



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

- Open Letter to Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2016 -2025) -

9 December 2025

Mr Filippo Grandi
High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHCR

Dear High Commissioner Grandi,

As your tenure as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees comes to a close, we at the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) Network wish to express our heartfelt appreciation for your visionary leadership, deep humanity, and unwavering commitment to serving forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Your journey began in the very heart of the humanitarian sector - with non-governmental organizations - and that grounding has never left you. From your earliest days in refugee response to your leadership in UNRWA and later UNHCR, you have consistently carried a belief that civil society is not simply a stakeholder, but a vital and strategic partner in protection, assistance and solutions.

This belief became a cornerstone of your time at UNHCR. You **elevated civil society engagement** from consultation to genuine collaboration, investing in trust, proximity, and principled partnership. Through your leadership, NGO consultations evolved into meaningful policy-shaping dialogues, and the UNHCR-ICVA relationship deepened through regular strategic exchanges and joint advocacy platforms. You championed localisation - long before it became a global priority - by listening to national and local NGOs, including those led by refugees, and by working to expand space for their leadership.

Your actions affirmed a core truth: strong refugee protection systems are built *with*, not *for*, affected communities - and civil society plays a crucial role in that architecture. This ethos not only shaped your leadership; it also forged a legacy that will guide the agency in years to come.

The partnership between UNHCR and ICVA has deep roots. It was formally recognised in 1963, when ICVA received the **Nansen Refugee Award**, a powerful acknowledgement of the unique and enduring role of civil society in refugee protection. Under your stewardship, this partnership not only endured but evolved, becoming more inclusive, strategic, and resilient amid unprecedented global displacement.

As you move forward, you leave behind not only a record of meaningful progress on inclusion, but also leadership exercised during a time when the humanitarian system, and UNHCR itself, faces profound challenges. This past year has tested us all: global displacement has reached record highs, funding cuts have jeopardised vital refugee services, and uncertainty continues to cloud the future of humanitarian response.

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Yet it is in moments such as these that the principles you championed prove their enduring value: solidarity, protection, and equitable partnership with civil society.

In honouring your work, we recommit to those values. And in the face of these storms, we will continue to build, together, the more just and compassionate humanitarian system.

With deep gratitude and enduring respect,



Jamie Munn
Executive Director
The ICVA Network