NGO Statement on Africa
Agenda item 3(ai)

Mme/Mr. Chair,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs.

To start with, NGOs welcome progressive refugee policies adopted by some African countries and the ECOWAS Member States’ commitment to eradicating statelessness. This demonstrates that it is ultimately beneficial for humanity to grant refugees their rights to asylum in dignity. For example, Uganda, the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, has very progressive refugee laws and took steps to integrate the refugee response in its national development plans; Djibouti has taken responsibility for refugee education; and Ethiopia is moving towards out-of-camps policies. At a time when wealthy countries are seemingly defaulting on their international obligations, these African countries are leading the way. Therefore,

- We urge others to support those countries in their endeavours to implement progressive refugee policies through increased development support;
- We call for further CRRF roll-out in other African countries hosting refugees and stateless persons;
- We call on Member States to redouble their efforts to eradicate statelessness in Africa, including by amending discriminatory laws, implementing safeguards against statelessness and finding durable solutions;
- We also take note of the Government of Tanzania recent withdrawal from the CRRF and hope that lessons can be learnt to better understand the support needed to ensure protection, assistance and responsibility-sharing.

We also want to highlight that Africa continues to endure major humanitarian and human rights crises:

**South Sudan:**
While acknowledging efforts, we draw attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Already the largest refugee crisis in Africa, the South Sudan crisis directly threatens the lives and livelihoods of over 10 million people in South Sudan and neighbouring countries. Moreover, since the secession of South Sudan, refugees from South Sudan may now be at risk of statelessness.

- We call for more resolute actions by the UN, African Union and IGAD to help restore peace and hold the perpetrators to account.
• We call for pressure to be applied on the South Sudanese Government to immediately remove heavy bureaucratic restrictions and fees on humanitarian actors and to allow access to remote locations so that lives may be saved.
• Since this is a regional crisis, we urge revitalized efforts to support refugee-hosting countries.

**Somalia**

As the conflict and displacement situation in Somalia remains acute,

• We urge the UN, AU, IGAD and their Member States to continue supporting Somalis’ efforts to stabilize the country and restore law and order.
• We call for a re-thinking of troops withdrawal and urge the UN, European Union, AU and IGAD to increase their financial, technical, security and moral support to save lives, re-integrate returnees and help re-build livelihoods in Somalia.

**DRC:**

The crisis in DR Congo is fundamentally a protection crisis with protection violations spiking exponentially recently, ranging from child soldier recruitment, armed occupation of schools, pillaging and sexual assault. Unfortunately, lack of funding and diversion of capacity led many humanitarian agencies to close their doors. The situation is also expected to deteriorate in 2018 since the Rwandan Refugee Cessation Clause came into effect. Many refugees in Rwanda and DRC are now also at risk of statelessness. There is a risk that Congolese who have sought refuge in Angola, Tanzania and Zambia may be forcibly returned to unstable areas, where safety and protection are not guaranteed. Protection of IDPs has also clearly not been prioritized despite being a most pressing issue.

• We call upon the DRC government to respect the UN Missions’ mandates and enhance cooperation to protect civilians and provide humanitarian aid in remote areas;
• We call on all actors to closely monitor the situation and provide humanitarian aid and political support to address root causes;
• Protection must be prioritized, adequately funded, capacitated and guide the response and to minimize risk for conflict- and displacement-affected communities;

**Central African Republic:**

CAR is in a deep and complex crisis. Recurring violence and increased conflict has led to displacement figures unseen since the height of the crisis in 2013. This is clearly a call for action. Continuing insecurity, logistical obstacles and declining funding are hindering humanitarian access. Forced to flee their villages, many stay in hiding, unable to access protection. Given the scale and severity of threats to civilians, all actors must be mobilised and enabled to step up their response.

• We call upon the CAR government to collaborate with the humanitarian community and peacekeeping mission to ensure that aid can be delivered and protection provided for the displaced and affected population;
• As chronic underfunding severely limits the humanitarian response, we urge Member States to allocate necessary funding to provide needed humanitarian aid and protection.
Lake Chad Bassin:
Lake Chad Basin is experiencing a very complex humanitarian disaster, affecting around 17 million people. The majority of the displaced are sheltered by extremely poor communities. Food insecurity and malnutrition have reached critical levels. Yet, the Refugee Response Plan remains underfunded.

We therefore call on donors to fully fund the 2018 UNHCR appeal.

- We call on all actors to ensure that returns of refugees and IDPs is voluntary, safe and dignified. The situation in areas of return in NE Nigeria is somewhat improving but remains volatile. The Tripartite agreement must be respected and all displaced must receive the information needed to make their own decisions about return;
- As assistance and support remain out of reach for many conflict-affected people, we urge authorities in the region to reduce restrictions on refugee and IDP movements and to support humanitarian access to hard-to-reach areas.

Statelessness in Africa
Statelessness remains a significant but poorly documented problem in Africa. NGOs draw your attention to the challenge of statelessness, resulting from forced migration but also from gender, racial, religious and ethnic discrimination in nationality laws. We refer, for instance, to protracted refugee situations in the Great Lakes region. NGOs urge African States to implement safeguards to ensure nationality to children born on a territory who would otherwise be stateless, realise universal civil registration and issue birth certificates and identity cards.

A longer version of the statement is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you, Chair.