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. It has been prepared in close consultation with the NGO community, representing a diverse set of views.

We appreciate the opportunity for continued engagement in preparations for the inaugural Global Refugee Forum (GRF), which should be a key benchmark – and proof of concept – for the effective implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) under a whole-of-society, multi-stakeholder and partnership approach.

We acknowledge the considerable efforts behind the draft of recent contributions towards GRF preparations, including the announcement of State co-convenors, the establishment of co-sponsorship thematic groups, the release of the GRF program, and the publication of new resources to support multi-stakeholder engagement, such as co-sponsorship factsheets and the Age, Gender and Diversity Tip Sheet for GRF Pledges developed and widely endorsed by NGOs. We also keenly await updates on pending areas of development, including details on the establishment and functioning of Support Platforms, the GCR Toolkit and Digital Platform.

As the GRF draws closer NGOs remain strongly committed to engaging actively with the myriad of preparations underway to assist in securing an inclusive and impactful event which yields concrete and sustainable benefits for refugees and host communities, including through trackable pledges aligned with GCR objectives and indicators, and responding to identified needs. As previously noted, inclusive participation, collaboration, impactful pledges and robust accountability will all be key to a successful GRF.

As recognised within 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. And to be meaningful such participation must be inclusive, with due attentiveness to age, gender, disability and diversity considerations, in keeping with GCR commitments.

We reiterate that the meaningful participation of refugees and other affected people must be embedded across all aspects of GRF preparations (including in the design of joint pledges and identification of good practices), during GRF proceedings, and in follow-up and review.
We commend the substantive 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. They should also be associated to the GRF proceedings, and in follow-up and review.

We commend the co-creation by UNHCR and others of a more enabling environment for refugee participation within the evolving GRF infrastructure, for example, through a refugee-led side event on meaningful participation at the second GRF preparatory meeting and encouragement of refugees’ engagement across co-sponsorship groups. Here, as for other remote participants, particular attention needs to be given to supporting effective virtual and global engagement.

We support calls to build upon 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. This could offset any geographical under-representation and ensure gender equality, and age, diversity and disability inclusiveness. Facilitation of virtual participation in the third GRF preparatory meeting ought also to be considered. And finally, on this point, in order to strengthen sustainability, we support the suggestion that UNHCR explore establishing a Refugee Participation Office in-house; 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.

With regard to facilitating inclusive engagement more generally, we welcome the convening of various regional events to support more geographically comprehensive input into preparations for the GRF, through collaboration between UNHCR, NGOs, refugee and diaspora networks, and other stakeholders. The robust participation of refugees and host community representatives should be pursued in these fora, and their outcomes fed into the pledging process and capture of positive practices.

We also welcome the initiative taken by some States to convene consultations at country levels and strongly encourage the rapid expansion of this practice, for which we offer our support. We recall that a guiding principle of the GCR is that national ownership and leadership are key to its implementation.

And as preparations for the GRF intensify, we encourage States, UNHCR and other actors to remain strongly focussed upon pursuing and deepening multi-stakeholder collaborations, so as to maximise our 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.

And we encourage efforts to incorporate the contributions of all actors identified within the GCR, making dedicated efforts to reach out to non-traditional actors and those who have not been UNHCR

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1. Such as the comprehensive gender audit being conducted across GCR and GRF preparatory processes and events, the work of the UNHCR Global Youth Advisory Council, and the mobilisation – with the support of NGOs – of people with lived and living refugee experience via refugee groups, including the Global Refugee-led Network.
implementing partners in the past, 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 with respect to the imperative of ensuring rights protective approaches to the management of complex mixed movement scenarios.

With regard to 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 linkages between themes, including the ways in which pledges and practices identified under one theme correspond to and may support those made in another. We note the importance of maintaining an overarching perspective across all themes to ensure coherence of approaches, exploit linkage opportunities and embed cross-cutting elements uniformly.

We support calls for ambitious new pledges which will deliver systemic changes aligned with GCR objectives. We also support joint pledges and coalitions which seek to strengthen relationships and understandings between diverse actors and chart a course for the incremental achievement of measurable, enduring benefits for refugees and host communities, with scope for replication and scalability. As we work to ensure the success of the first GRF, we must 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 and contributions. We see this tool as an essential mechanism to ensure consistency between GRF commitments and GCR objectives around a defined set of thematic priorities. 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 in the longer term.

And finally, we welcome the details provided with respect to the GRF program. We appreciate the opportunities which may be afforded for diverse actor engagement through spotlight sessions, the good practice marketplace and speakers’ corner. We look forward to discussing these approaches further and continuing to inform the substance of the full agenda.

In conclusion, NGOs reiterate their firm support for the first Global Refugee Forum. We believe inclusive participation, collaboration, concrete pledges and robust accountability will be fundamental to its success.

Thank you.