Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. It aims to reflect the diversity of views within 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 doubling annual resettlement spaces. Yet, we wonder: which governments will assume responsibility for following up on those 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 the ATCR: 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 expertise is needed to achieve this goal.

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

NGOs working in host and resettlement countries believe that:

1. Security vetting of refugees is already appropriately robust and sophisticated.
2. The history of resettlement demonstrates that, when a warm welcome is provided alongside appropriate integration support, refugees of all backgrounds can become productive members of society.
3. 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 an EU Resettlement Framework, as this has the potential to strengthen States’ participation 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. Because resettlement is a durable solution, resettled refugees should be granted permanent, not subsidiary status. This 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 over 180,000 refugees in 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.

The increasing scale of response in the Middle East should not decrease the response to other areas. NGOs are concerned about the decreasing number of resettlement places, specifically for Africa and parts of Asia. There is disproportionately little attention given to African refugee situations in terms of resettlement quotas. Likewise, Rohingya refugees and other 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 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. 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.

NGOs welcome initiatives in some states to increase alternative pathways for refugees outside of established resettlement programs – including through labour mobility, student visas and family reunion pathways. We affirm support for community sponsorship models and would like to see strong government and UNHCR engagement in ensuring that these become stable and accessible complementary pathways. We call on states to ensure that alternative pathways increase the overall capacity for legal permanent admissions and do 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 for 2017/18. However, it is regrettable that the recently announced Australian extension of its Community Proposal Pilot to become an annual program will be allocated within this scheduled increase.
Economically and socially, there is considerable potential for all resettlement countries to increase humanitarian intakes by tapping into direct support available from the community at large, the private sector and refugee diasporas. We urge Governments to pursue this without reducing the planned intake of the most vulnerable under general programs. We encourage resettlement countries to examine the Canadian community sponsorship program as a model.

Finally, Mr Chair, in order to fight hostility and xenophobia, we need strong government leadership in recognising the centrality of refugee resettlement for protection. In a year marked by cynical conflation of refugees and terrorists, very few world leaders stepped forward to 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 newcomers, social connections are created that combat fear and intolerance leading to more cohesive societies. 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.

A longer version of this statement will be made available on icvanetwork.org.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.