

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

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**NGO Statement at the
High Level Segment on Solidarity and Responsibility-Sharing
with Countries Hosting Syrian Refugees**

Agenda Item 3

Madame Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered by the International Rescue Committee on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. It has been drafted in consultation with NGOs and aims to reflect their diversity of views.

(Solidarity)

We want to begin by commending countries in the region for welcoming over two million Syrian refugees and, in some cases, allowing Syrians to work, choose their place of residence, and have access to local public services. It is imperative that the international community supports host governments and local authorities in their endeavor to offer protection and services to Syrians and other refugees fleeing the conflict. The international community must share the responsibility by explicitly supporting government line ministries to strengthen their infrastructure and public services, build the capacity of local service providers, and work with authorities and communities to mitigate tensions between refugees and their hosts. The international community should also support currently underfunded UN and NGO appeals for Syrians inside and outside Syria.

(Protection)

As the High Commissioner said in a recent statement, “When a war sweeps up a nation, there can be nothing more important to its people than open

borders.” We are concerned with the trend of closed and “managed” borders and call on all states in the region to ensure that those fleeing the war in Syria -- including Syrians of Arab and Kurdish descent, Palestinians, and Iraqi refugees -- are able to seek safety and not be discriminated against for their ethnic, religious or national backgrounds. We are particularly alarmed about the discriminatory treatment that is being meted out in several countries to Palestinians who are fleeing Syria. Syria was one of the few countries that had granted Palestinians their rights and now they find themselves stateless and abandoned.

The need to ensure that those fleeing Syria are offered protection does not apply only to states neighbouring Syria. Countries in Europe and elsewhere should fully respect their rights as refugees and refrain from unlawfully detaining them. While we believe voluntary repatriation will be the durable solution desired by the vast majority of Syrian refugees if and when conditions allow, we welcome the use of third country resettlement for particularly vulnerable Syrians. We call on resettlement countries to increase their efforts in a spirit of burden sharing, offer additional resettlement opportunities above and beyond regular annual quotas, and expedite processing to reflect the urgency of the situation. We also welcome creative approaches, like Germany’s Humanitarian Admission Pilot (HAP) and Switzerland’s visa facilitation for relatives of Syrians living in Switzerland.

(Coordination)

We see a need for clarified lines of accountability and better coherence of response. Given the scope and scale of the crisis, strong coordination and effective information management are essential. Mechanisms to ensure collaborative and transparent coordination have been established through guidance developed and endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). UNHCR’s role in supporting and implementing these mechanisms is critical to effective humanitarian action. Relationships between OCHA and UNHCR should be reinforced and mutual confidence enhanced to

ensure a shift towards regional planning and response strategies to the regional humanitarian crisis. Most notably, the Refugee Coordinator and the Syria Humanitarian Coordinator should work closely with the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, as well as regional representatives from NGOs.

In advance of releasing the sixth Regional Response Plan, UNHCR should ensure that an inter-agency participatory assessment is conducted in order to strategically prioritise current unmet needs. We urge UNHCR and OCHA to strengthen sectoral coordination by ensuring that working groups are either co-chaired by NGOs or have ample NGO input; that there is a focus on refugees and host communities; and that the cross-cutting issues of protection, aging, disability, and gender are mainstreamed.

(Out of Camp and Host Communities)

As the majority of refugees live outside of camps, resources for outreach, registration, and support to non-camp refugees, as well as investment in vulnerable host communities, must be dramatically increased. The desire to build additional camps is understandable; however, it should not come at the expense of those refugees who decide to seek protection in non-camp settings. We therefore urge the development of a more coherent plan and strategic and inclusive approach to addressing the needs of refugees living outside of camps and host communities. UNHCR and partners need to find more effective ways to actively identify and reach out to vulnerable cases in urban settings.

(Adjusting the Response)

We welcome UNHCR's initiative to hold this high level segment, and we also welcome the calls by many members states for the response to holistic, linking relief with recovery and development approaches. It is also critical for programming to focus on local level investments, including civil society and municipal administrations. Furthermore, UNHCR is encouraged to fully

integrate the refugee response into the UN Development Assistance Framework and Poverty Reduction Strategy papers.

(In Closing)

NGOs are encouraged by the pledges made in this assembly to alleviate the extreme human suffering that the Syrian conflict has and is still generating. To make a real difference, these pledges must be acted upon swiftly. Millions are suffering now - they should not wait any longer. The international community has a collective responsibility to ensure that a population displacement of such unprecedented proportions, the biggest in this generation, is not allowed to worsen. A negotiated political solution must be found for the Syrian people without further delay.

Thank you, Madame Chair.