

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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NGO General Debate Statement – Extended Version
Agenda Item 4

Madame 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.

Because this year's Executive Committee schedule has again been compressed, we have consolidated the NGO statements into a list of the top ten actionable items we feel require the immediate attention of UNHCR and Member States.

First, it is crucial for States and UNHCR alike to encourage and facilitate the leadership and participation of women and girl refugees.

We are concerned that displacement serves to exacerbate existing inequalities, discrimination and hardship faced by refugee women and girls. To overcome these barriers, women and girls should be given the opportunity to act as leaders, advocates and allies in their communities. Participation in formal and informal decision-making is crucial if women are to meet their critical role in securing meaningful protection and durable solutions. In particular, state and international actors should guarantee refugee women and girls access to due process, respect for gender-specific needs, and equal access to clear and transparent systems and processes for protection and assistance. Men and boys have an important role to play here, and we advocate for bringing refugee men into the discussions of how best to empower women.

We draw attention to the ten core protection areas identified by refugee and displaced women who participated in the Regional Dialogues with Refugee Women in 2011 and which build on the High Commissioner's 2001 Five Commitments to Refugee Women. Taken together, these core protection areas are the key to sustainable, effective protection and services for refugee, displaced and stateless women and girls. In order to ensure full implementation of these priorities, we urge UNHCR and States to put in place time-bound action plans with measurable goals and regular reporting. NGOs stand ready to be strong and active partners with UNHCR in achieving these goals, including supporting effective implementation in the field and advocating with donors and host governments for their support.

Second, for refugees stuck in protracted situations we urge states and international actors to give fresh priority to promoting genuine self-reliance and human rights.

The number of forcibly displaced persons has reached an all-time high, while protracted situations continue to lengthen in duration. And with emergencies in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Iraq, multiple protracted emergencies are being overlooked or are at the risk of being forgotten. Opportunities that build and reward self-reliance enable refugees to not only personally benefit, but also grow local economies and autonomously unlock solutions for themselves and their hosts, including improved prospects for local integration, resettlement, and repatriation.

Third, we urge States to ensure international protection for those fleeing across any border, including by providing effective access to territory and adhering to the principle of non-refoulement.

We urge governments to widen access to short-and long-term refuge for those fleeing conflict and environmental disaster. Together with the lock-down of borders, the lack of safe channels for those desperate to save their lives and their families is funneling refugees to death on land and sea crossings. And so many are dying: in a report published on 29 September, IOM confirms that more than 3,000 people have died this year alone in the Mediterranean Sea. Hundreds are mothers and children, and an increasing percentage are refugees from Syria, Gaza, and Iraq as well as from Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. NGOs urge UNHCR and states to explore and collaborate on safe channels instead of dangerous funnels.

Aware of international law prohibiting *refoulement*, we continue to urge governments to refrain from acts that clearly drive induced or involuntary repatriation of refugees, including Kenya with respect to refugees from Somalia, Thailand regarding refugees from Myanmar, Australia towards boat people from throughout Asia, Sri Lanka regarding Afghan, Iranian and Pakistani refugees, and the U.S. and Mexico regarding refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. On a positive note, we recognize the efforts of Latin American states and encourage further actions to reaffirm the regional protection regime and its broadened refugee definition in light of the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration.

Fourth, we call on UNHCR and States to better support refugees and displaced persons living in urban areas and other non-camp settings.

Data shows that two thirds of all refugees live outside of formal camp structures. The refugee response community is urged to strengthen outreach, facilitate access to services, promote self-reliance among urban refugee populations, and expand international support to public services in host countries. Refugees and IDPs live outside camps in all regions, and humanitarian programming must be resourced accordingly. We should pursue creative and practical strategies to promote income generation, safe employment and social inclusion for this population.

We appreciate the work of the UNHCR-NGO Urban Task team in sharing best practices and encourage ExCom members to attend our Friday afternoon side event on alternatives to camps. We look to further collaboration between governments, UNHCR and civil

society organizations working to meet the needs of these refugee populations. This is an example of the kind of partnership between NGOs and UNHCR that can make a real difference.

Fifth, we encourage UNHCR and States to promote legal frameworks, policies, funding, and coordination for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Despite the reforms launched in 2005, we have yet to enjoy a humanitarian system that consistently provides robust responses to internal displacement from conflicts and natural disasters. The December 2013 High Commissioner's Dialogue on IDPs was a step in the right direction, particularly to advance two priorities: the implementation of the Kampala Convention and the Secretary General's Durable Solutions Framework.

As UNHCR headquarters seeks to provide further support to its staff on the ground for IDP coordination and operational delivery, the next round of UNHCR COP planning and budget discussions will provide an opportunity to promote adequate, predictable, and operational coverage for IDPs.

Sixth, we urge all States to refrain from arbitrary detention.

Asylum and migration-related detention is on the rise. Detention harms the health and well-being of those affected, particularly children and families, and infringes on their human rights. UNHCR should continue to advocate for states to implement alternatives to detention. UNHCR's October 2012 Detention Guidelines should be implemented in practice. NGOs already collaborate with governments on these alternatives and stand ready to expand that collaboration.

Seventh, we urge UNHCR and Member States to better support host communities.

We have seen in the past, for example with Burundian refugees in Tanzania, that the pursuit of durable solutions for refugees suffers when tensions with host communities are not addressed. A far more substantial and coherent strategy is needed to address host communities, including the involvement of development actors, financial institutions, and the private sector.

Eighth, we urge UNHCR and Member States to maintain their commitment to Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD)-sensitive programming.

We hope UNHCR's new policy on community-based protection will improve UNHCR's engagement with affected populations. More should be done to improve prevention and response programming, meet established minimum standards, and ensure that the voices of women, children, adolescents and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, LGBTI individuals, and minority groups are heard.

Ninth, we encourage UNHCR and Member States to more systematically support local partner capacity development.

We note that national NGOs are particularly impacted by UNHCR's unpredictable funding availability. National and local NGOs are present before, during and after a humanitarian crisis. They can often provide good services at low cost, but may need help to become familiar and comply with increasing reporting and other administrative requirements. We look forward to working with UNHCR in the coming months and to lay the framework for the development of an institutional strategy for capacity strengthening.

Finally, we continue to encourage UNHCR, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and NGOs to strengthen their application of the Principles of Partnership in their daily interactions with one another.

This can be enhanced in the coming year with continued field rollout of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue, training on the updated Framework for Implementing with Partners, NGO involvement in the Solutions Alliance, and work associated with the High Commissioner's Dialogues on Faith, IDPs and Protection at Sea. All of these initiatives require time, patience, good communication, resources, and long-term commitment.

We look forward to monitoring progress in the future.

Thank you, Madame Chair.