

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
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NGO statement on Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. It has been prepared in close consultation with the NGO community, representing a diverse set of views.

The first-ever Global Refugee Forum

In December, African NGOs attended the first-ever Global Refugee Forum (GRF) which brought together NGOs, refugees, Heads of State and government, UN leaders, international institutions, development organisations, business leaders and civil society representatives, among others in Geneva. African NGOs joined the debates on the following six key areas: Arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing; Education; Jobs and livelihoods; Energy and infrastructure; Solutions; and Protection capacity.

The Forum gave NGOs, operating in Africa and elsewhere, a significant podium to catalyse long-term support. Over USD 7 billion¹ was pledged by the World Bank Group and Inter-American Development Bank, along with a range of States and other stakeholders. The challenge, however, is to encourage UNHCR to advocate that all pledges, either financial or non-financial, are implemented. The GRF can be considered as a real success if the vast majority of pledges are fulfilled.

Managing budget risks

In 2019, UNHCR had a budget of USD 8,698.6² million that was significantly underfunded. Humanitarian assistance is vital in the African Region if we are to ensure UNHCR and host government response plans succeed. Whether in Liberia, Central African Republic, Uganda, or other countries, there is also a need to go beyond building emergency shelters and distributing Non-Food Items, to supporting refugees to gain means of earning a livelihood. UNHCR needs to engage more actively with NGOs to determine the priorities on the ground and to avoid disappointment when there are budget cuts, or when there is a need to close down projects which are essential to beneficiaries.

Improving the partnership: working better together

African NGOs are fully committed to working with UNHCR, Governments and all stakeholders for the implementation of Durable Solutions. When UNHCR starts planning its operations, it is recommended that a group of NGOs active in Africa is included from the inception of the operational process.

To better facilitate implementation, UNHCR is requested to address delayed Project Partnership Agreements and ensure consistency in the implementation of UNHCR policies and instructions in line

¹ UNHCR Informal briefing on the Global Refugee Forum, Financial commitments, 19 February 2020

² UNHCR's 74th Standing Committee, Update on budgets and funding for 2018 and 2019, 4 March 2019, EC/70/SC/CRP.7/Rev2

with simplification and efficiency promoted by the Grand Bargain. Equally, they should be accountable for monitoring the fulfilment of pledges and contributions and turn them into realities. UNHCR should also recognise the advantage of having the NGO community respected as partners and not simply as contracted agencies. NGOs welcome recent discussions with UNHCR in Geneva to reform the implementing partnership framework and encourage UNHCR to take immediate steps to initiate the process.

NGOs – big and small – recognise and appreciate the decision to provide Partner Integrity Capacity Support Cost. In turn, we call upon UNHCR to disseminate administrative guidance to representation offices to create a shared understanding of the application and treatment of the Support Cost. In line with this, we urge UNHCR to improve communication to guarantee that the ongoing reforms at Headquarter are well communicated to the field. This will ensure that the entire UNHCR community maintains common understanding and thereby reduce the confusion that may happen.

Regionalisation and decentralisation

NGOs encourage UNHCR to share clear information about the structure of the new Regional Bureaus, particularly indicating specifically focal points for partnership aspects. UNHCR regional consultations with NGOs can be crucial to address challenges next to the point of delivery. For this reason, it is essential that NGOs be involved and engaged in the process from the start to identify meaningful topics, modalities and links with the Geneva consultations and feed into improved collaboration.

The situations in West and Central Africa, the East and Horn of Africa and Southern Africa Regions

East and Horn of Africa

The operational environment in the East and Horn of Africa continues to be unstable due to the ongoing outbreaks of violence, terrorism, droughts as well as social and political crises. There is a constant need for continuous efforts towards restoring peace to the unstable neighbouring countries in the region like South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Burundi.

In Tanzania, the protection environment is becoming more complicated due to the tight restriction on access to territory in recent years. The Refugee Response Plan for both Congolese and Burundians is looking to ensure that new births and new arrivals are considered, as with the upcoming elections, particularly in Burundi, Tanzania is likely to see a surge in refugee numbers.

NGOs are waiting for the final report of the Population Validation Exercise in Tanzania. This will provide the correct data on the refugee population in the country. The Tanzania government has started the registration of refugees with the National Identification Authority to provide them with National Identification Cards, a step that will allow refugees to register their telephone lines and even to open bank accounts.

Along with this achievement, we strongly recommend UNHCR to intensify advocacy, seeking an opportunity from the government to allow refugees to open small businesses for income generation and reduce their aid dependency. The NGO community reaffirms its commitment to continue supporting UNHCR to advocate for that purpose.

West and Central Africa

Humanitarian NGOs in Burkina Faso operate in highly volatile environments, facing a wide range of institutional, operational, access, and security challenges that necessitate carefully designed responses and mitigation measures. This has turned out to be a significant obstacle to the efficient delivery of

humanitarian aid and protection. Humanitarian actors alongside UNHCR must be allowed to support governmental institutions with the registration of displaced populations and with camp management in areas beyond State presence. To that end, NGOs request opportunities to work with UNHCR to advocate with the national Government to enable safe access to camps and sites.

Violence continues unabated across the Lake Chad Basin. It is reported that in North-East Nigeria alone, 1.9 million³ internally displaced persons (IDPs) are still living in forced displacement. More must be done to find a durable solution to the ten years-long displacement crisis that keeps people in congested IDP camps and overburdened host communities of major urban centres. IDPs in both Nigeria and Cameroon, as well as Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, are all faced with the threat of premature and unsafe returns, pushed by deteriorating living conditions and a government narrative pressing returns as the priority. Because of insecurity and enforced counter-terrorism policies, the humanitarian response and population movements are restricted to military-controlled zones. This limits humanitarian actors' access to the most vulnerable, as well as the population's access to livelihood and basic services.

Southern Africa

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains dire as a result of inter-communal violence increased fighting between non-state armed groups and Congolese security forces, Ebola and measles epidemic. Villages are burnt to the ground, and when people flee, they lose their livelihood, leading to extremely precarious living conditions. The fundamental fight for land and resources is at the core of the violence in Congo and sadly triggers a cycle of abuses, forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and school dropouts. The humanitarian situation for newly displaced people is increasingly difficult. In some of the villages, the displaced population makes up more than half of the population, according to local authorities.

Aid organisations in DRC operate in a particularly complex and challenging environment characterised by increasing insecurity which poses significant risks to international and national staff. This makes partners' ability to reach vulnerable populations with timely response costly, especially in the form of logistical support and protection required. The mounting needs and the lack of funding for humanitarian assistance means that we often have to close down an office in one location to be able to respond in another.

To address the situation, we propose that upstream actions be reinforced through existing international instruments to prevent, or help resolve, conflicts that beset communities. Years of unresolved conflict about land and resources, as well as the lack of solutions to historical grievances have caused cyclical violence, and sustained humanitarian response is needed as long as these underlying conflict drivers are not addressed. NGOs must strengthen existing basic structures through the construction of infrastructure, the training of State officials and the provision of equipment for better care of persons of concern to UNHCR; addressing underlying conflict drivers and taking development aspects into account in programming will further reduce the dependency of persons of concern on international aid.

Thank you, Chair.

³ UNHCR Operational data portal, refugee situations, Nigeria