

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME  
STANDING COMMITTEE  
68th Session  
2 – 6 October 2017

**NGO Statement on  
Agenda Item 4 – General Debate**

Thank you, Chair.

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. It has been drafted in consultation with, and aims to reflect the diversity of views of, the NGO community.

On 4 October 1967, the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees entered into force. The Protocol globalized the refugee protection regime by removing the temporal and geographic restrictions contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Exactly fifty years later, we are now engaged in efforts based on the 2016 New York Declaration, which recognized that the provision of international protection and durable solutions for refugees is a global public good and collective responsibility. We all have a role in developing comprehensive refugee responses based on more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing. In this perspective, we commend UNHCR for organizing this year an Executive Committee Special Segment highlighting the 'whole-of-society' approach, although NGO and refugee panelists could have also provided useful insights to this discussion.

NGOs are eager to go beyond 'business as usual' in refugee responses and are actively participating in the CRRF roll-out at national and regional levels. Thus, in East Africa, NGOs have provided inputs to the IGAD secretariat in the formulation of the Result Framework for the Nairobi Declaration and produced constructive recommendations on priority areas for CRRF roadmaps and Secretariats in roll-out countries. In Central America, NGOs are planning various consultations to feed into the process and generate inputs for the Global Compact on Refugees. Further clarity on the structures being developed to apply the CRRF at national and regional levels would help NGOs engage more predictably and efficiently. In regions where the CRRF is not yet being rolled out, NGOs are working to raise awareness and understanding of the process and contribute to the Global Compact.

NGOs can indeed provide their support for more effective work on the CRRF, but in order to fully leverage our capacities, it is essential to develop more efficient communication at all levels and with all civil society actors. In this perspective, we can build on the *2017 UNHCR-NGO Partnership Survey*, which reports a continued trend of favorable assessments on the state of partnership, with increased engagement in planning, partner selection and implementation. As UNHCR continues to create new partnerships and build upon existing relationships with

NGOs, the result of this survey can help improve communication, efficiency and overall impact in service to refugees.

The survey also recognizes that more should be done to sustainably build local capacities, an important dimension for the CRRF application, that goes beyond NGOs. Indeed, we are keen to see better connection of grass root actors to the CRRF process in order to make practical progress in implementing a true ‘whole-of-society’ approach, engaging more effectively host communities and refugees. NGOs commend UNHCR for its efforts since the June UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations to increase refugees’ inclusion in the CRRF and Global Compact process. NGOs are willing to work alongside UNHCR and already making contributions to have refugee voices more meaningfully heard, including by providing space for refugee-led organizations to effectively contribute. We encourage you to consult the Report on the Annual Consultations as it contains further NGO recommendations for the CRRF application and the development of the Global Compact.

In particular, NGOs strongly recommend that the centrally important element of responsibility-sharing for refugee protection be mainstreamed throughout the remainder of all Thematic Discussions on the Global Compact on Refugees. We call on UNHCR to formulate in the Programme of Action, and Member States to support, a vision accompanied with a road map that can set a trajectory for substantive progress in this area. To do this, the Programme of Action should go beyond a juxtaposition of good practices and highlight programmatic elements such as standby and partnership arrangements likely to increase responsibility-sharing and the predictability of responses. The international community has been talking about responsibility-sharing for a long time but the Refugee Compact must outline a concrete mechanism to put this into practice.

Moreover, responsibility-sharing should not be limited to financial support for countries of first asylum but also include measures to expand resettlement and complementary pathways. While countries of first asylum are important partners in refugee protection and need strong international solidarity and support, developed countries’ role cannot be limited to that of donors. In this perspective, NGOs would like to call on the current U.S. Administration to reconsider its decision to set the annual admissions ceiling for refugees during the 2018 fiscal year at 45,000. This represents a drastic reduction in US refugee admissions and a depressing signal, inconsistent with the traditional U.S. leadership role in refugee resettlement. Now is the time to increase, not decrease, refugee resettlement worldwide. We call on all countries to do everything possible to expand resettlement opportunities and alternative pathways. NGOs play an important role in resettlement, which should be acknowledged in the Programme of Action. NGOs are ready to support States that commit to resettle refugees.

NGOs are preparing to bring substantive contributions to the Thematic Discussions. For example, with regard to the Thematic Discussions on ‘Measures to be taken at the onset of a large movement of refugees’, it will be important to highlight the elements outlined in Section

5 of the Child Rights in the Global Compacts Recommendations<sup>1</sup>, particularly regarding alternatives to detention, and a comprehensive approach to protecting the rights of young people throughout responses to displacement.

We would also like to emphasize the need to include the issue of statelessness in the deliberations on the CRRF and the Global Compact, recalling that the New York Declaration recognizes that statelessness can be a root cause of forced displacement, and that forced displacement, in turn, can lead to statelessness. This needs to be discussed both in the context of the October Thematic Discussion, as well as the November one on ‘Measures to be taken in pursuit of durable solutions’.

In addition, NGOs are also looking forward to engaging with UNHCR ahead of the December High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges ‘stocktaking exercise’ and to better understand how this exercise will link with UNHCR’s Monitoring and Evaluation’s efforts on the CRRF roll-out. Further details on how UNHCR envisions the formal consultations process to unfold in 2018 would also be appreciated, so as to ensure the effective collaboration of all stakeholders, including NGOs, in the process. NGOs are eager to engage with an interactive process.

In conclusion, Ms. Chair, let’s remember that in New York last year, Member States reaffirmed the importance of the international refugee regime and adopted commitments to strengthen our collective capacity to address mass displacement. As noted in our Standing Committee Statement two weeks ago, NGOs commend the progress achieved so far in the CRRF implementation and the legislative reforms underway in countries of East Africa and Central America. As NGOs, we are keen to see the legislative changes resulting in a new reality where ‘care & maintenance’ and confinement strategies become the exception; where children and youth can access education; where refugees can become economically and socially self-reliant with access to services, justice and public life without discrimination. In other words, a reality where refugees can live a dignified and peaceful life while in exile, and where local communities benefit from hosting refugees.

However, we also need to ensure the momentum is maintained to actually deliver on those commitments everywhere needs arise. The geopolitical situation is unfortunately a constant reminder that more needs to be done in this perspective. The indiscriminate violence in Rakhine State, which has been described as ‘ethnic cleansing’ by the OHCHR<sup>2</sup>, has resulted in mass displacement of over 500,000 refugees fleeing to Bangladesh. This unfolding humanitarian catastrophe requires urgent action at the highest level. We need specific humanitarian and political attention, in line with the commitments made in the New York Declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.childrenonthemove.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Working-document-29-June-2017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22148>

In the coming months, we should also make sure our collective focus on the Global Compact on Refugees does not leave anyone behind, including internally displaced persons.

Thank you.