GUIDANCE NOTE ON PARTNERSHIP IN ADVOCACY FOR PROTECTION

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2011 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres called for a review of the quality of partnership between UNHCR and NGOs and launched a process known as the "High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue." A Steering Group comprised of representatives and members of InterAction, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and UNHCR have guided the process.

The goal of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue was to achieve mutual respect and trust demonstrated by open communication, transparency in decision making, and clear accountabilities between UNHCR and respective partners.[i] A key recommendation resulting from the Dialogue centered on collaboration in developing advocacy positions and strategies:

> Recommendation 3: "*Acknowledging the complementarities in roles, expertise and relationship to other stakeholders in the response to refugees and stateless persons, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs will enhance their collaboration in developing advocacy positions and strategies at field level on issues of mutual concern. A simple guidance note will be jointly developed to maximize the impact of advocacy through partnership at various levels (field, regional, global)…."* [ii]

This document serves as the guidance note recommended above, drafted through consultations with UNHCR, IFRC, and NGO representatives.

The purpose of this note is to guide partners through the process of advocacy in partnership in order to increase the impact and strategic nature of advocacy initiatives. Advocacy of this nature entails on-going commitment to partnership before, during, and after an advocacy initiative, as well as regular discussions among partners on key protection issues, including well in advance of joint advocacy activities.

It is intended to increase future collaboration and impact of advocacy efforts by UNHCR and partners at the field, regional, and global levels, spanning a wide range of protection issues so as to achieve positive protection outcomes for refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and stateless people. [iii] This guidance note will be rolled out in 2013, and will be reviewed in 2015.

2. FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTION ADVOCACY IN PARTNERSHIP

Advocacy includes influencing decision-making processes at the local, national, regional and international level through the development of coalitions and alliances; research and publications; diplomacy; public campaigning; common messaging; conferences and events; communications and media work; (the facilitation of) self-advocacy by persons of concern; and social mobilization. The selection of the types of activities, targets and implementers should be carefully tailored to the specific context and make maximum use of the complementary strengths and mandates of each partner.

The aim of advocacy is to – directly and indirectly – influence authorities, decision-makers and relevant audiences to bring about actions that result in better protection of refugees, internally displaced people[iv], returnees and stateless people, as well as the fulfilment of their rights. For the purpose of this note, the focus is on advocacy that can be undertaken in a joint or complementary manner, but this does not preclude any of the partners from also carrying out independent advocacy activities.

Information sharing is key to successful partnerships in protection advocacy. Information-sharing helps ensure complementarities, avoid gaps and optimizes protection and program delivery in operational settings. Partners commit to sharing information regularly, in a timely fashion, and with all relevant partners, according to agreed information-sharing expectations, bearing in mind particular operational contexts. Recognising that the

humanitarian environment in which UNHCR and partners operate is complex and ever-changing, and in line with applicable data protection principles, partners commit to ensuring that data shared is as relevant and accurate as possible. [v]

Experience shows that the protection of refugees and other persons of concern is enhanced when partners advocate:

1. In adherence to **human rights** and **humanitarian principles** of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.
2. In adherence to **principles of partnership** of complementarity, equality, responsibility, transparency, and results-oriented approach.
3. Based on **common understanding** and appreciation for the purpose of advocacy, and the role of affected communities in advocacy.
4. In a partnership that is **well-balanced and continuously reinforced**, in which each partner contributes sufficient capacity and coordinates systematically, while maintaining its ability to act independently.

3. **PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROTECTION ADVOCACY**

In addition to the above, the following principles should be respected when engaging in advocacy partnerships:

1. Responsibility: Advocacy needs to be conducted in the best interests of the people we seek to assist, to the extent possible with their consent, and at minimum in consultation and participation with them. Effective advocacy is conducted in a manner that preserves and promotes their dignity, and supports their rights and aspirations. Sound advocacy adheres to humanitarian and protection principles,[vi] carefully balancing short-term and long-term gains, and accountability towards the persons of concern should underpin all advocacy efforts.[vii]

2. Complementarity: Unique responsibilities are assigned to UNHCR by its organizational mandate and its role in the promotion of the goals and supervision of the implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and other refugee instruments, as well as the prevention and reduction of statelessness (1961 Statelessness Convention), its authority vis-à-vis governments, and its leadership role within the cluster system. NGOs have access to local resources and decision-makers, they have a diversity of mandates, membership in international networks, and have fewer formal obligations to member states. The complementarity of partners' mandates and their mutually reinforcing roles and responsibilities are the basis for advocating in partnership. This complementarity should be recognised and understood. In advocacy partnerships, each partner's role should be clarified and reviewed regularly in order to manage expectations. This clarity enables partners to benefit from each other's comparative advantages and leverage, while respecting each other's independence, uniqueness and diversity of interests.

3. Transparency: Transparent information-sharing mechanisms and a common understanding of each other's roles are established from the onset of an advocacy partnership so as to ensure preparedness, timeliness, predictability and efficiency.

4. Equality: Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. Partners respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect should not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.[viii]

5. Result-oriented approach: Advocacy partnerships aim at positive protection outcomes for affected populations. They require result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities. On-going consultations will be used to monitor impact or risks and suggest corrective and mitigating measures when needed.

Annex 1

Recognizing the variety of contexts in which this note will be used, the following are suggested guiding questions to inform protection advocacy partnerships: [ix]

Considerations	Guiding Questions
On-going investments needed for advocacy partnerships	
Strong working relationships among partners	- To what extent are the principles of partnership followed by the partners? What are the existing and ongoing communication channels between partners, both formal and informal? What additional communication channels will be needed for successful advocacy? - To what extent is advocacy a standing item in country strategy planning processes? - What are the avenues to channel disagreement without damaging trust?
Capacity and mutual understanding in place	- To what extent does a clear understanding exist between partners of each other's mandate and responsibilities and is the complementarity of roles understood? - What capacity for advocacy exists with each partner? - What advocacy training, tools, and resources are available to partners? - How will partners best solicit meaningful participation of affected communities and their representatives? - How will the advocacy agenda be updated based on new developments?
Considerations at the start of an advocacy initiative in partnership	
Analysis and prioritization	- What are the critical protection risks facing this population? - What situation analysis, including an examination of security concerns, has been completed and how does it inform advocacy priorities? How are reliable sources of information to be identified and accessed? - Do affected communities welcome public advocacy? What are the prioritized protection issues according to the affected communities? - What risks could be caused by advocacy in regard to affected populations, to partners (staff), and to operations? How can these potential negative consequences be prevented or mitigated?
Strategizing and planning	- What advocacy priorities and messages have been agreed and circulated? - What are the main goals and objectives of the advocacy initiative? Which are short-term and which require longer term engagement? - Which actors are the main targets of the advocacy, and at which level (field, regional, global)? What advocacy techniques will be used at these various levels? - What access and influence do partners have, directly or indirectly, to these actors? Who are potential allies? - What needs to be included in advocacy planning (e.g. actions, timeline, roles, expected outcomes, etc.)?
Clarifying partner roles	- How will affected communities participate in the advocacy initiative? - What analysis has been undertaken to understand how best to use each others' strengths in leveraging advocacy outcomes? - How will partners divide tasks to best leverage their complementarities and comparative advantages? - Depending on the context, who will do what, when, where, and with whom? What additional resources or support are needed?
Considerations during an advocacy initiative in partnership	
Regular information flow and responsiveness	- What types of information is needed, by whom, and when? - Is progress reported to partners on a regular basis? - What confidentiality protocols are in place, particularly for sensitive protection issues? - Do partners know what to do when information-sharing expectations are not being met?
Monitoring impact and benefitting from lessons learnt	- How is progress toward advocacy goals measured? - How are needs for training and support identified throughout the advocacy process? - How are lessons learned collected, shared and fed back into future advocacy efforts? - When advocacy partnerships are successfully completed, no longer advantageous, or creating undue additional risk? - What are the context-specific conditions, including changed security conditions, under which advocacy partnership needs to be reviewed or is no longer appropriate?

[i] The concept of partners, for the purpose of this note, is not limited to the organizations with which UNHCR has partnership agreements.

[ii] *The High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on NGO-IFRC-UNHCR Partnership, An initiative to improve partnership between UNHCR and NGOs in 2012 and beyond – Partnership Recommendations,* December 2012.

[iii] While noting UNHCR's protection functions for to refugees, IDPs, returnees and stateless persons, for the purpose of the guidance note, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) definition of protection will be used:"… all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. HR law, IHL, refugee law)."

[iv] Giving special consideration to UNHCR in its role as the Global Protection Cluster Lead Agency.

[v] Within the framework of the Structured Dialogue between UNHCR and NGOs, work is underway on guidance for information sharing and an emergency information management toolkit (http://data.unhcr.org/imtoolkit/) is also available.

[vi] See, for example, ICRC, *Professional Standards for Protection Work Carried out by Humanitarian and Human Rights Actors in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence*, 2013 edition, February 2013 or Hugo Slim and Andrew Bonwick, *Protection – An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, 2005.

[vii] Recognizing that affected individuals and communities must be at the centre of all advocacy efforts, UNHCR has developed a variety of tools to make sure that their concerns are accurately reflected. These tools include participatory assessments, which are part of the annual planning process and the AGDM strategy and the AGD Accountability Framework. In addition, UNHCR is a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Accountabilit to Affected Persons (AAP).

[viii] *Principles of Partnership, A Statement of Commitment*, Endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Forum, 12 July 2007.

[ix] These considerations may be revised in light of experience gained through field practice.