NGO Statement on the Grand Bargain  
Agenda Item 2(b) – Management

Conference Room Paper 25 provides a detailed summary of the efforts UNHCR is undertaking to implement the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing.

We commend the leadership of UNHCR and Japan in co-convening Grand Bargain workstream 4, which is focused on reducing duplication and management costs. We encourage the co-convenors to strengthen their engagement with the Grand Bargain signatories to ensure greater participation. We would welcome the development with workstream stakeholders of a collaboratively developed workplan that could be used to track and monitor the overall progress of the work stream and its important contributions, as has been recently done for workstream 7: increasing collaborative multi-year planning and funding. This would be particularly helpful to advance the implementation of commitments where little progress has been made and identify gaps, for example around risk management and oversight.

We welcome UNHCR engagement in the 8+3 harmonized narrative reporting pilot. The NGO-driven Less Paper More Aid initiative demonstrated a significant amount of time is spent by partners coping with markedly distinct donor and UN reporting templates, which take up valuable time that could be better spent on project monitoring and enhancing quality interventions. We are counting on UNHCR’s support to ensure the successful delivery of the pilot project to test out the GPPI 8+3 approach in Iraq, Myanmar and Somalia. Outreach will be conducted to pilot participants in the coming month to advance the roll-out.

We also appreciate UNHCR engagement with UNICEF and WFP to harmonize and simplify UN approaches towards the NGOs. ICVA’s 2015 study comparing UN partnership arrangements showed a wide variation in approaches by different UN agencies, and recommended aligning these, including through the use of common terminology, etc. We acknowledge and welcome some initial steps undertaken by the group of UN agencies, but call for a more structured, inclusive, and expedited process. NGOs have experience with different UN agencies’ online platforms that would be useful in considering how to utilize UNHCR’s Partner Portal as a common platform for information sharing and innovative technology. We stand ready to support these agencies in conducting outreach to NGOs to get their broader feedback on efforts underway to harmonize and simplify partnership agreements, due diligence processes and audits. Harmonizing approaches can have significant impacts on increasing the inclusion of local and national NGOs.

We call upon UNHCR to consider and adopt recommendations that will move forward the work done towards transparent and comparable cost structures. As noted in the Conference Room Paper, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in partnership with the Boston Consulting Group have mapped out the significantly different cost classifications and handling used by donors and UN agencies. They have proposed solutions highlighting considerable savings in terms of financial reporting by NGOs and quality improvements that will be considered as part of a larger package of Grand Bargain commitments related to donor
conditions. We call on UNHCR to engage with the signatories to continue this important initiative. We also ask UNHCR to consider whether the new Good Financial Grant Practice standard provides a potential solution to harmonising due diligence requirements mentioned in section D of CRP 25.

We welcome the progress made by UNHCR in achieving the commitment to increase collaborative multi-year planning. We encourage UNHCR to further share the results of their experience with the other co-conveners in order to benefit from their lessons. This will allow for the identification of new opportunities for increased cooperation. To this end we would welcome the opportunity to engage in an open and frank discussion to find out how benefits from multi-year planning and funding can be channeled to partners.

An important initiative not mentioned in the paper under support for local and national responders is UNHCR’s effort to systematize capacity strengthening with partners. UNHCR has a draft guidance note on this topic that was developed with input from partners to implement a key recommendation made during the High Commissioner’s Structured Dialogue on UNHCR-IFRC-NGO partnership. The draft guidance is based on the results of a survey of partners as well as extensive outreach to partners through regional and country-specific consultations in Africa and Asia. Once UNHCR is ready to begin releasing the guidance and policy notes, we would welcome its dissemination and follow-up.

Finally, Chair, UNHCR has a leading position as an intermediary between donors and diverse NGOs. We would like to encourage UNHCR to advocate and push for more widespread and solid commitments to harmonization of reporting and cost structures, and of passing on the benefits of the Grand Bargain to implementers.