

NGO statement on Africa

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs and aims to represent a diverse set of views.

We start by offering the following brief reflection on the first ever Global Refugee Forum, which NGOs attended last December along with a broad range of stakeholders, including UNHCR, Member States and refugees. The Forum gave NGOs a significant podium to catalyse long-term support and participate in the debates on all six key areas. Going forward, we encourage UNHCR to advocate so that all pledges, either financial or non-financial, are implemented and monitored. The GRF can only be considered as a real success when the vast majority of pledges are fulfilled.

Our statement will cover 3 thematic areas and then address points relevant to each new UNHCR bureau in Africa:

1. Managing budget risks

In 2019, UNHCR's budget was significantly underfunded. Humanitarian assistance is vital in Africa to see UNHCR and host government response plans succeed. Whether in Liberia, CAR, Uganda, there is also a need to go beyond building emergency shelters and distributing NFIs. Refugee self-reliance also needs to be supported. UNHCR should engage more actively with NGOs to determine priorities on the ground and avoid disappointment when there are budget cuts or projects close down.

2. Improving partnership

NGOs are fully committed to working with UNHCR, Governments, and others for the implementation of Solutions. When starting its operations planning, UNHCR should include, from the start, a group of NGOs active in Africa.

To better facilitate implementation, UNHCR should address delayed Project Partnership Agreements, recognising NGOs as respected partners, not simply contracted agencies. NGOs welcome recent discussions with UNHCR to reform the implementing partnership framework and encourage immediate steps. In line with the Grand Bargain's simplification and efficiency objectives, UNHCR should particularly ensure consistency in the implementation of its policies and instructions.

NGOs recognise and appreciate the decision to provide Partner Integrity Capacity Support Cost. Related guidance should be disseminated to create a shared understanding of the application and treatment of the Support Cost. We also urge UNHCR to improve communication to guarantee that the ongoing HQ reforms are understood in the field.

3. Regionalisation and decentralisation

NGOs encourage UNHCR to share clear information about the structure of the new Bureaus, indicating Partnership focal points. Regional consultations can be crucial to address challenges close to delivery point. It is therefore essential to involve NGOs in the process from the start, to identify meaningful topics, links with the Geneva consultations and feed into improved collaboration.

Tuning to the situations in each sub-region:

- 1. In East and Horn of Africa** the operational environment there continues to be unstable due to outbreaks of violence, terrorism, droughts, social and political crises. In places like South Sudan, DRC, Somalia, and Burundi, continuous efforts are needed to restore peace.

In Tanzania, the protection environment is complicated because of government imposed restrictions on access to territory. However, the Refugee Response Plan for Congolese and Burundians aims to ensure new births and new arrivals are considered. The government has started the registration process to provide refugees with Identification Cards, a step that will allow them to register telephone lines and open bank accounts. We strongly recommend UNHCR to intensify advocacy with NGOs' support, seeking an opportunity from the government to allow refugees to develop small businesses and reduce their aid dependency.

2. West and Central Africa

NGOs in Burkina Faso operate in highly volatile environments faced with a wide range of institutional, operational, access, and security challenges, requiring carefully designed responses and mitigation measures. This resulted in significant obstacles to the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid and protection. Humanitarian actors alongside UNHCR must be allowed to support the government with the registration of displaced people and camp management in areas beyond State presence. NGOs are eager to work with UNHCR to advocate for safe access to camps and sites.

Violence continues unabated across the Lake Chad Basin. There are 1.9 million IDPs in North-East Nigeria alone. More must be done to find durable solutions to this lingering displacement crisis that keeps people in congested IDP camps and overburdened host communities in urban centres. IDPs in Nigeria and Cameroon as well as Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, face the threat of premature and unsafe returns, pushed by deteriorating living conditions and a government narrative pressing for returns.

Because of insecurity and counter-terrorism policies, the humanitarian response and population movements are restricted to military-controlled zones, limiting humanitarian actors' access to the most vulnerable, and the population's access to livelihood and basic services.

3. Southern Africa

The humanitarian situation in DRC remains dire due to inter-communal violence; fighting between non-state armed groups and Congolese security forces; Ebola and measles epidemics. Villages are burnt 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 human rights violations. The humanitarian situation for newly displaced people is increasingly difficult.

NGOs in DRC operate in a complex and challenging environment characterised by increasing insecurity, posing significant risks to staff. This makes partners' ability to reach vulnerable populations with timely response costly. Because of mounting needs and funding shortage, we often have to close 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. NGOs must strengthen existing basic structures through infrastructure constructions, Training of State officials, and the provision of equipment to improve humanitarian aid. Moreover, addressing underlying conflict drivers and integrating development aspects into programming will further reduce the aid dependency of displaced populations.

A detailed version of this statement will be soon available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.