EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER’S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
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NGO Statement on Strategic Partnerships, including coordination
Agenda item 5(a)

Thank you, Madam Chair,

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

We are pleased that partnership continues to be a prominent Standing Committee agenda item. We welcome the Partnership Update provided by the Director of External Relations. Meaningful partnerships are a vital contributor to the success of UNHCR and our shared mission to work for improvements in the lives of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people as well as other people of concern to UNHCR.

UNHCR’s dedication to improving partnership with NGOs is well-recognized. Change, particularly of behavior and systems, can be tedious and must be continuous. To better track partnership dynamics and develop a body of evidence on perceptions of UNHCR-NGO partnership, since 2014 UNHCR’s Implementing Partner Management Service (IPMS) alongside HIAS, and, in 2017, InterAction, have been systematically soliciting UNHCR and partners feedback via an annual survey on the state of UNHCR-NGO partnership. The 2017 UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey revealed that, in general, both UNHCR and NGO partners report a satisfactory overall relationship. Most respondents reported that the NGO-UNHCR relationship has improved over the last 12 months, continuing a three-year trend of increasingly positive assessments. Areas highlighted for improvement largely relate to rigidity of systems (agreement signing for instance) and ongoing micro-management issues (such as extensive budget negotiations). No other UN agency has sustained this level of attention to improving partnership with NGOs. We trust that UNHCR will continue this valuable survey and persevere in taking actions to improve when needed.

NGO partners appreciate the ongoing internal system-strengthening to improve partnership with NGOs and its leadership in spearheading the development of the UN Partner Portal, particularly amidst an internal change management process.

In line with the Grand Bargain Commitment to harmonise UN Framework Partnership Agreements we would like to see further progress in terms of simplifying and harmonizing templates, procedures and requirements, including financial ones, amongst the key UN agencies. In this regard we welcome the steps undertaken by UNHCR in joining the pilot for narrative reporting promoted by Germany and ICVA.
We welcome the recent issuance of two guidance notes related to the Implementing Partnership Management Service. The IPMS Guidance Note No. 4 (Revision 1) on Partnership Procuring with UNHCR Funds provides useful clarification and guidance on the principles and requirements related to procurement. Compared to the previous Guidance Note on Procurement issued in November 2014, we noted, building on inputs provided by partners, the streamlined assessment of Partnership for pre-qualification for Procurement (PQP) status and the focus on key procurement principles, providing NGOs with greater flexibility in the implementation process. The Guidance Note No. 8 on the Management of UNHCR-Funded Partnership Agreements formalizes the revised standard formats of UNHCR-Funded Partnership Agreements and outlines the essential requirements for the preparation, signing and management of the Agreements. We welcome that at the time of signing, the project budget remains the only mandatory document while other documents can be exceptionally added within a month after signature. This will hopefully help to reduce ongoing delays in signing of many Agreements. NGOs look forward to the issuance of the Operational Guidelines for complementary capacity strengthening for UNHCR and its NGO partners. We also appreciate the efforts in rolling out the Framework for Implementing with partners through face to face trainings, workshops and e-learning opportunities.

We take note of the recently announced UNHCR internal reforms. The reconfiguration of the Partnership Service now responsible for relations with humanitarian partners, NGOs, and UNHCR’s engagement in the humanitarian inter-agency process certainly represents a welcomed rationalization of efforts. However, NGOs also note that engagement with development actors and work on the CRRF will be dealt with through the newly created Division of Resilience and Solutions. We hope this institutional divide will not divert attention to the critical need to link humanitarian and development approaches and NGOs inputs in developing the resilience of UNHCR’s people of concern. Further, we look forward to a more global perspective on the changes taking place within UNHCR. We very much appreciated, for instance, the Final Report of the Operational Review of UNHCR’s Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement. How will the recommendations from this review be taken forward?

Recent global policy debates on the Global Compact on Refugees and the practical roll-out of the CRRF have highlighted the importance of widening partnership approaches in the spirit of the whole-of-society. In this perspective, UNHCR is encouraged to enhance its partnership with NGOs and refugee-led organizations beyond project-based partnership and some general meetings and involve them at decision and policy-making phases as well as in advocacy with governmental bodies. NGOs have engaged in constructive reflections and have made proposals to ensure a new way of working in refugee and other displacement responses strengthen – and do not undermine – coordination and accountability mechanisms.

To strengthen humanitarian and development cooperation and ensure the achievement of comprehensive solutions it is paramount to put in place multi-year planning process. We appreciate the piloting of multi-year plans in certain countries by UNHCR and would welcome further communications on the outcomes of this exercise. We all agree multi-year funding is essential to implement multi-year plans and have a meaningful impact on people of concern. We suggest, in line with the Grand Bargain commitment, joining forces in the framework of
the IASC bodies to promote multi-year funding and identify solutions to potential obstacles to its effective allocation.

Finally Chair Person, we look forward to continuing working in connection with the Governance Service in relation to the UNHCR governing body’s meetings and the GCR formal consultations.

This statement is available on icvanetwork.org. Thank you, Chair.