EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME,
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NGO Statement on Sustainable Responses

Dear Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The NGO community welcomes the discussion on sustainable responses, especially as the focus now is on the operationalization of all 4 objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. Particularly at a time of unprecedented crisis in the humanitarian funding landscape, we need a better approach for bridging the gap between humanitarian response, development and peacebuilding to respond in an effective and meaningful way to address the challenges of forced displacement and statelessness globally and to galvanize international solidarity in so doing.

At the centre of such an approach must be the forcibly displaced and stateless persons themselves. Upholding human dignity and the rights of people who have been forced to flee or have been denied their fundamental right to a nationality must be of highest priority in all phases of the response to forced displacement and statelessness, including in emergency phases, in protracted situations, and in the search for durable solutions. Having a place to live, being able to attend school, obtain livelihood skills, being able to make an income to feed oneself and one's family, having access to health care and essential medication – these are all part of being able to live a life with dignity and rights.

A truly sustainable approach requires recognizing the delivery of protection and services to displaced and stateless populations as a global common good. This means acknowledging that sustainable responses need adequate, predictable and multi-year funding. It also means supporting and enabling host countries to provide the same responses to forcibly displaced persons, while ensuring equitable responsibility-sharing. The imperative for sustainable responses should not be a pretext for a complete burden shift to the host countries and communities alone.

Given the complexity of forced displacement situations, sustainable and effective responses also requires that humanitarian and development efforts simultaneously prioritize the reconstruction, stabilization, and capacity building of countries of origin, such as Afghanistan. Without addressing root causes and rebuilding social, economic, and institutional infrastructures in countries of origin, we risk perpetuating cycles of displacement and loss of critical human capital. This integrated approach ensures that aid not only alleviates immediate suffering but also contributes to durable solutions – for example, by enabling safe, dignified, and voluntary returns – thus preventing future displacement crises. All humanitarian projects and interventions should embed this dual focus: supporting displaced populations while actively contributing to the sustainable recovery of their home countries.

Given current funding constraints, we as NGOs are gravely concerned that the adequate, predictable and multi-year funding needed to enable sustainable responses is unavailable. As extreme funding cuts force significant reduction in UNHCR's resources, staff capacity and infrastructure, we question the agency's ability to act as a facilitator and catalyst for sustainable responses, and how the agency will prioritize between sustainable responses and delivering on its other activities, including emergency responses and UNHCR's core protection mandate.

We also fear that current funding shortfalls will impede a key aspect of sustainable responses: the transition from parallel delivery systems towards economic inclusion and social protection and integration of service delivery for forcibly displaced persons into national systems. The first UNHCR background paper on sustainable programming clearly stated that this transition

would require a period of time to build up the capacity of host governments to deliver on protection and essential services such as education and health. Currently most of the parallel education programmes and health services are implemented by NGOs which are instrumental in transferring knowledge and capacity to government actors as well as local actors, including RLOs, SLOs[1], WLOs and CBOs. Yet UNHCR is now threatened to pull out of education, health, water and sanitation services hastily, which would not allow for a conducive transition period. This means that host governments and local communities would be forced to immediately shoulder the burden when they are not ready to do so, ultimately jeopardizing the lives and dignity of the displaced and stateless populations.

The role of NGOs, RLOs, SLOs, WLOs, CBOs and other civil society actors in sustainable responses

NGOs, RLOs, SLOs, WLO, CBOs and other civil society actors have always played a most crucial part in sustainable responses with their community-based and community-led approaches, contributing to social cohesion with their engagement of both forcibly displaced populations and their host communities, stateless communities, and capacity building of government structures at national and local levels. We think this has not been elaborated upon enough in the background paper despite the notion that sustainable responses require a whole of society approach.

If Member States and UNHCR emphasize cost-effectiveness and efficiency in reaching affected populations directly, they must not continue to overlook the indispensable role of RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs in leading refugee and statelessness responses. Despite limited formal recognition and financial resources, these organizations remain embedded within their communities, offering vital support and emergency response using available tools and contextual knowledge. Furthermore, a number of these organizations are led by persons living at the intersection of forced displacement and disability, or other compounded vulnerabilities. Their lived experience provides essential, firsthand insight into the unique protection challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities — insight that is critical to designing truly inclusive and effective responses. NGOs, RLOs, SLOs, WLOs, and CBOs are therefore essential partners in building inclusive and resilient humanitarian systems. When meaningfully engaged through equitable collaboration, these actors play a vital role in ensuring that responses are grounded in the rights, needs, and priorities of all. Prioritizing these partnerships is not only good practice, but a necessity for sustainable humanitarian outcomes.

Promote equitable partnerships where RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs are co-designers and co-implementers.

Despite their impact, RLOs and SLOs are frequently marginalized and denied meaningful participation in humanitarian decision-making. International actors often engage RLOs in tokenistic ways—leveraging their presence for community access or donor justification, without genuine investment in their growth or leadership. RLO and SLO leaders are often still referred to as “community volunteers” rather than recognized as directors of legitimate, professional organizations. RLOs and SLOs are routinely involved only in superficial roles such as data collection or community outreach. Instead of being offered true partnerships, they receive small tokens of appreciation. Furthermore, despite years of engagement and claimed support, many RLOs see no tangible growth. Funding intended for RLO and SLO capacity-building is often delivered in the form of low-quality, donor-driven training that does not match actual needs. All the challenges highlighted now become manifestly problematic as global funding cuts necessitates actors to do more with less, often at the expense of RLO agency. Similarly, partnerships with SLOs have been extremely limited, with SLOs lacking adequate resourcing and a seat at the table with decision-makers.

[1] Stateless-Led organizations (SLOs)

Member States, UNHCR and INGOs must promote sustainable and equitable partnerships with organizations led by forcibly displaced persons and stateless persons. This means shifting power and resources. We recommend supporting the expertise and leadership of these organizations and assuring their meaningful participation in decision-making. Strengthening small RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs through increased recognition and support will particularly amplify refugee and stateless voices and enhance their ability to address community-specific challenges effectively. To achieve this, we need to scale up opportunities for flexible, direct and sustainable funding, capacity sharing, collective advocacy, and coalition development. Partnerships with the private sector will help us to further reinforce impact.

LGBTIQ+ Persons

Efforts of LGBTIQ+ organizations must be supported and uplifted. By removing barriers restricting the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and addressing the risks they face, we can create a more inclusive and just environment for all.

Stateless People

Statelessness is caused and perpetuated by discrimination, and stateless people are vulnerable to all forms of discrimination, persecution, and in the most extreme situations, to crimes against humanity and genocide. Effectively addressing statelessness through promoting the right to nationality for all, as well as equal rights for all regardless of legal status, is one of the core challenges of our times. We urge states to treat this global challenge with the urgency, political commitment and resource allocation it demands, while centring stateless people and their communities as the true experts who understand what solutions they need, and to whom we should always be accountable.

Recommendations:

- Sustainable responses must be adequately funded through predictable and multi-year funding, including for the transition period.
- Recognize RLOs, SLOs, WLOs, CBOs, and other actors leading localized refugee and statelessness responses as essential civil society actors capable of delivering impact efficiently, especially in low-resource environments.
- International actors should co-create solutions with RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs to transfer skills, capacity and technical guidance to enable and enhance their operational impact.
- INGOs should be proactive, and be supported, in transferring skills, capacity and infrastructure in delivering refugee responses, particularly in the areas of education and health services, into national systems and local/community actors.
- Integrate, as equal partners, RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs into all stages of project cycles, UNHCR planning processes, and other relevant decision-making structures.
- Ensure their leadership in designing inclusive services and protection mechanisms.
- Institutionalize RLO and SLO representation within governance frameworks to ensure their long-term inclusion beyond symbolic gestures.
- Collaborate with RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs to develop inclusive monitoring and evaluation tools.
- Advocate for dedicated global platforms for refugee voices that are independent of host government constraints and entrench refugee participation as a core principle.
- Support RLOs, SLOs, WLOs and CBOs' access to global decision-making forums.
- Facilitate feedback mechanisms that include perspectives from refugees and stateless persons with different backgrounds – including, but not only refugees with disabilities

and other persons living with other compounded vulnerabilities – to ensure perspectives from a group as diverse as possible and take into consideration a variety of needs.

- Fund and empower local disability-led organizations or other organizations of persons living with other compounded vulnerabilities to conduct outreach and deliver tailored services.