



**Shared responsibility, shared humanity:
communiqué from the International Refugee Congress**

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Communiqué from the International Refugee Congress 2018

Preamble

We, 156 participants, representing 98 diverse institutions from 29 countries, including refugee-led and host community civil society organisations and initiatives, academia, think tanks, municipalities and the private sector came together in Istanbul for the International Refugee Congress on 10-11 May 2018. The gathering in Istanbul drew on the contributions of close to 600 organizations from 47 countries, which participated in consultations that were held over the past six months leading to the Congress. This preparation process and the meeting itself provided an important platform to demonstrate our shared quest for equal participation in decision making processes at all levels, as well as our common commitment to work together to put the voices and aspirations of refugees and host communities at the forefront of policy and program development, including the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).

The recommendations that are included in this communiqué constitute a unanimous call for all actors to make good on their commitments, to put the equal rights and participation of refugees and host communities at the centre of their policy and program actions, and to work together in unity, collaboration and coordination to urgently help transform the international refugee system in a way that ensures shared responsibility for meeting needs in a balanced and accountable manner.

A Call for a New Approach

The international refugee system is in need of a new approach if the global community, with its diversity of actors, is to restore hope, advance justice, and make it possible for the millions of people displaced throughout the world to live in dignity, free from fear and want. We call on all stakeholders to join us in upholding the equal rights of refugees, and nurturing their capabilities and long-term aspirations. We call for global coordination and solidarity that is based on the principle of shared responsibility in addressing refugee issues, and an unyielding commitment to eliminating the factors that continue to force people to flee.

The approach we envision is one that:

- Equitably and predictably distributes the responsibility for responding to the needs of refugees and host communities amongst states;
- Transforms perceptions of refugees from simple recipients of aid to holders of rights, responsibilities, talents, capabilities and aspirations;
- Assures the dignity, equality, and human rights of all refugees – women and men, children and adolescents, elderly and all other groups - irrespective of faith, mental and physical ability, political view, religion, ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation, education, class or country of origin;
- Seeks to eliminate the causes of displacement including violent conflict, economic deprivation, environmental conditions and persecution on the basis of gender, ethnicity, faith, ideology, political view or other parts of a person's identity;



- Produces solutions that are durable, sustainable and mutually beneficial to refugees and host countries alike;
- Guarantees refugees and host communities a seat-at-the-table at all levels of decision-making and all stages of policy implementation;
- Places the needs of women and girls at the forefront of all policy and program development and ensures their full participation in decision-making;
- Enables self-reliance and builds on refugee capabilities, experience and knowledge;
- Ensures all actors throughout the international system act with the highest level of transparency and accountability;
- Encourages respect, inclusion, solidarity, harmony and unity among all stakeholders.

None of this is possible without broad political will at international, regional, national and local levels and a commitment to significantly raise the standards and capabilities of actors across the board including in knowledge, systems and procedures.

In support of the above, we call for the adoption of an independent and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism that is strengthened by gender disaggregated data collection, documentation of best practices and regular review of lessons learned, to ensure effectiveness and encourage innovation in refugee response and management systems.

Priorities for Immediate Action

We urge collective action to realize the following priority goals in the five thematic areas that were identified through our consultations: guarantees for refugee legal rights and asylum; access to quality services; durable solutions and sharing responsibilities; increased and focused support for displaced women and girls; and representation and participation at all levels of decision-making.

Legal Rights and Asylum

Legal rights are at the core of refugee protection. Guaranteeing access to these rights would shift the dialogue from people in need to people with rights. Building structures of access to legal rights is fundamental to progressive refugee policy, the pursuit of durable solutions, the enjoyment of basic rights in asylum, and the protection of refugees, especially women and girls and marginalized groups. Whether residing in countries of first asylum, repatriating to countries of origin or resettling in other countries, refugees need guarantees for their rights and freedoms, clarity about their legal status, and access to legal recourse and assistance. Towards this end, we call for:

- Establishment of legal frameworks and mechanisms for access and protection of rights at global, regional, national and local levels in line with international laws and standards;
- Ensured access to asylum and territory as well as to effective, timely and quality procedures;



- Guaranteed access to legal aid, due process and remedy for refugees and asylum seekers, in all state and non-state adjudication structures including UNHCR. Ensure that the appropriate capacity is in place to do so;
- Establishment of independent oversight and monitoring mechanisms to ensure due diligence, maximize inclusion, and increase accuracy and transparency in all asylum and refugee rights-related procedures. Examples may include tiered appeals processes or regular external evaluations by independent parties;
- Limiting detention and ensuring least restrictive alternatives guided by liberty as a human right; ending the detention of children and other vulnerable populations through protocols encompassing the superiority of the principle of the best interests of the child;
- Creation of space for the direct participation of refugees and host community members in international and national legal processes relevant to the rights and obligations of refugees, including relevant UNHCR proceedings;
- Establishment of systems for reporting violations and monitoring compliance at all levels that link to mechanisms such as Universal Periodic Review of the human rights records of all United Nations' member states.

Access to Services

Irrespective of their legal status or proof of certification, all refugees have the right to access public services including health and education, as well as employment. This is crucial for fulfilling their basic rights, ensuring life with dignity and enabling them to settle effectively in host communities. Nevertheless access to these rights is often limited, denied or unavailable. Among other factors, the uneven distribution of responsibility for refugee protection among countries, and the reliance of the refugee system on a number of low and middle income countries, is straining the capabilities of many host countries to provide equitable access to good quality services to host communities and refugees alike. Given the protracted nature of many refugee situations worldwide and funding gaps across the sector, we believe policy changes are needed to achieve a more equitable division of responsibility between states and other stakeholders with clear responsibilities and accountabilities defined for each actor. Toward this end we call for:

- Collaboration among states who are hosting relatively small numbers of refugees, and/or not hosting refugees, to extend responsibility sharing beyond the provision of development and humanitarian assistance. Dialogue with international and regional economic organizations/ forums (such as the World Bank, The New Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Economic Forum, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the G20) and host countries should explore a range of measures that can help to create national resources and fiscal space for major host countries and enable them to invest in services for refugees and host countries alike. These measures could include concessional trade arrangements designed to support overall economic growth; non-conditionality in aid; counter cyclical loans; and loans in local currency, amongst others. Refugee-hosting countries, with the collaboration and support of other states, should in turn:
 - Guarantee access to gainful employment with full legal protections;
 - Provide opportunities to develop skills matching market supply and demand, as well as incentives for development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and for them to hire refugees;
 - Incentivize sectors that can employ both refugees and host communities;



- Monitoring of the implementation of all rules, regulations and policies related to service-provision and creation of employment opportunities for refugees and host communities;
- Guaranteed collaborative and coordinated effort with clear, measurable and time-bound targets to develop and implement policies for all services and programs within host countries;
- Ensured access to quality education for all refugees and host communities regardless of legal status and prior certification. Under circumstances where formal education is not an option, ensuring that certified, flexible, high quality and, where
- applicable, accelerated, non-formal education is sanctioned by state institutions and that students of all ages, but especially refugee youth, are not deprived of opportunities to continue their education from pre-school to higher education;
- Ensured access to quality healthcare for all refugees and host communities in line with universal health coverage, leaving no-one behind.
- Building upon the capacity, experience, and professional training of refugees and refugee-led organizations in all service areas including teachers and healthcare workers.
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Durable Solutions and Sharing Responsibility

Forced displacement across international borders is at record levels, and the number of people living in protracted refugee situations is at all-time high. While the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance is critical at the outset of a crisis, long-term solutions are needed to support refugees and host countries. Many low- and middle-income countries are assuming a disproportionate share of responsibility for hosting refugees in relation to their economic and other resources. We believe policy changes are needed to ensure a more equitable and predictable division of responsibility between states, improve access to services for refugees and host communities and expand refugees' access to long-term, sustainable solutions. Accordingly we call for:

- Development of alternative long-term solutions including those that would address root causes of forced displacement, and re-confirm the right of people to seek asylum in any country of their choosing;
- Creation of a mechanism designed to ensure equitable and systematic distribution of responsibility that considers the specific needs of host states and builds on existing local strengths and resources. This should be determined through local, national, regional, and international multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogue, including refugee-led and host country civil society organisations, municipalities and academia.
- Establishment of a funded and resourced multi-stakeholder accountability mechanism to include civil society, international financial institutions, think tanks, municipalities, refugee-led and host community organisations, including women's organisations, to shape the implementation of the Programme of Action;
- Ensured collaboration and cooperation of middle- and higher-income countries and international financial institutions (IFIs) to improve macro-economic conditions, increase employment-creation and labour market integration in countries of first asylum through a range of measures including experience and capacity-sharing, concessional trade arrangements, innovative and targeted investments, soft loans, risk-sharing, and strategic use of public funds;
- Expanded robust channels to promote diversity and build an inclusive society to facilitate social cohesion;



- Ensured space for civil society, including refugee-led organisations and academia, to lead exploration of the potential of pendulum migration (i.e. free movement between countries of asylum and origin without the need for permanent repatriation) as a strategy for supporting reconstruction, rehabilitation in countries of origin, and possible voluntary repatriation;
- Reaffirmation of commitments by all stakeholders to the principle of non-refoulement to ensure the right to voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity;
- Increases in the number of resettlement places and destinations, and the development of new pathways to enable mobility of refugees between countries including private sponsorship, humanitarian admission as well work/study and family reunification programmes.

Women and Displacement

Women and girls confront risks and face social, political and economic vulnerabilities linked to persistent gender discrimination and inequalities worldwide. The violence, persecution and other traumas faced by women during conflicts and displacement heighten the risks of structural poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to basic services including health, reproductive health and education, among others. Despite the rhetoric surrounding women's participation, refugee women's voices and perspectives are persistently absent from national and international decision-making processes at all levels, leading to policies that fall short of delivering what refugee women and girls need most. In line with existing national, regional and international commitments made by states, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam Convention, the 2010 Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and United Nations' Resolution 1325, we call for:

- Inclusion of the needs and resources of women and girls at all stages of the policy process, such as planning, consultation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
- Promotion of images of women that project strong and positive role models, presenting them as rights holders and stakeholders, and ceasing to portray women as weak and vulnerable recipients of aid;
- Training and capacity building on gender sensitivity and women's rights issues for all stakeholders working with and for refugee women, such as media, research, government, and international aid agencies;
- Increasing the support for women-led, refugee-led, grassroots organizations, through funding and resources, advocacy, networking, strengthening capacity for research, planning, management and building strategies;
- Increased representation of women, both in quantity and quality, across different sectors, including those spaces that are seen as traditionally "male", such as business, law enforcement, peace keeping and building and post- conflict development programs;
- A re-definition of human security going beyond military security by including aspects like domestic security, women's security in public and private spaces, economic opportunities and political participation to ensure equal opportunities and access to basic rights for women;
- Support to women's knowledge production at all levels, including grassroots, community-based and academic knowledge, and the creation of an enabling environment for multi-sectoral exchange and networking, by means of training women to design, collect and analyze data, resource mobilization, formulating agendas and designing evidence-based policies;



- Challenging patterns of discrimination and harassment across different sectors and actors in the international development and aid system.
- National governments to fulfill their commitments to the realization of women's rights.

Representation and Participation

Policy and programme formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation regarding forced displacement at all levels must be informed by the perspectives, experiences and priorities of those most affected. The question of representation – who speaks for whom, how and when regarding refugee matters – is critical. Refugees and refugee-hosting countries and communities must speak for themselves and play a key role in determining which policies and programmes are prioritised at all levels, as well as decisions on processes, systems, financing and implementation of policies. Clarity, direction and supporting processes are critical to ensuring they are no longer routinely sidestepped, left out of processes altogether or used to advance policies developed without their knowledge or control. We therefore call for:

- Support for refugee-led organisations to establish an inclusive international platform for refugee participation and self-representation made up of a network of refugee community organizations, initiatives and leaders from around the world;
- Guaranteed reform of current practices, including program design, by all development and humanitarian actors and policy makers, to assure refugees and host communities a seat-at-the-table at all stages and levels of decision-making and policy implementation. This should be accompanied by the establishment of a mechanism to monitor performance and hold actors to account.
- Creation of pathways by UN agencies to integrate refugee-led and host community organizations into existing systems for formulation of emergency response including invitations to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Executive Committee meetings of UNHCR and the UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs;
- Development of inclusive mechanisms by municipalities and national governments to encourage the participation of refugee-led organisations, including NGOs, think tanks, the private sector and community groups, as well as refugee academics and other professionals, in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs;
- Inclusion of municipalities and host communities in the GCR follow up process, and ensured participation of refugee-led organizations in the global and national support mechanisms foreseen in the GCR;
- Provision of the legal status that is necessary to enable refugees' equal participation in the political, economic and social spheres, by national governments. This includes well-sequenced solutions for determining legal status such as short- and long-term residency with corresponding rights;
- Support of refugee-led multi-media initiatives and other social, cultural, and academic means that enable refugees and host communities to narrate and promote their own perspectives, experiences, and ideas in order to shape discourses on refugee matters. Refugees' access to technology should be supported by national and international development and humanitarian actors;
- All responses to address systematic barriers to women's participation at all levels.



Conclusion

The priorities for policy development and action planning presented in this communiqué are unanimously endorsed by all participants of the International Refugee Congress that was held in Istanbul on 10-11 May. We, the participants of this congress, believe that implementation of these recommendations is vital to better support refugees and host communities, and to achieve more equitable and fair responsibility sharing in the international refugee system.

We, as a group of refugee-led and host community civil society organisations, and our allies from the international community, are determined to work together, to establish systems and mechanisms that can help bring the voices of the people most affected by displacement to the forefront of refugee response. We are confident that our close collaboration with policy makers at all levels will be essential in more inclusive and participatory processes that are designed to increase the access of refugees and host communities to essential rights and services, including representation and participation, access to legal rights and basic services, durable solutions, and women's rights.

The recommendations presented here are by no means exhaustive. Instead they represent a set of starting points for further articulation. While some of these recommendations are widely acknowledged, we are concerned that this acknowledgement more often remains rhetorical, falling short of translation into action. Thus, this communiqué represents a call for all actors to make good on their commitments, to put the equal rights of refugees and host communities at the centre of their policy and program actions, and to work together in unity, collaboration and coordination to urgently transform the international refugee system in a way that ensures shared responsibility for meeting needs in a balanced and accountable manner.



