

NGO Statement on the Middle East and North Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a variety of NGOs.

Ten years after the Arab Spring, conflicts, displacement, humanitarian crises, and bad governance continue to tear countries apart in the region.

In **Yemen**, recent escalations in Marib threaten to displace populations while aid agencies are ill prepared to deal with rapid displacement. Since 2015, 2.5 million individuals have fled violence. The humanitarian space continues shrinking, as actors face obstructions to delivery, despite growing needs and widespread famine. National aid workers are subject to pressure, intimidation, while aid diversion remains a major concern.

- We urge States to reach a peaceful settlement, protect national aid workers; increase financial support, and support aid agencies' response to possible displacements in Marib;
- Access should also be ensured to schools, services, and homes for women and girls to reduce GBV.

Despite political progress **on Libya's** reunification, 278,000 people remain internally displaced. Premature returns create risks of intercommunal conflict calling for investment in social cohesion, reconciliation, and support for IDPs' voluntary and well-informed decisions to return.

Migrants and refugees routinely face torture, SGBV, abduction, trafficking, forced labour and killings, all in total impunity. Since 2021, both departures from Libya and arbitrary detention after interception at sea have sharply increased. Humanitarian aid is often insufficient and lack coordination. The Emergency Transfer Mechanism is virtually the only legal option.

We, therefore, call on:

- authorities to amend legislative frameworks on migration and asylum, aligning these with international law; end arbitrary detention, establish alternative procedures and gradually close detention centres. Safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors should be guaranteed.
- authorities and groups with *de facto* control of territory to fully cooperate with international accountability mechanisms including the ICC and Fact-finding mission and bring perpetrators of crimes to justice.
- actors to expand safe and legal routes for displaced population and renew efforts in effective operational coordination, in particular referral pathways and systems between humanitarian actors, and in cooperation with available public services.

Iraq recently closed several IDP camps despite protection and humanitarian concerns. Facing major obstacles in their place of origin, IDP returnees were forced into new displacement. Access to shelter

or basic needs remains a challenge and risks of tensions with host communities persist. Moreover, Iraq's determination to 'close the displacement file' by the October elections raises concerns for nearly 190,000 people living in camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

- Should further camp closures be planned, those must adhere to the minimum return standards, in-line with the endorsed Principled Returns Framework and in close consultation with host communities and IDPs.

10-year after the Syrian uprising, half the population is still displaced; explosive hazards and bombings threaten safety; and 38% of the population live in areas outside of government control. Without any alternative to UN-supported cross-border operations, an effective response may be hampered if the Security Council resolution is not renewed, opening major gaps in funding and procurement. In government-controlled areas, agencies already experience severe difficulties in receiving allocated funds because of sanctions, resulting in delay and suspension of vital programming.

NGOs are ready to co-lead sectoral coordination in controlled areas such as Damascus.

- Donors should robustly fund and increase multi-year flexible funding to allow programs to adapt to the ever-changing context.
- UN agencies and donors should support NGOs to address banking challenges, facilitate direct transfers of humanitarian fund and support the creation of a dedicated humanitarian transfer mechanism for partners.
- We call for strengthened dialogue with local authorities to increase understanding of Good Humanitarian Donorship and support NGOs to partner.

In 2020, **Syrian refugee returns** significantly decreased, due to COVID-19 movement restrictions and the deteriorating socio-economic situation inside Syria. Conditions are not yet conducive for returns. However, the pandemic's economic impact in host countries might reignite returns such as in **Lebanon**, which struggles with economic downturn, COVID-19, and the effects of the August 2020 explosion, exacerbating refugees' vulnerabilities.

We urge stakeholders to:

- Focus on sustainable aid approach in providing dignified shelters, prioritizing self-reliance and ensuring host communities' inclusion.
- Humanitarian actors should monitor return condition, support the flow of impartial and reliable information and counselling on rights, administrative and legal processes, and conditions in areas of return.

In the MENA region, States continue to show little investment in the #IBelong campaign to end **statelessness**. Ratification of international conventions remains limited. Discriminatory policies prevail, such as citizenship revocation in Bahrain, and the stigmatization of children of Yezidi mothers in Iraq.

We urge States to:

- Work with civil society to activate commitments based on regional instruments, principally the 2018 Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity, and international commitments to eliminate gender discrimination in law affecting nationality rights.
- Promote access to birth registration in the region, an important mechanism for statelessness prevention.

The **pandemic** hits through ongoing economic collapse, pushing people into poverty, food insecurity, straining already struggling health sectors, and exacerbating GBV. Movement restrictions and border closures significantly impacted the forcibly displaced ability to find safety. Starting the vaccination process, many States indicated they will include displaced population in their campaigns, and this should be monitored.

We call for:

- developing a clear coordination mechanism for the vaccination campaign, ensuring humanitarian actors' contributions.
- NGOs have concerns about UNHCR MENA's funding needs for the COVID-19 response. Last year, the GHRP referenced partnerships with NGOs and funding was allocated to lead agencies. We welcome an update on funding received, how it was allocated, for whom and what.

Regarding, **partnership with UNHCR**, NGOs recommend strengthening the independence of coordination forums, and having clear divisions between mandates as clusters and as UNHCR. Coordination structures should be accountable and promote co-leadership with national and international NGOs. Local partners, including women-led NGOs, should be supported.

Further details are available at icvanetwork.org

Thank you.