

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME  
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13-14 September 2023

**NGO Statement on International Protection**  
**Oral update on the preparations for the Global Refugee Forum**

Dear Chair,

This statement represents the view of a wide range of NGOs. We commend the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its immense effort in preparing for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). As the GRF approaches, it brings with it global attention including the media gaze. Collectively, we would like to highlight to the UNHCR and Member States the increasingly distressing situation faced by refugees worldwide when it comes to how their image is portrayed in the media. It is with great concern that we address the accelerating discrimination against forcibly displaced population by some local communities and the detrimental role played by certain media outlets in exacerbating this issue.

In recent years, we have witnessed a surge in displacement, forcing millions to seek safety. These refugees have fled persecution, conflict, violence, and environmental disasters often leaving behind everything. As their plight becomes increasingly evident, it is disheartening to observe that they are confronted with discrimination and hostility during their flight and upon arrival in host countries.

Local populations, while often generous and empathetic towards refugees, are also grappling with challenges. In many cases, these challenges have led to misconceptions, fear, and mistrust, resulting in discriminatory practices against forcibly displaced populations. This not only hinders the integration of forcibly displaced populations, it also perpetuates hostilities hampering social cohesion.

Moreover, the role of the media in shaping public opinion and discourse cannot be overlooked. Regrettably, some media outlets have chosen to portray forcibly displaced populations in a negative light, sensationalizing isolated incidents and fueling unfounded fears, rather than highlighting the resilience and contributions of refugees to their host communities. Such biased reporting not only perpetuates discrimination but also undermines efforts to foster understanding and compassion between refugees and local populations.

Considering these challenges, we urgently call upon the UNHCR and Member States to take principled action and address this pressing matter in the following ways:

UNHCR should intensify its efforts to raise awareness about the rights and vulnerabilities of refugees, promoting understanding and empathy. By facilitating dialogues and

exchanges between refugees and local populations, UNHCR can support in fostering mutual understanding and community engagement.

The media often marginalizes forcibly displaced populations as the 'other,' positioning them as a threat. This also dehumanizes them and significantly promotes hate speech and hostility.

UNHCR can contribute to dispelling stereotypes by working with media outlets to promote responsible journalism, emphasizing the positive impact of forcibly displaced populations. A mechanism to monitor media ethics should be established to evaluate adherence to ethical reporting standards, flagging instances of discriminatory content while promoting balanced and accurate coverage.

The UNHCR should establish a connection with official media regulatory agencies and social media platforms and seek to limit misinformation, prejudice, and stereotyping against refugees.

Through advocacy for strengthened legal protections against discrimination based on refugee status in host countries, we can change the narrative and ensure that refugees as well as other forcibly displaced populations are granted equal access to essential services and opportunities. By collaborating with governments, NGOs, and local actors (including forcibly displaced populations) to design and implement holistic integration programs we can together promote welcome and inclusion.

The voices of forcibly displaced persons are rarely heard in the media. There is an increasing need for platforms for displaced persons to speak freely, without relying on indirect representation by political actors, humanitarian organizations, or journalists.

It is critical to avoid tokenization when it comes to the representation of forcibly displaced populations in high level events. UNHCR can contribute to portray forcibly displaced populations as experts through authentic and relatable stories and informed contributions to panels and discussions.

NGOs commends UNHCR and Member States on the constitution of a forcibly displaced population delegation in the preparations of the GRF. It is critical that their views are heard, and they are at the center of discussions and the development of commitments and pledges. Noting that the GRF this year will have an exhibition space and media zone, we call upon UNHCR and journalists to use these spaces effectively and ethically to highlight refugees' and other forcibly displaced populations meaningful contributions.

As we approach the GRF, one of the biggest global events focusing on forcibly displaced populations UNHCR has an important role in setting the example on how forcibly displaced populations are portrayed, including speaking out against discrimination by media outlets, whose negative portrayal contributes to creating hostilities towards forcibly displaced populations. By changing the narrative, UNHCR and international actors create a more inclusive and compassionate global community.

Thank you.