

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
66th Session
5 October – 9 October 2015

**NGO General Debate Statement
Agenda Item 3**

Mister Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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.

We have echoed calls from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres and other partners for an urgent, coherent and robust response to the refugee crisis in Europe and beyond.

The world is watching Europe's response, particularly countries hosting significant numbers of refugees in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. But the problem is not Europe's alone. The current flight of refugees to and across Europe is the result of successive collective failures: failed interventions creating chaos in Afghanistan and Iraq, a failure to secure a political solution and humanitarian access in Syria, failure to adequately support the response in neighbouring countries, failure to support front-line European countries like Greece, failure to heed warnings that the Dublin system was not fit for purpose, and failure to prepare for and readily accept new arrivals in Europe despite early and constant warnings. In addition, the international community has failed to adhere to basic treaty obligations established to protect people in their greatest hour of need.

We believe the requirements are clear, and applicable not only the European context, but also in the other regions.

1. Dignity and Rights: Refugees and others arriving from situations of war and insecurity have already suffered terribly. They are entitled to be received with **dignity and respect for their rights, regardless of their immigration status**. The reception of refugees and migrants should be consistent with these principles - rather than focused on barbed wire, tear gas, pepper spray, water cannons, and menacing intimidation. **Acts of *refoulement* (pushbacks) are unacceptable.**

2. Saving Lives: Many people are still undertaking perilous journeys across the seas. We need to ensure operations have the adequate capacity and mandate to deal with the growing problem. **Saving lives, not border control, should be the priority for search and rescue operations.**

3. Asylum: European and other governments should **respect the universal human right**

to seek asylum. Whatever their country of origin or arrival, asylum procedures must be prompt, fair and efficient.

4. Identifying Special Needs: It is very important to screen new arrivals for special needs. For example, they may have been trafficked, traumatized or tortured. Special protection measures and reception arrangements must be put in place to meet the specific needs of women and children, in particular measures to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence (before, during flight and on arrival). Special attention should be paid to persons with disabilities and elderly persons.

5. Funding: UNHCR and its partners are facing significant funding shortfalls. We strongly encourage increased and flexible donor support for current appeals. **Any funding for the response in Europe should add to, rather than detract from, funding needed for humanitarian assistance in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Americas.**

6. Planning: Movements of refugees and migrants are influenced by dynamics like seasonal changes. In the Northern hemisphere, temperatures are already beginning to fall, and the harsh realities of winter are imminent. **States should plan accordingly, and if they feel they do not have the capacity to respond they should ask for assistance.**

7. Solidarity:

- EU leaders must commit to a fair and equitable system to protect, resettle and relocate refugees and asylum-seekers across EU Member States. Resettlement should be shared across the EU and be proportional to the number of people seeking protection worldwide.
- All Member States should contribute to the response in whatever ways they can. We encourage a strengthened role played by regional actors, including Gulf states, as well as refugee resettlement countries. They are strongly encouraged to provide greater financial support for humanitarian assistance in addition to resettlement opportunities or temporary protection based on UNHCR's vulnerability screening criteria.

8. Alternatives: The crisis in Europe could have been mitigated if people in need of protection were able to access **alternative and efficient legal pathways** to admission, including refugee resettlement, humanitarian admissions programs, education visas, work visas, and family reunification schemes. Efforts should be made to develop a comprehensive plan of action for States to document, promote and support such pathways as a matter of urgency, while ensuring minimum standards of protection.

9. Xenophobia: Leaders should do more to tackle racism and xenophobia. Civil society organizations worldwide have organized a number of successful campaigns that can be replicated, such as the Movement Against Xenophobia (MAX) in the UK, to **prevent violence against new arrivals and promote peaceful co-existence.** Putting programs in place today to facilitate language learning, quality education, livelihoods training, and citizenship courses will go a long way to minimizing tension.

10. Root Causes: Investment in addressing the root causes of conflict, violence and displacement such as poverty, inequality, injustice, the arms trade corruption, competition for resources and climate change is essential to reverse the growing flight of men, women and children in search of protection.

- Member States with influence over the parties to conflicts should, among other actions, intensify their efforts to pursue a negotiated political solution.
- The upcoming Valetta Summit with the EU and African Union is an important opportunity to address root causes of displacement in Africa, including conflict, repression and poverty.
- We look forward to a discussion of root causes at the December 2015 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in Geneva. We recommend the Syria situation to be included in the discussion.

At the end of the day, the primary responsibility for refugee and migrant protection lies with States. While we recognize the many contributions of various partners to the response, it is the obligation of the States to implement these ten recommendations.

A longer version of this statement will be posted at www.icvanetwork.org.