DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL’S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE WHS

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Introduction

Today’s world faces an unprecedented number of forcibly displaced people. Never before have we been confronted with a level of displacement as high as the one we witness today. 59.5 million people are currently displaced by conflict, according to the latest figures from UNHCR. 59.5 million individuals who are displaced internally, displaced across borders, newly displaced, as well as in situations of protracted displacement.

These individuals form part of an even larger and increasing number of individuals moving in mixed migratory flows. Flows that are only likely to continue to grow in size and diversity. A reality that further complicates and adds strain to an already overburdened humanitarian system.

The need for solutions to these complex situations has never been more pressing. The average duration of displacement is presently at a staggering 17 years, exacerbating an already intolerable situation for the many millions who have been forced to flee from their homes.

It is against this sobering backdrop that the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) outlines its six priority areas for the international humanitarian community to address through the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) process. DRC regards the WHS as a momentous opportunity for the diverse range of actors who are committed to humanitarian action to better address the drivers and consequences of forced displacement and mixed migration.

DRC calls for the international humanitarian community to:

01 Differentiate between displacement situations by root causes
02 Seek political solutions to displacement
03 Prioritise the protection of people in need
04 Devise an international normative framework for mixed migration
05 Strengthen efforts to prevent displacement
06 Place accountability to affected populations at the centre of humanitarian action

01 **Differentiate between displacement situations by root causes**

- **The international humanitarian community must distinguish between displacement induced by natural disasters and displacement induced by conflict.** The root causes of displacement are multivariate and consequently pose different challenges and require different responses from the humanitarian community. Aspects of central importance to all humanitarian work, such as access, engaging with local partners, entering into dialogues with states and non-state actors, and upholding impartiality and neutrality, hold heightened significance in contexts of conflict displacement. In addition, solutions require a very particular set of preconditions and interventions depending on the displacement situation, including distinct levels of understanding and responsibility by duty bearers. It is therefore imperative that an identification of duty bearers is made at the onset of all situations of displacement. If there is an absence of a duty bearer, as is often the case in fragile states, a temporary system of protection must be erected.

- **A greater differentiation of appropriate response mechanisms is needed based on in-depth analyses of specific contexts.** We need to be open to each displacement context presenting particular needs and therefore requiring different responses. We have to recognise that an appropriate, effective response must be based on in-depth knowledge and evidence. In turn, sufficient flexibility and agility is required by humanitarian actors to adapt accordingly. We therefore suggest caution when formulating standardised responses and coordination mechanisms.
02 Seek political solutions to displacement

- **Political commitment is a precondition to ending conflict displacement.** DRC argues for much greater emphasis on finding political solutions to the crises that continue to drive people from their homes. Only once we stem the conflicts that give rise to people fleeing will we see a decrease in the ever-larger numbers of displaced. Solutions to displacement, irrespective of whether they are found for refugees or internally displaced persons, are of a short-term duration or durable, require firm political commitments by states, non-state actors and duty bearers. Only once a firm political will to pursue solutions has been established will the tools of the international community be applied. In the meantime, it must be recognised that humanitarian work is not a replacement for political indifference or an obstruction to solutions for displacement.

- **Duty bearers hold a unique position in the context of solutions.** DRC is of the opinion that the increased skill sets of humanitarian actors, new funding support mechanisms, and an adherence to key principles of humanitarian action does not replace the primary role of duty bearers in creating an enabling environment for solutions.

- **Strategies for solutions should commence already at the onset of displacement.** While the priority in the first stage of displacement crises is the saving of lives and ensuring protection, efforts should also be invested in identifying how the immediate response impacts on future prospects for solutions, including through the early involvement of development partners. We must think long-term from the outset.

- **Particular attention must be placed on unlocking protracted displacement.** Central to this is the need to stop conceiving protracted displacement as a humanitarian crisis alone. It is untenable that humanitarian actors bear the responsibility for issues which are first and foremost a development concern. We suggest the creation of a high level specialised task force consisting of states, donors, the UN and NGOs from both humanitarian and development circles to work together on finding concrete solutions to protracted displacement.

- **Solutions can only be obtained on a foundation of strong partnerships.** The humanitarian community must move from thinking and implementing in silos to holistic planning and engagement. Linking humanitarian and development work is paramount and an opportunity for multiple sets of actors to contribute to more robust and sustainable solutions. We recognise a positive shift towards increased awareness among many development partners and appreciate that more partners are becoming involved, a trend we would like to see even further strengthened. It is important to recognise the limits of humanitarianism and acknowledge that we stand stronger on a foundation of collaboration and cooperation. We must strive to think anew in our existing partnerships as well as seek out new partnerships, including with non-traditional actors, local partners and the diaspora.

- **Solutions are regional in their nature.** Efforts should continue to be directed towards initiatives which are centred on finding solutions from a regional perspective. In this respect DRC places strong hope in the joint efforts of Member States, the UN and NGOs working together in the Solutions Alliance to narrow the gap between different actors and thereby increase the basis for solutions. A key driver to solutions is the application of general concepts within a clear context, allowing for tailor-made tools for concrete action as reflected in the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDDS), focused on ending displacement in Somalia.
Prioritise the protection of people in need

- **Centrality of Protection.** Protection must be placed at the heart of humanitarian action. We actively support the review and advancement of the UN protection architecture, such as the United Nations Rights Up Front Action Plan and the Interagency Standing Committee’s (IASC) commissioned “Whole of System Review of Protection in Humanitarian Action”, and look forward to its application in concrete contexts of humanitarian work. Experience shows that operationalisation must include headquarters’ and senior managements’ commitment and follow up, as well as additional resources and skills at the country and regional levels. This would facilitate developing a solid and comprehensive protection analysis – based on the collection, analysis and use of reliable and meaningful protection data and information – which informs and results in effective protective humanitarian strategies. We encourage greater efforts in operationalising protection as the core concept in all phases of humanitarian response.

- **International Humanitarian Law must be respected and adhered to.** With the overwhelming humanitarian needs and rise in rights violations in situations of armed conflict there is a greater need to advocate for and ensure all actors adhere by International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We call for greater efforts by governments and the international community to advocate and take action for those in need of protection, and hold accountable those responsible for violations of IHL and IHRL.

- **Quality of asylum and legal frameworks.** Refugee hosting states must uphold their responsibilities to provide protection and support for displaced people in accordance with fundamental human rights and the international protection regime. A critical link exists between the quality of asylum and the quality and sustainability of longer-term solutions. This includes access to legal protection and ensuring that refugees have full access to rights, in recognition that improved self-reliance will pave the way for sustainable solutions. A reduced quality of asylum, due to reduced funding, legal restrictions, or political motivations of host governments, must not be employed as a method to induce displaced peoples’ decision to pursue a particular solution.

- **Uphold and reaffirm the humanitarian principles.** In today’s complex and politicised humanitarian contexts, DRC reasserts the need for the adherence, application and respect for humanitarian principles. Impartiality, humanity, neutrality and independence form the fundamental basis of humanitarian action and are key tools used by humanitarian agencies in accessing and assisting communities, and ensuring the protection of people’s rights. While not all humanitarian principles are applied equally by all actors, efforts should be directed towards better applying these principles rather than revising them.
04 Devise an international normative framework for mixed migration

- **Mixed migration requires management, not control.** Migration is not a new phenomenon. Recently, however, it has grown in importance and garnered increased international political attention. While the movement of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees towards economically more active centres is a global trend, the response to influxes of migrants is too often fences, exclusion, criminalisation and an intentional lack of protection. Experience shows that the management of migration flows is much more effective than authoritarian control efforts. Therefore, DRC calls upon states and duty bearers to actively engage in devising equitable management policies. We must recognise that migration cannot be controlled, it can only be managed.

- **Mixed migration requires a normative framework.** There is a need to develop a clear framework for conceptualising the multitude of reasons for why people are on the move. Drivers of mixed migration are oftentimes a mix of political, social and economic reasons. A clear and conceptual normative framework for mixed migration should therefore be devised. This framework must take into account diverse protection concerns and the need to uphold particular rights for particular people, as well as distinguish between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, recognising the particular vulnerabilities, protection concerns and rights afforded to each of these groups.
05 Strengthen efforts to prevent displacement

- **The growth of unmet needs facing the humanitarian community must be understood within the context of fragile states.** The majority of conflicts occurring today are in fragile states. Conflict, by turn, is one of the main drivers of displacement. The result is that we must place far more attention to addressing stability in fragile states. We must not approach this task singlehandedly as humanitarians, but instead advocate for development actors to work alongside us in this challenge. Development actors are in a unique position to address the governance issues and instability which so often plagues fragile states.

- **The resilience of affected populations should be strengthened.** Communities must be at the centre of resilience efforts. An investment in bottom-up stability, starting at the outset of displacement, contributes to strengthening populations’ self-reliance and resilience. Strengthened resilience in turn reduces the likelihood and impact of displacement, improves the prospect for durable solutions, as well as reduces the likelihood of recurring crises. Timely and holistic engagement is needed prior to conflict to prevent displacement. With the current focus on addressing ongoing displacement, this important work risks being overlooked.

06 Place accountability to affected populations at the centre of humanitarian action

- **Affected populations must be at the centre of humanitarian action.** Considerable progress has been made in strengthening and broadening accountability measures in the humanitarian sector. Important strides have been made to align accountability with key principles such as transparency, effectiveness and sound implementation. Valuable administrative and financial considerations have also become embedded in accountability. We welcome these advancements while simultaneously urging the humanitarian community to not lose sight of the human focus in accountability. Affected populations lie at the heart of accountability and must not be overlooked at the expense of standards.

- **Coordination is a means to an end and can serve to enhance accountability.** DRC is a firm believer in and active supporter of coordination of humanitarian aid at global, regional, national and local levels. DRC actively engages in the Transformative Agenda, Refugee Coordination Model and other platforms as a mechanism to provide assistance in a more timely and accurate fashion. Coordination efforts that are too expansive, however, run the risk of losing this primary focus. DRC therefore calls for an appropriate use of coordination tools to enhance accountability towards affected populations.