NGO Statement on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)

Agenda Item 5 – Coordination

Thank you, Chair.

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

To begin with, we would like to note progress in the practical application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), particularly at the regional levels. In the East and Horn of Africa, notable progress has been made with the recent validation of the IGAD Road Map and Results Framework of the Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan. NGOs welcome the detailed schedule of work and NGO participation in the planning. In Central America as well, we welcome the fact that UNHCR has released details about the process and timeline for the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (CRPSF). NGOs in the region are eager to contribute to this process and are planning various consultations that will feed into the Global Compact on Refugees process. However, we cannot help noticing that a pronounced regional imbalance persists in the design and implementation of the CRRF, which continues to focus on less-developed countries of first asylum. While we acknowledge that these countries are important partners in refugee protection, and particularly need international solidarity due to the severity of challenges they face, the role of the developed countries in the CRRF cannot be limited to that of donors. To be truly “comprehensive”, the CRRF should, for example, more actively promote durable solutions as a central piece of global responsibility-sharing on refugee protection.

NGOs worldwide would welcome regular concrete updates on how the CRRF application is unfolding in specific countries and suggest making more use of the UNHCR CRRF Web Portal to share up-to-date information and documents. We nonetheless also note positive developments at country level: For example, we welcome the launch of the CRRF Secretariat in Tanzania, inclusive of national and international NGOs. The meeting on 7 September was an opportunity to agree on the newly released roadmap for the CRRF implementation, as well as Terms of Reference for the Secretariat and Steering Committee. We are looking forward to learn more about the details of this roadmap, including timelines and a more clearly formulated role for the government.

We also warmly welcome the planned and promulgated legal reforms in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. This trend is in line with commitments made at the 20 September 2016 Leaders’ Summit. The intended changes that would allow refugees greater freedom of movement and access to education, work, and services will have an immensely positive impact on the quality of asylum for hundreds of thousands of refugees in the East and Horn of Africa region. A very welcome recent example of this was the official integration of refugees in Djibouti into the national curriculum, a development launched by the government on 10 September. As NGOs, we are keen to see the legislative changes resulting in a new reality where ‘care & maintenance’ and confinement strategies become the exception; where children and youth can access education; where refugees can become economically and socially self-
reliant with access to services, justice and public life without discrimination. In other words, a reality where refugees can live a dignified and peaceful life while in exile, and where local communities benefit from hosting refugees.

However, these examples also demonstrate – as mentioned by UNHCR during the last Standing Committee session – that in a number of cases, the practical application of the CRRF is not unfolding as fast as originally hoped. Multi-stakeholder approaches take time, and development actors follow different timelines and cycles. NGOs can provide their support for more effective work on the CRRF at the country level, but in order to fully leverage our capacities, more effective communication at all levels and with all civil society actors, not just current UNHCR implementing partners, will be essential.

Moreover, NGOs would like to raise the following, specific concerns:

- About three months after the Uganda Solidarity Summit, NGOs are still concerned about the gap between funding needs for a comprehensive refugee response and pledges actually made at the Summit. These continue to fall short of meeting the needs of refugees in Uganda. Moreover, NGOs would welcome clarifications as to whether pledges made represented new funding (rather than filling gaps in ongoing appeals), and stress the need for swift, coherent and transparent allocation. Uganda needs substantial international support to maintain its progressive refugee policies, especially in the face of the continued large influx of refugees it receives. We also note the slow progress in establishing the CRRF institutional architecture, and would welcome a swift launch of the CRRF secretariat to enable faster progress in programming and response. NGOs’ representation and role in the CRRF Secretariat and Steering Committee remain unclear, notwithstanding the fact that civil society was very active in the lead-up to and proceedings of the Uganda Solidarity Summit, particularly through side events and an Interagency Call to Action. NGOs are also keen to see a better connection of grass roots actors to the CRRF process in order to make practical progress in implementing a true ‘whole of society’ approach, engaging more effectively host communities and refugees in the settlements.

- In Tanzania, we appreciate the structural progress on the CRRF and welcome the government’s recent announcement of plans to offer citizenship to the remaining 1972 Burundi refugees. However, we are disturbed by the tightening asylum space observed over the past months, evidenced in reduced food rations in the camps, border closures, and significant political pressure for return of newly arrived refugees from Burundi. We welcome the Joint Communiqué from the Tripartite Commission Meeting on 31 August which reiterates a commitment to voluntary return in line with the New York Declaration and the CRRF. However, there is a pressing need for more consistent monitoring and information on the status of certain sections of the refugee population who have already returned to Burundi. We also call for a return to a more integrative approach to more recent arrivals, following an earlier suspension of registration procedures. NGOs hope the Tanzanian government will remain committed to the CRRF and the pledges it made at the Leaders’ Summit. To be able to do so, Tanzania will also need concrete support from the international community.

- With regard to Central America, NGOs welcomed the recent briefing provided by UNHCR and governments and would appreciate further clarity on the structures being developed to apply the CRRF/CRSPF at the national and regional level. This would ensure more predictable and constructive engagement and coordination. For example, will there be similar structures as the CRRF Secretariats established in Tanzania and Uganda? It would also be good to consider including El Salvador in future planning, since its displacement crisis bears structural
similarities to that of its neighbours, and could thus benefit from an integrated and well-coordinated regional response.

- Despite hosting the largest volumes of refugees worldwide, Asia and the Middle East continue to be absent from the formal CRRF roll-out phase. Throughout the regions, resettlement remains a remote possibility for most, while local integration is likewise almost impossible, with refugees lacking access to basic rights, employment and services in host countries. Thus, further opportunities to engage the regions on the CRRF should be explored. In the MENA region in particular, opportunities for regional learning should not be missed. We are aware of ongoing efforts to organize consultations around this, but the planning process has been very slow, and care should also be taken to ensure that such consultations are able to directly feed into the development of the CRRF and the Global Compact. Likewise, more efforts should also be made to extract lessons learned from the 3RP process.

- We also note the persistent absence of Europe and North America from the CRRF architecture. This is particularly concerning at a time when many countries in both regions are involved in implementing policy measures which appear to contradict the aims of the GCR. These regions are also key to Pillar One of the CRRF (reception and admission), without which no CRRF could be “comprehensive”; several countries, like Canada (community-based private sponsorship), Sweden (focus on refugee children) and Germany (focus on integration measures) have provided solid pieces of these solutions. We would therefore encourage strengthened efforts to involve stakeholders in both regions in a proactive dialogue aimed at generating positive contributions to the development of the GCR.

With regard to the process leading to the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees next year, NGOs appreciated the elements and ideas brought up during the first Thematic Discussion on 10 July. NGOs strongly recommend, however, that the centrally important element of responsibility sharing for refugee protection be mainstreamed throughout the remainder of all Thematic Discussions. We call on UNHCR to formulate in the Programme of Action, and Member States to support, a vision accompanied with a road map that can set a trajectory for substantive progress in this area.

NGOs are grateful for UNHCR’s engagement in preparing the Thematic Discussions and hope that there will be opportunities to provide inputs into the agenda of those discussions, allowing for NGO panelists to showcase their good practices and provide ideas and analyses, and for refugee advocates who can speak from lived experience to also be represented in these discussions.

NGOs are preparing to bring substantive contributions to the discussions. For example, with regard to the Thematic Discussions on ‘Measures to be taken at the onset of a large movement of refugees’, it will be important to highlight the elements outlined in Section 5 of the Child Rights in the Global Compacts Recommendations1, particularly regarding alternatives to detention, and a comprehensive approach to protecting the rights of young people throughout responses to displacement.

We would also like to emphasise the need to include the issue of statelessness in the deliberations on the CRRF and the Global Compact, recalling that the New York Declaration recognizes that statelessness can be a root cause of forced displacement, and that forced displacement, in turn, can lead to statelessness. This needs to be discussed both in the context of the October Thematic Discussion, as well as the November one on ‘Measures to be taken in pursuit of durable solutions’.

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In addition, NGOs are also looking forward to engaging with UNHCR ahead of the December High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges ‘stocktaking exercise’. Further details on how UNHCR envisions the formal consultations process to unfold in 2018 would also be appreciated, so as to ensure the effective collaboration of all stakeholders, including civil society, in the process.

NGOs also commend UNHCR for the further efforts developed since the June UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations to increase refugees’ inclusion in the process. NGOs are willing to work alongside UNHCR to make sure their voices are meaningfully heard, including by providing space and support for refugee leaders and refugee-led organizations to effectively contribute. As an example, in the East Africa region, a group of NGOs have initiated a series of consultations with people of concern in Uganda, Kenya (Somali displaced populations), and with returnees in Somalia. These consultations aim to be highly inclusive and to capture the views of different communities affected by displacement. The aim is to have the priorities of displacement-affected groups reflected in the Global Compact process, as well as to inform programming and policy at national level on an on-going basis.

In a number of countries, including Australia, Canada, Honduras, and Guatemala, NGOs have been involved in roundtable discussions with governments, and have in some cases developed joint NGO positions to inform the governments’ inputs into the CRRF and GCR process. Beyond that, NGOs are also drafting a civil society Program of Action for Australia to encourage concrete actions to come out of the GCR process.

In the East and Horn of Africa region, NGOs have participated actively in advancing the CRRF roll-out. For example, a regional alliance of NGOs has provided direct assistance to the IGAD secretariat in formulating the Result Framework for the Nairobi Declaration. In Uganda, NGOs produced constructive recommendations on priority areas for the CRRF roadmap.

In addition, NGOs are also involved in identifying good practices and lessons learned within their sectors. In Canada, for example, NGOs are collaborating with academic researchers – as part of a larger country-level working group including UNHCR – on a mapping of experiences in implementing integrated refugee response programming. This research will help identify impediments organizations face in trying to bridge the humanitarian-development divide, and highlight experiences in putting key tenets of the New Way of Working agenda in practice in refugee response situations.

Some NGOs are also documenting key practices to protect and empower youth and adolescent refugees, which will feed into the GCR process as recommendations.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, let’s remember that it was exactly a year ago that 193 UN Member States signed the New York Declaration. By doing so, UN Member States particularly reaffirmed the importance of the international refugee regime and adopted a set of commitments to enhance the protection of refugees and migrants. A year ago, at the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, about 50 States also made specific commitments to increase global responsibility sharing for refugees and strengthen the international community’s capacity to address mass displacement. We need to ensure the momentum is maintained to actually deliver on those commitments. The geopolitical situation is unfortunately a constant reminder that more needs to be done in this perspective. For example, the current mass displacement of people from Rakhine State into Bangladesh certainly requires specific humanitarian responses, in line with the commitments made in the New York Declaration.

Thank you.