

## NGO statement on Asia and the Pacific

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

In 2023, displaced and host communities in Asia have faced renewed challenges, impacting opportunities for solutions. In this context, it is crucial to build on the GRF and prevent donor fatigue, particularly for the main regional situations:

In **Afghanistan** the protection environment has deteriorated through the combined effects of earthquakes; unequal access to services, largely due to the ban on female NGO workers; and decreasing manifestations of solidarity from neighboring countries. Afghans ordered to return, particularly women, face loss of livelihoods, family separation, harassment, and anxiety in a highly gender-segregated society.

NGOs therefore:

- urge again to reverse the ban on female workers.
- call on donors to fund humanitarian organizations and support longer-term approaches including protection-sensitive border screening mechanisms; a gendered response to returns; and reinforcing community-based reintegration mechanisms.
- urge host countries to preserve the asylum space, avoid deportations, provide access to documentation and legal stay, respect the UNHCR non-return advisory, and the *non-refoulement* principle.
- call for increased third-country solutions and responsibility sharing. In this respect, NGOs reiterate their readiness to engage with the SSAR Support Platform.

In **Myanmar**, conflict, climate-related events, rights violations, and humanitarian impediments have increased displacement and statelessness. In the region, deteriorating living conditions in camps and dwindling humanitarian assistance are increasingly pushing Rohingya refugees towards dangerous sea journeys, where they face pushbacks, detentions, and xenophobia.

We therefore call for:

- diplomatic and political efforts to address displacement drivers, and renewed support for humanitarian activities in Bangladesh camps.
- receiving countries to allow disembarkation and support search and rescue operations.

- member of the Bali Process to share responsibility for protection of refugees, adopt alternatives to detention (particularly community-based alternatives) and facilitate family reunification.
- governments in the region to work with civil society to counter xenophobia.
- States should also increase responsibility-sharing through a joint framework on third-country solutions.

In addition, we want to highlight some thematic areas of importance to the region:

- **First, on Solutions, including statelessness**

Practical longer-term approaches are needed to create enabling environments for durable solutions. This includes providing access to rights and services, which are crucial to build a sustainable future; removing gender-discriminatory provisions from nationality laws; and recognizing refugees' and stateless people's contributions to societies.

While we recognize the significant efforts to address statelessness, particularly by Kyrgyzstan and Thailand, we also remind that the Rohingya represent an extreme example of statelessness due to exclusionary and discriminatory nationality laws. The region also lacks a regional human rights framework, hampering solutions for stateless persons.

We also call on UNHCR and States to ensure access to refugee and stateless status determination procedures and formal documentation, providing financial and technical support when necessary.

In addition, States and relevant stakeholders should help increase opportunities for third-country solutions.

- **Second, on Detention**

In many countries in the region, forcibly displaced and stateless persons face arbitrary and indefinite detention, with negative and long-lasting mental and physical health consequences. While some States have reduced detention, significant policy and implementation gaps remain.

- We call on States to develop and implement non-custodial community and human rights-based alternatives to detention. We note with interest the Australian and Royal Thai Government's GRF multi stakeholder pledge in this regard.

- **Third, on Climate Change**

Increasing intensity and frequency of disasters and extreme weather events remains an urgent priority, raising insecurity for Pacific populations, potentially increasing statelessness.

Disasters exacerbate protection risks for already marginalized communities, and impact displacement patterns, as seen with Cyclone Mocha.

- We, therefore, urge States and humanitarian actors to integrate climate change into national and regional refugee protection policy and programming responses.

**Finally**, stimulating exchanges, increased refugee participation, and renewed momentum for responsibility-sharing were constructive developments at the **Global Refugee Forum**.

While awaiting the Outcome Document to inform deeper analysis, NGOs hope that the GRF generated impactful pledges likely to influence responses and related programming for the coming years. Sustained political commitment and advocacy for solutions are needed to ensure pledges become truly transformational. NGOs in Asia will follow-up on this and contribute to collective accountability.

Further details are available on [icvanetwork.org](http://icvanetwork.org).

Thank you.