Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organisations. It has been drafted in consultation with, and aims to reflect the diversity of views of, the NGO community.

Since 2016, some developments have been encouraging, others a cause for concern. Beginning on a positive note, during the September Summits States made concrete commitments to do more to meet refugee needs, including the doubling of annual resettlement spaces to 360,000 globally. Yet, we wonder: which governments will assume responsibility for following up on the summit commitments, and what is the role of UNHCR in tracking the pledges?

We know that resettlement is a core element of responsibility-sharing and as mentioned by the High Commissioner at this year’s Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement: resettlement remains a fundamental tool for protection and to achieve solutions for refugee situations.

We know that realistic and achievable resettlement solutions can be found that will bring benefits to both host and resettled communities. Civil society’s knowledge and expertise is needed to achieve this goal.

Unfortunately, actions embarked upon by some governments, most notably the historically generous U.S., have become increasing matters for concern. If these new policies were to move forward, they would come at a tremendous human cost as well as at a significant moral cost as the world faces the largest global refugee crisis since the Second World War. Now is the time to increase, not decrease, refugee resettlement worldwide. Now is the time to show leadership in responsibility-sharing.

As NGOs working in host and resettlement countries, we believe that:
1. First, security vetting of refugees is already appropriately robust and sophisticated.
2. Second, the history of resettlement globally demonstrates that when a warm welcome is provided alongside appropriate integration support, refugees of all ethnic and religious backgrounds successfully integrate and become productive, contributing members of society.
3. And finally, resettlement is a crucial safety-net which functions alongside humanitarian assistance.

NGOs urge all major resettlement countries to continue to demonstrate global leadership,
providing positive models for others to emulate.

In Europe, resettlement efforts need to be encouraged and strengthened. We welcome current initiatives to establish an instrument for a European Union Resettlement Framework, as this has the potential to strengthen the participation of European states and the quality of programmes offered. However, it is important to ensure that resettlement maintains its humanitarian function and not serve political objectives of migration control and deterrence. Because resettlement is a durable solution, resettled refugees should be granted a permanent and not a subsidiary status in all EU states. This status would increase both the quality and quantity of places, while maintaining access to asylum for those reaching Europe. UNHCR should maintain a primary role in the referrals under the EU Resettlement Framework.

In South East Asia, most refugees remain without any legal status or permission to work, despite resettlement states collectively resettling more than 180,000 refugees over the past decade from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. We call on states to improve support for host countries through continued diplomatic engagement and targeted aid to bring about long term change. Resettlement states can also play a significant role in supporting longer term voluntary repatriation, for example to Myanmar, particularly by insisting that refugees must be centrally involved in this process if repatriation is to succeed.

The increasing scale of response in the Middle East should not decrease the response to other areas of deep concern. NGOs are concerned about the decreasing number of resettlement places, specifically in Africa and parts of Asia. There is disproportionately little attention given to African refugee situations – both in terms of humanitarian aid and resettlement quotas. Likewise, Rohingya refugees and other cultural and religious minorities living in countries of asylum in the Asia Pacific region are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Any further reduction in access to protection for these groups may encourage onward and dangerous journeys. NGOs therefore strongly encourage resettlement states to increase their quotas from Africa and parts of Asia.

We are particularly concerned that recent trends in key resettlement countries will result in a decrease in overall spaces for the resettlement of children at risk, including unaccompanied minors. NGOs strongly believe there is a role for resettlement states to play in increasing resettlement to this highly vulnerable group. NGOs in different countries have developed expertise in supporting the integration of children and young people, and are willing and able to work with states to increase programs for the resettlement of children at risk, such as the U.S. Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program.

Keeping families together is key to successful resettlement and integration. NGOs call on both resettlement countries and UNHCR to do much more to preserve family unity in the resettlement process. In cases where states do not facilitate this under national and regional family reunification laws, this should be through resettlement – including nuclear families and all first degree relatives, adult children with their parents, and siblings with one another. This is particularly important when there are indications that in the country of origin, or the country of first asylum, the family formed an important support network for one another.
NGOs welcome initiatives in some states to increase alternative pathways for refugees outside of established resettlement programs – including through labour mobility schemes, student visas and family reunion pathways. We affirm support for community sponsorship models and would like to see strong government and UNHCR support in ensuring that these become stable and accessible complementary pathways. We call on states to ensure that these alternative pathways increase the overall capacity for legal permanent admissions and not replace or undermine existing state-led resettlement programs. We commend the Japanese initiative to work with communities, Universities and the private sector to provide resettlement spaces for Syrian refugees. We congratulate the Australian government for increasing its humanitarian program by 2,500 places in the 2017/18 program year. However, it is regrettable that the recently announced Australian extension of its Community Proposal Pilot to become an annual program of 1,000 places will be allocated within this scheduled increase. We are also concerned by the potential effects of the important up-front costs to be borne by sponsors. Economically and socially, there is considerable potential for all resettlement countries to increase its humanitarian intake by tapping into direct support available from the community at large, the private sector and refugee diaspora communities. We urge Governments to pursue this without reducing the planned intake of the most vulnerable under its general program. We encourage resettlement countries to examine the Canadian community sponsorship program as an effective model for advancing this as a tool for resettlement including its carefully designed distribution of cost and incentives.

Finally, Mr Chair, in order to fight hostility and xenophobia, strong government leadership in recognising the importance of refugee resettlement for the protection of people is central. In a year marked by the cynical conflation of refugees and terrorists for political purposes, very few world leaders stepped forward to resolutely reject the scapegoating of refugees. Yet we see in many contexts the difference when governments choose to show leadership to fully support resettlement. When host communities work together to welcome the newcomers, social connections are created that combat fear and intolerance, which are by far the strongest foundation for a more inclusive and cohesive society that benefits all members. We want to see governments show leadership in working towards positive solutions that are ambitious enough to deliver protection at the right scale, while creating confidence in all parties and drawing on the expertise of civil society.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.