NGO statement on the Global Compact on Refugees and on preparations for the first Global Refugee Forum

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

We appreciate the continued engagement in preparing the inaugural Global Refugee Forum, which should be a key benchmark for the implementation of the Refugee Compact, under a whole-of-society and partnership approach.

We acknowledge the efforts made so far, including the announcement of co-convenors, the establishment of co-sponsorship groups, the release of the GRF program and of new guidance and resources to support multi-stakeholder engagement. We look forward to further discussions and will continue informing the substance of the full GRF agenda. We also keenly await updates on pending areas of development, including details on the establishment and functioning of support platforms.

Indeed, NGOs remain strongly committed to engaging actively with all processes underway to assist in securing an inclusive and impactful event, which yields concrete and sustainable benefits for refugees and host communities. This includes trackable pledges aligned with GCR objectives and indicators, responding to identified needs. Inclusive participation, collaboration, impactful pledges and robust accountability will all be key to a successful GRF.

As recognised in the GCR, the meaningful participation of refugees lies at the very heart of effective responses, and of a properly functioning multi-stakeholder and partnership approach. To be meaningful such participation must be inclusive, with due attentiveness to AGD considerations.

We commend the efforts of NGO colleagues, refugee leaders, UNHCR, States and other actors to support the meaningful participation of refugees in GCR and GRF preparations thus far. Going forward, they should also be associated to the follow-up and review.

We also commend the co-creation by UNHCR and others of a more enabling environment for refugee participation within the evolving GRF infrastructure, for example, through encouraging refugees’ engagement across co-sponsorship groups. Here, as for other remote participants, particular attention should be given to supporting effective virtual and global engagement.

We support calls to build on this momentum through initiatives such as a dedicated refugee contingent at the GRF, facilitated by UNHCR with support from Switzerland, as co-host, in addition to inclusion of refugees in government and other delegations. Facilitation of virtual participation in the third GRF preparatory meeting should also be considered. And to strengthen sustainability, we support the suggestion that UNHCR explore establishing a Refugee Participation Office, which could potentially be taken as a pledge to the first GRF.

We would like to commend UNHCR for its efforts in trying to ensure that age, gender, and diversity are given due attention during the GRF preparations. We are concerned, however,
that AGD considerations to date may be unevenly addressed across the co-sponsorship groups. We draw attention to existing guidance, such as the ‘AGD Tip Sheet for GRF Pledges’, which was endorsed by over 20 NGOs. We reiterate that AGD considerations – including disability – should have dedicated time at the Forum to ensure discussions are strongly anchored in this approach.

More generally, on facilitating inclusive engagement, we welcome the convening of various regional events to support more comprehensive and geographically balanced input into the GRF preparations, especially through collaboration between UNHCR, NGOs, refugee and diaspora networks. As national ownership and leadership are key to the GCR implementation, we also welcome the initiative taken by some States to convene country-level consultations. We strongly encourage swift expansion of this practice, for which we offer our support.

In the coming months, we encourage States, UNHCR and other actors to pursue and deepen multi-stakeholder collaborations, to maximise collective efforts over both the immediate and longer terms. This includes exploring opportunities to share, scale and replicate good practices, and to make joint and matching pledges, responsive to identified needs, which will ideally be mutually-reinforcing. Collaborative approaches across sectors and geographies can bring a multiplier effect and contribute to the much-needed additionality that the Compact seeks to create.

We encourage efforts to incorporate contributions from all actors identified in the GCR, making dedicated efforts to reach out to non-traditional actors and those who have not been UNHCR partners so far, particularly at local and community level. Civil society can play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining effective contact to such groups, many of whom are part of our networks. This includes fully leveraging the UN system, encompassing contributions relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, country level operations, and the evolving UN Migration Network – particularly to ensure the use of rights protective approaches to the management of mixed movements.

On the co-sponsorship groups, NGOs are participating actively across themes and encourage robust engagement by other actors. We greatly welcome the opportunity these groups afford to catalyse joint action, cultivate partnerships, and help shape the GRF agenda. We encourage the articulation of constructive linkages between themes, including the ways in which pledges and practices are identified. It is important to maintain an overarching perspective across all themes to ensure coherence of approaches and cultivate linkage opportunities.

We support calls for ambitious new pledges which may deliver systemic changes aligned with GCR objectives. We also support joint pledges and coalitions which seek to strengthen relationships between diverse actors and chart a course for the incremental achievement of measurable and enduring benefits for refugees and host communities, with scope for replication and scalability. We must also hold a vision of what we need and intend to achieve, together, by the second GRF in 2023, and how contributions can be transparently tracked in the interim.

We look forward to contributing to the design of a reliable tracking tool for GRF pledges. This is an essential mechanism to ensure consistency between GRF commitments and GCR objectives. We also wish to reiterate the importance of producing GCR indicators that measure the most meaningful changes in the lives of refugees and their host communities.

A detailed version of this statement is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.