

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
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**NGO General Debate Statement
Agenda Item 3**

M. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. It has been drafted in consultation with, and aims to reflect the diversity of views of, the NGO community.

We meet here just three weeks after the UN high level meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, and stand at the threshold of a two-year process aiming to forge global compacts to reinforce our capability to assure their rights and safety. We meet at a time when the scale of this crisis is the greatest we have witnessed for generations; yet our common will and capacity to meet it have fallen short.

We urge that the processes launched at the High Level Meeting emphasize the participation of all expressions of civil society – and **put the voices of refugees and those internally displaced at their heart**. We call on UNHCR to build on the extensive consultation model offered by the World Humanitarian Summit process and explore innovative technology which will open up real dialogue with displaced communities. Only by seeking inclusive, demand-driven solutions – at individual, family, community and societal levels – will we be able to truly mitigate our global crisis.

Yet two years is a long time to ponder reforms. In the time it will take to deliver this statement here, it is likely that another 150 people will have been forcibly displaced from their homes and nine will have died on that unwanted journey. Here, we want to emphasize **practical measures** that we, collectively as the international humanitarian community, can **take immediately** to make

refugee and IDP assistance more effective – in emergency response, in protracted crises, and in asylum and resettlement.

First, we know **conflict is the primary driver of forced displacement**. We must move beyond rhetorical recognition to reforming how humanitarian and post-crisis development assistance is shaped to emphasize work on the root causes of conflict: weak and bad governance; inequity; injustice; competition for ever-scarcer resources; climate change; and exclusion. As a follow-up to the 2015 Dialogue on Root Causes, we call on the High Commissioner to support our call to **integrate programs** that address these key drivers **into humanitarian response** to forced displacement crises **from inception** – and to **double the trivial amount currently dedicated to peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in bi- and multilateral donors’ global humanitarian aid budgets over the next two years**.

Even with increased funding for good governance and peacebuilding, we will not make progress in addressing the key drivers of refugee flight without a concerted and coordinated effort between humanitarian and development actors. While recognizing the necessity of preserving a distinct humanitarian space, **we cannot wait until some ill-defined ‘transition’ point between acute emergency and post-crisis recovery to act on these issues** – because the complex, protracted and volatile environments in which we work simply demand assistance that is adaptive, accountable and context-driven.

We call on UNHCR to exercise its considerable authority to provide leadership at country, regional and international levels **on how we collectively and practically bridge humanitarian action and development assistance**, with the single aim of maximizing the impact for those people and communities most affected.

We must not shy away from testing radical and innovative ways to better realize this shared commitment: blended crisis funds; new multilateral mechanisms to coordinate humanitarian and development actors, such as that overseen by the World Bank; and common needs assessments and program planning that is inclusive of conflict sensitivity and fragility indicators. We must be transparent and accountable on the shared commitments made six months ago at the World

Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul – **we request UNHCR actively test and pilot solutions in partnership with the Solutions Alliance and report back on progress at the Executive Committee in 2017.**

As well as humanitarian and development actors breaking any and all barriers with the shared aim of better assistance, we must also **change the way we fund emergency and protracted responses** to refugee situations. **We call on UNHCR to pilot, foster and support adaptive solutions** that move away from rigid program cycles and lengthy delays in grant approvals. **There are simple solutions this agency can endorse now.**

First, cut back the bureaucracy that stymies rapid response and **put in place funding mechanisms truly able to deliver funding to proven humanitarian partners** for the delivery of on-the-ground action **within 72 hours of crisis inception**. **Second**, **end the practice of short-term grants** and **guarantee a minimum funding period of one year** for partners. **Third**, embed a context-driven **crisis review mechanism** within the program cycle **to enable project expansion, shifts in focus and other adaptive practices** that better enable humanitarians to meet rapidly-changing needs in complex, fluid environments.

In shaping a more effective humanitarian response, we must also not lose sight of **the critical importance of youth in refugee crises worldwide**. Displaced young people are too often viewed as some kind of demographic time bomb - but **they are in reality our most powerful allies in supporting greater stability and durable solutions, whether integration, resettlement or return.**

Although young refugees are a critical demographic in most of the world's refugee crises, the specific needs of this population are too often underserved or marginalized in crisis response. **We urge UNHCR to work with its implementing partners, experts, and refugee youth themselves not only to ramp up tailored assistance but to ensure programming evolves based on evidence for what works in increasing the personal well-being and resilience of young people, opening up access to meaningful education, lifting up their voices, and connecting them to economic opportunities both in exile and on return.**

We stand with the High Commissioner and his agency in **warning of the dangers inherent in the increasing erosion of respect for the Refugee Convention.** This remains the bedrock of refugee protection globally. We strongly urge that the new Secretary General reiterates the stance of UNHCR and makes clear his or her commitment to preserve its core tenets, facilitate adherence to its full application by all signatory States, and use the two years' process of policy formulation launched in New York to encourage more member States to accede and adhere to the Convention and its Protocols.

We were discouraged that the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September did not take up the Secretary General's call for "expanding means of admission in other countries for refugees sufficient to meet the annual resettlement needs identified by UNHCR, or at least 10 per cent of the total refugee population." **UNHCR has projected resettlement needs for 2017 at the unprecedented level of 1.2 million refugees. Commitments thus far from states have reached only 360,000 resettlement places globally, a significant increase from prior years but still far short of the need.** We must continue to expand opportunities for resettlement and other forms of admission, such as family reunification, private sponsorship options, and work or study-based visas.

While expanding the volume of resettlement opportunities, **we should also not lose sight of associated equity issues. This means continuing to prioritize those at greatest risk** rather than those whose cases are expected to move through the process more quickly. This means **approaching resettlement as a global program** that requires predictability and infrastructure that cannot and should not all be shifted to the latest crisis. **There are high-needs cases in all regions and populations that have been waiting decades for durable solutions.**

Regional quotas made available by resettlement countries should remain dedicated to those regions and not be reallocated. Within regions, we should endeavor to make access to resettlement more equitable among countries, so that one's probability of being resettled is not dependent on fleeing to a known processing location. **NGOs stand ready to work with UNHCR on these challenges through assistance with case identification and referral and staffing.**

We must contemplate and create new models to support meaningful and long-term durable solutions for refugees. This must include structuring incentives for hosting countries to commit to policy changes that shift the currently unacceptable status quo in a direction that better supports refugees in protracted displacement contexts. To this end, we urge UNHCR to support the creation of a comprehensive **Refugee Integration Index and Fund** that would help direct donor resources and incentivize positive changes in hosting countries.

The Index should build on the model already provided by the Migration Policy Institute's Refugee Integration Evaluation Tool and Fund, developed in partnership with UNHCR, and currently being rolled out in 16 EU countries and Turkey. This tool utilizes civil society evaluation of specific integration indicators to rate refugee-hosting countries' policy and implementation steps in support of durable solutions for refugee populations.

In order to provide participating States with an incentive for policy improvement, **index ratings would be linked to disbursement of a focused fund for targeted assistance in the integration of refugee populations.** The components of such an index and incentive fund already have proven precedent - and it could be rolled out to include any country which is a major refugee destination globally. Such a mechanism would not only improve coordination between multiple multilateral, state and non-governmental actors with a focus on better resettlement integration outcomes – but also shift the assistance paradigm toward an evidence-based, outcome-driven model.

We would be remiss in talking about the Summit if we did not mention our disappointment with the New York Declaration's language related to detention. We call on states to work to end the practice of child detention and implement rights-based alternatives to detention for the entire family in accordance with the best interests of the child. Furthermore, we must not forget people who are displaced within their own borders: we need concrete measures to improve protection and assistance for IDPs.

We, as the NGO community, emphasize our commitment to active participation in the longer-term processes launched during the General Assembly with the admirable aim of strengthening

protection for displaced people everywhere. We also stress that we can take action now on key issues that can deliver more effective assistance at no harm, and considerable benefit, to those global outcomes. We urge UNHCR to engage openly and actively with us on how to realize the suggestions we have made today.

Thank you, M. Chair.