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Community-based Protection

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Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A sense of community is important to every one of us. Our communities play a big part in defining our place in this world, and are part and parcel of our identities. The best in human beings is often brought out by a shared feeling of community that allows us to look beyond our own needs to those of a wider group.

This applies equally, if not even more, to people who are forcibly displaced. Refugees fleeing their homes may leave almost everything they own behind, but not their sense of communal solidarity. UNHCR recognizes how valuable this sense of community is to its work with refugees and the internally displaced. Indeed, community participation has long been an integral part of our programming.

As mentioned in the opening statement by the Director of International Protection, during the last year or so UNHCR has taken a fresh look at key areas of protection such as child protection, SGBV prevention and response programmes, and education. Similarly, the Conference Room Paper, *Community-based Protection*, before you describes the results of a self-assessment of how we structure and conduct our work with communities and the changes we need to make to obtain improved and sustainable outcomes. This redefinition is also articulated in detail in the just issued protection policy paper, *Understanding Community Based-Protection*.

The inherently unstable and changing nature of the environments we work in today has been one driver of this re-definition. Displaced

communities are often more fractured, less secure and frequently located not in camps or settlements, as in the past, but dispersed in cities and regions. Yet even in such circumstances, the cohesive elements within communities in displacement provide a measure of the social stability that aids protection.

The restructuring and re-tooling of the community services function in UNHCR is also in response to a key finding of the analysis we have conducted, which is that the protection benefits of meaningful and continuous engagement with communities are not sufficiently understood by all core protection staff.

A community-based approach, both at the strategic level and in our day-to-day work in any operation, is essential for effective solutions that address protection problems. The re-design of the community-services function will see it more strongly integrated with other protection mechanisms and structures. The resulting synergies will make UNHCR more effective in delivering on its mandate, as communities of concern bring their skills, knowledge and experience to bear in the search for solutions.

The Age , Gender and Diversity, or AGD, policy and the imperatives of equality that drive it are by now well-understood and accepted. AGD principles are fundamental to community-based protection not only because they affirm the rights of all members of a community to participate in the decisions that affect them, but also because they generate more inclusive solutions. While UNHCR's emphasis on community involvement is not something new, we recognize that the protection purpose of this function needs to be reaffirmed. This requires that community work is understood to be part of the protection response in an operation. Placing this integral part of UNHCR's response more squarely within the protection architecture of operations will bring about more effective and sustainable protection outcomes.

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Our new emphasis on Community-Based Protection is a logical next step in the on-going operationalization of protection, which has in recent months focussed on child protection, SGBV and education. . It will build on the concerted efforts and progress we have made over the years to

situate displaced communities at the centre of our protection work. UNHCR's revitalisation of community-based approaches to protection will build on the strong foundations of the AGD policy, participatory assessments and planning, and partnership practices.

Participatory assessments to ensure that the views of persons of concern are sought and reflected in planning and programming have for some time been a cornerstone of UNHCR's method of working. However, the 2012-2013 AGD Accountability Framework report indicates that while participatory assessments were systematically conducted, and the results influenced country operations' protection strategies and work plans, programme planning and budgeting, this remains an area in need of improvement. The Regional Dialogues with refugee women and girls in 2011 pointed to the need to develop new ways of conducting participatory assessments and finding community-based solutions.

UNHCR's long-standing commitment to strong partnerships with national civil-society organizations and networks, including community and faith-based organizations—another area in which we have made significant advances—will be of crucial importance as we restructure our ways of working with communities of concern. These alliances will strengthen our collective response to the range of protection problems that arise in situations of forced displacement. They will also allow us to identify and address the protection needs of minority groups, persons with disabilities and other marginalized populations more effectively.

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Our analysis of various sectors within the broader UNHCR field protection work force showed that community services officers were the most aware that community participation is key to maximizing the positive impact of protection programmes. That kind of understanding is required among all field-based protection officers and operational leadership structures to maximize the positive impact of protection interventions. Therefore, our attention to community-based protection will include a number of structural changes during 2013 for the global implementation of Community-Based Protection.

Most significantly, the field-based P2 and P3 Community Service Officer and Protection Officer functions will be merged into a single function, with the new title of Protection Officer (Community-Based Protection). New job descriptions will be created for these posts and recruitment profiles for field-based protection staff will be adjusted accordingly. The job descriptions of managers supervising field-based protection staff will be revised to reflect their accountability for community-based protection.

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Our partners have been our strongest supporters and most active advocates in efforts to build sustainable community-based programmes. Community initiatives take time to develop and implement as broad support for programmes that empower the most marginalised must be carefully constructed so as to ensure that no harm is done. More practically, community members that have not experienced such participatory processes or been given the space to be involved in decision-making may need training and confidence building to enable them to participate fully.

Community-based approaches to protection should, therefore, be resourced with a longer-term perspective from the very beginning. Short term support may do harm. A short-term perspective could, for example, cause grantees to circumvent established patterns of community decision-making in the interests of showing rapid results, or select less meaningful outcomes because these can be achieved quickly. Such responses destroy trust and result in programmes that are less effective and less sustainable.

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In a number of contemporary humanitarian crises, UNHCR and its partners face enormous obstacles to working in partnership with communities of concern. Surmounting these challenges will require innovative strategies to augment, often remotely, the ability of communities to help themselves, thereby effecting positive changes in

their own environments. On the other hand, refugee influxes on the scale of what we are seeing in countries neighbouring Syria, require a response that also understands the impact on, and addresses the needs, of the local communities hosting them.

In these emerging displacement scenarios, where humanitarian workers are not always able to engage directly with communities and those where refugees and internally displaced people are hosted within local communities, community-based protection approaches will be particularly efficacious and necessary.

Thank you.

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