NGO statement on Africa

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

NGOs welcome the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which presents UNHCR and States with a generational opportunity to innovate and adopt a new form of engagement to make a qualitative difference in refugee protection and response. On the African continent, which is home to one-third of the world’s forcibly displaced population, it is befitting that the African Union (AU) has devoted 2019 to Durable Solutions for Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Taken together, it appears there is a heightened political will to address forced displacement through a more structured and sustainable approach.

However, this may amount to little if longstanding policy and practice bottlenecks are not removed: a huge backlog of large-scale unmet needs amounting to 50 percent or more in certain cases; gaps in national expertise on comprehensive refugee response; lack of measurable and time-bound targets on health, safety, education, and economic well-being; and, issues with UNHCR’s financial transparency, flexibility and predictability. To this end UNHCR and States need to:

**Support host States to advance expertise on comprehensive refugee response.** Two years after the New York Declaration there is still scarcity of national institutions for government-led comprehensive response in some of the most protracted refugee situations. Even in situations where CRRF is implemented, the concentration remains at national level, resulting in discrepancy between national policies and field realities. What we need is a bottom-up evolution, with full participation of the primary stakeholders (including refugees, host communities and IDPs) coupled with a systematic devolution of the central authority, empowering sub-national and local authorities to manage comprehensive, multi-stakeholder responses.

While the GCR stipulates that national arrangements to coordinate and facilitate stakeholders’ engagement is a prerogative of host States, significant capacity gaps hamper the efforts of national and sub-national authorities to coordinate and facilitate joint outcomes. UNHCR needs to provide governance guidance on host government-led secretariats and processes for collective outcomes. The existence of efficient institutions for coordination is critical to harnessing international solidarity.

NGOs also call on UNHCR to redouble efforts towards alternatives to camps. Positive outcomes from comprehensive responses hinge on economic and social inclusion. Established practice in Uganda (Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategic Framework), as well as recent developments in Ethiopia (in January 2019, the government enacted legislation to allow refugees rights that are integral to socio-economic inclusion) have demonstrated that political will is the pre-eminent factor required to unlock economic and social inclusion. Therefore, the political tone set by the AU in its theme and roadmap provides a distinct opportunity for UNHCR and NGOs to intensify advocacy with host governments based on the growing body of evidence that alternatives to camps produce better outcomes for both refugees and their hosts.
Establish clear, measurable and time-bound targets for the realization of economic and social rights including documentation, health, education, social and economic well-being. The GCR does not define targets and indicators for refugee populations. Therefore, a critical dimension of comprehensive national response is to ensure targets and goals are in place so that stakeholders can be accountable for the degree to which refugees and host communities realize economic and social rights together, and to guarantee they are not left behind in national progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Consequently, UNHCR needs to invest more in its capacity to mobilize international support for host governments and other stakeholders to accelerate progress in translating targets into goals in a comprehensive and flexible approach that enables them to address the critical needs throughout the displacement cycle, dealing not only with refugees and host communities but also with IDPs and returnees.

This requires UNHCR to focus more on advocacy and policy, serving first and foremost as an agenda setter, convener and expert, and enhancing resource mobilization at the global level. This shift, from focus on interventions that UNHCR implements, to interventions aimed at improving capacities and resources working more closely with existing and potential partners, will go a long way in empowering national and sub-national operators, including governmental and non-governmental actors to do more and better in responding to the critical needs along the entire displacement cycle.

Increase financial transparency, flexibility and provide multiyear funding to support medium- and long-term outcomes. Increasingly, donors are enhancing the predictability of funding but a large proportion of funds typically extend for less than a year, even in contexts of protracted displacement such as in much of the Horn and East Africa region, where partnerships with NGOs have existed for decades. As UNHCR and States well know, predictable funding is essential to deliver and measure progress against medium- and long-term outcomes. We therefore urge you to accelerate reforms to expand predictable multi-year funding.

NGOs would also like to draw the attention of UNHCR and States to some specific situations:

**South Sudan Refugee Situation**

Comprehensive refugee response is undermined by chronic underfunding of the South Sudanese Regional Refugee Response Plan (54% funded in 2018). In Ethiopia and Uganda which together host 90% of South Sudanese refugees, competition over scarce resources between South Sudanese refugees and host communities threatens to destabilize implementation of comprehensive responses despite legal and policy measures for socio-economic inclusion. In Ethiopia, these tensions have led to suspension of land allocation for expansion or establishment of new camps despite crowding and may be to blame for the push back by local communities following the recent Refugee Proclamation. In Uganda, there are concerns that the South Sudanese refugee response is not adhering to the 70-30 split agreed in the CRRF due to scarcity of resources amidst increasing displacements from the DRC. In this context, the South Sudan RRRP is a litmus test for States to demonstrate the efficacy of the GCR.

Moreover, some NGOs in Uganda regret that allegations of mismanagement resulted in freezing of funds intended for the refugee response. The refugee response is already seriously underfunded and it is fundamental to avoid refugees being further affected by those regrettable developments. We hope that the oversight and accountability lapses highlighted in 2018 will be rapidly addressed so that donors’ confidence can be restored.
DRC Situation

In the DRC, UNHCR needs to improve on the protection of IDPs, which is a less clear-cut and more controversial subject than refugees. This requires improvement of UNHCR’s camp co-ordination role and partnership with IOM as well as robust advocacy against forcible camp closures and involuntarily movement of persons, which is still a common occurrence. UNHCR needs to be more adaptable – based on the Urban Displacement and Out of Camp principles – taking into account that a majority of people (approximately 80%) who are displaced in DRC are not residing in official camps. UNHCR must also take into account that many IDPs choose to move to areas that are neither areas of return, nor points of displacement, and these IDPs often receive very limited assistance or are left out of the equation altogether. Support and accompaniment of IDPs should not be restricted simply to IDP camps, destinations of displacement and areas of return.

Horn of Africa Somali Situation

Somali refugees are facing increased risk of marginalization from comprehensive responses in the East and Horn of Africa region owing to continued fragility in Somalia and perceived links to insecurity in host countries. UNHCR and States must invest more to promote and safeguard the institution of asylum in order to mitigate against host governments reacting in ways that expose Somali refugees to additional risk, and to encourage alternatives to camps.

Nigeria Situation

Violence against women and girls in Northern Nigeria is alarming, particularly along the border with Cameroon, involving abduction of school girls, forcible use as human bombs, sex slaves or in forcible marriage. Moreover, the targeting of schools has adversely affected children’s education outcomes, which combined with structural gender and age dynamics in the region render adolescent refugee and IDP girls especially vulnerable. The situation calls for urgent intensification of protection interventions.

Thank you Chair.