NGO Statement on UNHCR’s engagement with internally displaced persons

Dear 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 the NGO community, and aims to represent the diversity of views within the community.

We are pleased that in this year, which marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Executive Committee is prioritising the importance of systemic and effective engagement with internally displaced persons. 30.6 million new internal displacements associated with conflict and disasters were recorded in 2017 and, by the end of the year, 40 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence. As the global numbers of IDPs continue to rise, and displacement becomes protracted, improving global and national responses is essential.

We welcome UNHCR’s commitment to improving its engagement in situations of internal displacement, as outlined in the Final Report of the Operational Review published in September 2017. However, since the publication, it is not clear how much institutional progress has been made in implementing its recommendations. Strategic engagement by UNHCR on internal displacement must better reflect operational realities on the ground.

We understand UNHCR is drafting a new policy on IDPs and urge UNHCR to consult NGOs throughout the strategy development process, to ensure the policy is informed by a diverse range of perspectives. UNHCR strategic partners can contribute in bringing operational experience in internal displacement contexts, from preparedness through solutions. We also encourage meaningful participation of IDPs in this process. Any new policy should endeavour not to introduce requirements or bureaucratic processes which would undermine rapid responses at the onset of an internal displacement crisis. We strongly encourage including budget and human resource implications, including vis-à-vis refugee response, clear follow-up arrangements and a regular progress monitoring process in the policy framework.

As already indicated in the note “Refocusing on Internal Displacement” for the IASC Principals meeting, the new policy should also outline a clear direction for UNHCR’s role within the interagency system. We therefore encourage UNHCR to clarify its position on humanitarian coordination and operational response in situations where there are mixed populations of refugees/returnees and IDPs.

The pursuit of more coherence, integration and linkages between UNHCR’s IDP response and its refugee responses in country is critical. This should include early warning monitoring mechanisms, flexible and multi-year funding arrangements, enhanced coordination and planning, and more efficient staff allocations. This is especially clear in situations where returning refugees are at risk of being internally displaced. The last years have seen worrying levels of refugee returns into situations characterised by high levels of insecurity. In many countries, including Afghanistan, Syria, DRC and Somalia, returning refugees have found themselves unable to settle back into their former homes and lives or integrate elsewhere in their country, leaving them internally displaced. IDMC estimates that around 8.5 million of those reported as returned across 23 countries may not have found durable

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1 According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *Global Report on Internal Displacement* (2018)
solutions and can therefore be considered to still live in displacement. There is a major gap, however, in systematic empirical data on the fate of many returning refugees and their progress towards achieving durable solutions.

More consistent approaches and more transparent mechanisms for assessing future displacement risk for returnees and measuring the success of returns beyond immediate time frames must become an integral part of UNHCR’s strategic planning. Making more investments in prevention planning is also important. This will require more active engagement than has previously been the case by UNHCR with governments, other UN and NGO partners, local actors and civil society. This will also mean engaging development actors at the onset of emergencies, including to identify future durable solutions in the early stages of displacement. With regard to developing comprehensive solutions and integrated programming, how will the new Division of Resilience and Solutions work in practice to integrate IDP concerns, and to bring their perspectives into long-term national development and peacebuilding processes? Is UNHCR planning to consult strategic partners in developing its guidance to facilitate integrated programming across population groups? When will the new Integrated Programme Service be operational?

Some governments continue to reject the notion that their countries are undergoing humanitarian and protection crises. Strong advocacy is vital in encouraging these governments to address humanitarian situations and allow access.

UNHCR’s co-chairing of the GP20 Plan of Action provides a useful mechanism by which NGOs and other actors can engage UNHCR on internal displacement. We should strive to ground the Plan in concrete actions and measurable outcomes, and expand engagement with affected states. Further, we encourage UNHCR to work to raise the ambition of the GP20 Plan of Action and expand its scope beyond addressing existing displacement through assistance and protection, to promote system-wide action in reducing the risk of new displacement.

We also call on UNHCR to recognise more explicitly the role that climate change and the risk of extreme events play in driving displacement. UNHCR, in its role as member of the UN Climate Change Conventions’ Task Force on Displacement, should lead efforts in planning and investing in disaster risk reduction. It should do so especially in contexts where the impacts of climate change and weather extremes interlink with resource scarcity and conflict, such as the Horn of Africa or the Lake Chad region, to prevent short-term internal displacement from becoming protracted.

We welcome UNHCR’s acknowledgment of the need for better data gathering and analysis, and particularly its collaboration with the World Bank to establish a joint Data Centre on forced displacement in 2018. This timely initiative recognises existing challenges and gaps in data and evidence that can be met to inform a more effective response on forced displacement, including internal displacement. To complement existing efforts, avoid duplication, improve the interoperability of data and promote innovation, we encourage UNHCR to work closely with other relevant agencies and partners, such as OCHA’s humanitarian data centre, IOM, IDMC, JIPS, government bodies and other local stakeholders. We particularly encourage investment by the Centre in its objective of monitoring the socio-economic impacts of forced displacement, in order to support policies and planning aimed at reducing displacement risk and protracted displacement. We would also welcome more detailed information on the population data management package for internal displacement that UNHCR has been piloting with partners in the DRC. When will this be rolled out to other countries and what are some of the challenges and lessons UNHCR has encountered in developing and piloting the model?

Dear Chairperson, we look forward to continuing working with UNHCR on improving operational responses, data collection and analysis, and policy development on internal displacement. It is only through genuine partnerships, improved responses, and investing in efforts to bridge humanitarian and development gaps, that we can prevent protracted displacement and ensure no IDP is left behind.

Thank you.