make that flame grow.”

Thank you.