

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

76th SESSION

6-10 OCTOBER 2025

Joint NGO Statement on the General Debate – written statement

Dear Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

This statement was drafted through consultation with a wide range of NGOs, including organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

We speak today as NGOs committed to upholding the rights, dignity, and agency of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. We are also humanitarians and cannot ignore the many and increasing humanitarian emergencies globally. The failure to find peaceful solutions at the political level is pushing humanitarian responses to their limits. In Sudan, we are witnessing one of the largest famines in modern history. In Gaza, famine, catastrophic mass displacement, and genocide^[1] are playing out before our eyes.

We ask ourselves and we ask you, why is global suffering increasing? Instead of decreasing? How many times do we need to raise our concerns, **urge** States to uphold their international obligations, **call** for our political leaders to act until we see real, tangible change. As humanitarian NGOs, we have not forgotten why we are here. Have you?

Dear Chair, Excellencies,

This session takes place at a pivotal moment. Humanitarian space is shrinking, asylum systems are under strain, displacement has reached record highs. At the same time, unprecedented funding cuts are already undermining critical programmes, and cuts in rations and basic services for refugees are becoming widespread across camps and settlements globally. We are now seeing onward movements, as families are forced to move due to cuts in food assistance.

A few examples illustrate the gravity of the situation:

- One NGO reported that they could no longer support individuals at extreme risk in Honduras and Guatemala who were seeking asylum or safe relocation. The suspension of the U.S. resettlement programme on January 2025 left around 15,000 people in situations of high vulnerability, including 2,000 at imminent risk of violence or persecution.
- In Kenya, one NGO reported a 72% reduction in protection services, including cash assistance, GBV response, child protection, legal aid, and resettlement case processing, which affected over 12,000 beneficiaries.
- Up to six of nine health facilities in Kakuma/Hagadera were reported to be at risk of closure, with declining immunisation, maternal health, and child protection services.

Education for over 112,000 learners was affected due to reduced teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and suspended safeguarding programmes.

- NGOs further reported that operational constraints, including staff layoffs, reduced fuel allocations, and limited field access, severely affected service delivery across protection, health, education, and WASH sectors.
- In South Sudan, funding cuts forced an NGO to close its programme for children with disabilities, resulting in the deaths of seven children from severe malnutrition. As other programmes were also cut, there was no case referral mechanism in place to protect the most vulnerable.
- In the Americas, the global reductions to resettlement, a legal pathway to lifesaving protection, have left 15,000 people in high-risk situations, including 2,000 at imminent risk of violence or persecution.

Given this backdrop, we can no longer delay systemic change that maximises impact, and strengthens rights-based, inclusive responses. We make the following recommendations towards this aim:

1. Redouble support for inclusion, and the refugee convention and its protocol

At a time of reduced resources, we remain deeply concerned about the roll-back of hard-won gains for protection and inclusion. Where food, water, health, and access to other essential services are inadequate, forcibly displaced people face heightened risks and greater exposure to protection violations, exploitation, and violence. In this environment, we urge UNHCR to prioritize and continue supporting national governments, especially those hosting large refugee populations, in adopting and implementing robust national legal frameworks that support protection and inclusion.

The legal architecture for refugee protection—including the Refugee Convention, its Protocol and regional instruments—remains robust, but enforcement is weakening as states increasingly externalize borders and restrict access. We should never forget nor underestimate the importance of the Refugee Convention and its Protocol. Member States must continue to support it, and uphold these frameworks, and ensure the humanitarian principles, international human rights and international humanitarian law remain the cornerstone to all responses.

2. Strengthen collective action towards a new multilateralism

We must go beyond commitments, and take active steps towards whole-of-society collaboration, breaking silos between humanitarian, development, and peace actors, fostering innovation, and strengthening transparency, data-driven accountability, and principled leadership. The new multilateralism also demands that every actor assess *where* they add the most value in ensuring principled and effective humanitarian action, including recognising where refugee-led organizations and other local partners are better placed to lead.

This important work requires support to the diversity of local actors and systems that influence the lives of forcibly displaced people. This includes support to local and national authorities, local markets, community groups, and local and refugee-led organisations. Supporting the resilience of these actors supports the resilience and self-reliance of forcibly displaced populations at risk. As part of this equation, we need predictable, flexible and direct financing

to local response actors; we need to work with governments to remove legal and administrative barriers reducing the effectiveness of local actors; and we need political commitment to include local leadership in decision-making, in line with the commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Meeting diverse needs with limited resources requires new multilateralism. We urge States, the UN, private sector, civil society, and forcibly displaced and stateless persons to work together, collaborating for effective and inclusive planning and delivery. We thank the High Commissioner for leading two Global Refugee Forums where we witnessed first-hand the emergence of this solidarity. We need uphold, respect and redouble on our commitments made under the Global Compact on Refugees—particularly in support for host communities, expanding third-country solutions, and meaningful refugee participation at all levels. Participation must go beyond consultation to genuine partnership in decision-making.

3. Locally-driven responses

Refugee-led organizations can step up where systems fall short. They are responding to crises, providing services, advocating for inclusion, and building trust within communities. As we have said repeatedly over the past year, such organizations must be acknowledged as institutions in their own right, with knowledge, legitimacy, and the capacity to co-design and implement durable solutions. We welcome recent recommendations by UNHCR and partners involved in regional refugee responses that call for direct funding to be provided to refugee-led organizations. We recognize UNHCR country and regional offices that have spearheaded efforts to directly fund refugee-led organizations and women-led organizations and call on UNHCR to support, capacitate, and fund refugee-led organizations across all country and regional offices.

In addition, recognizing refugees, stateless persons and other forcibly displaced people as agents of change, who develop and lead their own solutions rather than serving merely as recipients of aid, is essential. In today's context of rising anti-refugee sentiment, shrinking resettlement opportunities, and dangerously declining funding for protection and solutions, it is more critical than ever to see forcibly displaced people not only as rights-holders but as vital partners in designing and delivering responses to displacement.

Genuine, meaningful participation is the foundation for durable, legitimate solutions.

4. Coherent responses and principled leadership

We also call for coherent prioritisation of limited resources. UNHCR and partners must ensure that persons at the highest risk are reached first, and link this with participatory processes that determine how assistance is delivered. As response tools are revised following the funding crisis UNHCR and partners should develop and adopt a common framework for understanding the severity of humanitarian assistance and protection needs of refugees and other crisis-affected population groups. In an increasingly resource constrained environment, it is vital that we ensure humanitarian funding reaches those who need it most, and standard severity metrics to help us understand *where* to respond, and participatory approaches to define *how* we respond.

Finally, principled leadership remains essential in the face of access constraints, growing security risks for humanitarian staff, and conditions in crises such as Palestine, Sudan, and the DRC, where all humanitarian red lines have been crossed and obligations to protect civilian populations have been blatantly disregarded. Furthermore, it is crucial that UNHCR maintains

its statelessness mandate and expertise, safeguarding the rights and inclusion of stateless persons globally despite budgetary pressures. Protecting the most marginalised and upholding humanitarian norms must guide our collective response in all contexts.

This is a moment of choice. The commitments reaffirmed here must translate into meaningful action that protects rights, upholds dignity, and builds futures for displaced and stateless people, as well as the communities that host them.

We stand ready to work with Member States, UNHCR, and all partners to transform these commitments into lasting, positive changes.

This statement is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.

^[1] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds?sub-site=HRC>