

Regional Update on the Americas
NGO Collective Statement – ORAL Statement

Dear Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, the protection environment for millions of forcibly displaced and stateless people in our region is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Restrictive policies, rising violence, and lack of access to protection mechanisms continue to place millions of people at risk, contradicting the 1951 Refugee Convention, international human rights standards and international law.

Many countries in Latin America remain at the center of overlapping crises, where both internally displaced persons and those forced to flee their countries face increasing barriers to safety. NGOs witness firsthand the escalating risks along mixed migration routes—sexual violence, trafficking, extortion, and disappearances—particularly in the Darién Gap, Central America, and Mexico. NGOs are concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Colombia's Catatumbo Region, where clashes between armed groups have rapidly escalated, affecting thousands of displaced people and reaching unprecedented levels.

Women and girls face heightened risks throughout displacement. In the Darién Gap and Mexico, NGOs report widespread abuse, while gender-based violence remains underreported and underserved. Many women take dangerous routes due to barriers in asylum systems, increasing their exposure to harm. Women's organizations highlight the lack of a gender-sensitive approaches in asylum procedures, leaving women disproportionately disadvantaged. Gender stereotypes and revictimization in state practices often prevent them from receiving a fair hearing.

Despite efforts by some countries to carry out regularization processes, thousands of refugees remain excluded due to unreasonable requirements—such as proof of legal entry or valid identification. Meanwhile, asylum systems remain deficient, often hindered by a lack of political will. NGOs stress that temporary protection measures, implemented by some countries, must not substitute stable and long-term international protection.

Now, the situation in Haiti requires an urgent, hemispheric response. Displacement has increased internally and across the region, yet Haitians continue to face limited protection, linguistic barriers, and systemic discrimination. We welcome UNHCR's 2024 guidance recognizing Haitians' protection needs, yet many countries in the region have not provided effective protection. Given the country's crisis, we urge regional governments to apply the Cartagena Declaration.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, newly enacted policy changes severely restrict asylum access. In parallel, the policy changes to U.S. foreign aid assistance has left humanitarian programs across the region in limbo. As the largest donor in humanitarian and development response, this decision jeopardizes life-saving assistance, undermining protection and integration at a time when needs are at their highest.

Given this critical moment, we urge UNHCR and Member States to:

1. Scale up protection responses for people along complex mixed migration routes, protecting the rights of all those persons on the move, regardless of their legal status.
2. Strengthen the protection for internally displaced people, particularly in countries with policy gaps in recognition, prevention, and assistance.
3. Ensure the meaningful participation of civil society and refugee-led organizations in decision-making at all levels, including in the follow-up of the Chile Plan of Action adopted last year and other cooperation mechanisms.
4. Extend refugee protection to Haitians and other displaced populations under the Cartagena Declaration, ensuring fair asylum procedures, without discrimination.
5. States must work towards clearer asylum procedures for those needing protection.
6. Ensure that gender-based persecution is applied in asylum procedures and strengthen responses to gender-based violence affecting women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals.
7. All countries in the Region must uphold the principle of non-refoulement in line with international and domestic law. All Member States must either resume or increase foreign aid funding, which remains essential for humanitarian programs supporting displaced and host communities.

The NGO community, including refugee-led organizations, stand ready to support UNHCR and states in the achievement of these recommendations.

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Thank you.