

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
77th Meeting
10-12 March 2020

NGO statement on the Americas

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. We aim to highlight the major crises in the Americas as well as the regional challenges regarding persons of concern in the region, starting with the Venezuela situation:

The political, human rights and socio-economic developments in Venezuela resulted in 7 million people being in need of humanitarian aid inside the country. Several factors, including increased insecurity have undermined the ability of many Venezuelans to meet their most basic needs. Humanitarian actors also face logistical impediments, due to the lack of fuel and deteriorated basic services, limiting their capacity to reach vulnerable populations and provide assistance. As a consequence, vaccine-preventable diseases have re-emerged and are on the rise, millions are undernourished and lack access to water. Children are particularly affected.

This has led to the largest flight of people in recent history in the region, an unprecedented influx that continues placing immense pressure on host governments and communities.

Restrictive migratory measures applied by different countries, such as revised entry requirements for Venezuelans, have generated an increase in irregular border crossings and further vulnerability. Lack of documentation, length of administrative procedures and restrictions, difficulty in accessing legal counsel, and high visa application fees maintain Venezuelans in difficult irregular situations and sometimes increase the risk of statelessness. The denial of the existence of humanitarian needs is also a major challenge for humanitarian actors, also impacting their ability to collect necessary data to design interventions.

Venezuelans, particularly women and girls, continue to face different types of violence including trafficking, exploitation, and discrimination during their journeys and within host communities. Irregular armed groups present in some areas and popular demonstrations impact humanitarian access. Many Venezuelans continue to encounter difficulties in crossing borders and accessing their rights.

- North Central America

Criminal violence, insecurity economic hardship, and climate change effects continue to force thousands of people across borders in this sub-region, especially from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. In 2019, asylum applications from those nationals increased in various countries, mainly in the Americas, while the situation of internal displacement further deteriorated, reaching historic levels.

Human mobility in North Central America has also been affected by recent policies implemented by the United States. "Asylum Cooperation Agreements" (ACAs) concluded by with Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador particularly raise protection concerns. Moreover, the institutional and technical capacity to process increasing asylum claims in Central America remains limited, and systems require significant strengthening and assistance. Again, we call for a Humanitarian Response Plan or Appeal to address the needs of displaced people from and inside North Central America.

- In Nicaragua, the deterioration of social, political and human rights conditions since

April 2018 has forced 90,000 people to flee, mainly to neighboring Costa Rica. As witnessed by Ms. Kelly Clements during her recent visit, many arrive in need of health care, psychological support, shelter, and food. Additional support is necessary to maintain an adequate protection response. Long delays in registration and adjudication of asylum applications and obstacles to the enjoyment of basic rights continue to raise serious protection concerns.

- **In Colombia**, the security situation further deteriorated along the border with several attacks against community leaders and human rights defenders; the use of anti-personnel mines; the forced recruitment for criminal activities; and instances of SGBV. Chronic displacement and restrictions on movement are commonplace and predominantly affect indigenous people and Afro-Colombians.

Based on those observations, NGOs consider that:

- States in the region are often in violation of their obligations to respect the right to seek asylum, including guaranteeing *non-refoulement* and protection against collective deportations. We also reject practices aiming to subcontract deportation measures to other States or to force displaced populations to remain in an unsafe transit or third country.
- Increased protection risks faced by displaced people, particularly children, adolescent girls and the LGBTQI community, such as violence, trafficking, exploitation, separation and SGBV should be addressed and condemned.

NGOs call on:

- States to use the broader Cartagena Declaration refugee definition, which is adapted to the current displacement dynamics in the region. States have an obligation to ensure a human rights and dignity-based response with a differential and intersectional approach mindful of AGD dimensions, race, sexual orientation, disability and any other form of human diversity.
- In addition, States should guarantee and unify their regular migration channels to ensure full access to rights and facilitate integration in host communities.
- We call on States, UNHCR and other international organizations to generate disaggregated data on persons of concern for designing programs and public policies. In addition, UNHCR and other international organizations should ensure transparency in their budgeting processes.
- UNHCR and States should take IDPs into consideration when developing local integration policies and budgeting processes. UNHCR should strengthen its IDP response in coherence with the Cartagena+30 Action Plan and continue its coordination leadership in IDP responses.
- UNHCR should support actions to ensure access by humanitarian actors, in particular access to detention facilities. Humanitarian actors have to adopt new modes of operation in order to reach the most vulnerable as most IDPs and refugees try to remain unidentified to protect themselves from further violence.
- Finally, we call on UNHCR to strengthen its coordination with NGOs and improve broader information-sharing mechanisms to intensify the protection response in the region.

A detailed version of this statement is available on icvanetwork.org.

Thank you.