

Refugee Statement – Closing plenary

Assembly Hall, 18 December 2019

[Introduction of the speakers by the HC]

- The first Global Refugee Forum brought together refugees to discuss the importance of international burden and responsibility-sharing and the need for more timely, comprehensive, predictable and equitable responses – alongside States, development and humanitarian and other actors.
- The Global Compact clearly sets out the importance of whole-of-society approaches, and we, as refugees, have shown leadership through our own efforts of engaging with many different actors, seeking to advance the spirit and the objectives of the Compact.
- Throughout these three days, many participants clearly acknowledged the importance of refugee participation, self-representation in refugee responses and highlighted the importance of having refugee voices in the room.
- We are pleased to now hear from some of these voices that, over the past months, have worked diligently with many of you to think through and develop pledges and contributions that we have seen come to fruition at the Forum.

Introduction by the refugee speakers - GRN

- Thank you, High Commissioner.
- We, as refugee representatives at the first ever Global Refugee Forum are thrilled to see other refugee fellows present and in action at such a high-level meeting that's about us. Yesterday the High Commissioner noted that we play a pivotal role in the preparation for the Global Refugee Forum. As the SG noted, we agree that the GCR is both our collective achievement and that we have a collective responsibility to support the implementation.
- We consulted our own communities and refugee groups in different parts of the world in the development of the GCR and planning for the GRF. In partnership with UNHCR and other stakeholders, we have been working closely and tirelessly to ensure that the process towards the GRF, the GRF itself and beyond are meaningfully inclusive of refugees.
- We would like to acknowledge that the Forum offers an opportunity to create innovative and collective solutions to displacement. We should not forget, however, that the best solution resides in solving root causes and preventing displacement in the first place in addition to rebuilding the home countries.
- We are very grateful to States and other stakeholders for making important pledges to the Forum. As refugees, we were the first to pledge and have also actively worked with many of you to design inclusive, sustainable and impactful pledges.

Shaza Alrihawi- The Global Refugee-Led Network

The Global Refugee-Led Network, is one of the delegations contributing to the preparations for the GRF. In fact, the GRN was the first organization to make a joint multi-stakeholder pledge for the Forum focusing on meaningful refugee participation. In our pledge, we commit to support the meaningful participation of refugees and host communities in decisions that affect their lives. Participation should take into account the diversity within communities, including age, gender, and disability. This pledge will support the agency of those we seek to assist while improving the relevance, quality, transparency and accountability of that assistance. We furthermore commit to share experiences on the implementation of this pledge at subsequent Global Refugee Forums and/or high-level officials' meetings.

Since June, we've been able to mobilize substantial support for the pledge from different stakeholders, including States such as Canada, Denmark, the private sector and INGOs and the IFRC.

To tell you a bit more about GRN; the Global Refugee-Led Network is a coalition of refugees and refugee-led organizations in six regions of the world (North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and the Asia Pacific). Through our efforts, we collaborate with and amplify refugee voices and initiatives nationally, regionally, and globally. The pursuit of meaningful refugee participation is the foundational pillar and principle of our work.

To this end, we have been facilitating refugee participation through Refugee Summits within each of our regions, and at the global level. Thus far, we have learned from the knowledge and expertise of over 130 refugee-led initiatives from over 60 countries, and counting -- reach made possible through careful planning and innovative virtual participation practices. From Asia to Latin America and everywhere in-between, the summits have given us and our fellow refugee participants a sense of belonging to a new global community, and the opportunity to share experiences and exchange ideas for addressing displacement. This learning is unprecedented and the depth of human connection has been extraordinary.

Across summits, demands were similar. Namely, refugee-led initiatives want to be included in discussions where decisions are being made about their lives.

Furthermore, in advance of the Forum, as a refugee delegation, we met and developed a shared vision and messages for the GRF and beyond.

- We call on UNHCR and other stakeholders to support the establishment of at least one refugee observer seat on the UNHCR EXCOM and Standing Committee.
- We call on UNHCR and regional institutions to work with us on creating a refugee-led advisory bodies that would inform their work on regional levels.
- We call on all stakeholders to increase the monetary and non monetary resources to support the refugee led movement

Today, at this very moment, we made history by including over 70 refugee representatives as co-organizers, speakers, and experts in this historical meeting. Let's make sure that this becomes the new norm because refugee participation is a right not a privilege.

Wenasa - Refugee student delegation

The United Nations 2030 Agenda recognizes that “the future lies in the hands of today’s younger generations, who will pass the torch to future generations”. To harness the potential of our younger generations we must expand access to inclusive, quality education opportunities at all

levels of learning, and ensure equal participation of girls and boys and those with diverse and different needs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Refugee youth have formed a global network of refugee students in higher education to connect and amplify the voices of refugee students worldwide. Some of us are here today.

Part of our mission is to elevate the importance of secondary education as the link between refugee girls and boys and their future beyond primary school. The pressures we face to find jobs and contribute to the financial stability of our families drives many of us away from education, and the doors it can open. As refugee youth leaders, our request today is that you do not forget that your best investment is in our education and our future. Through education we will become advocates, role models, critical thinkers, entrepreneurs, policy makers and peace builders and we will contribute to the communities and societies around us.

Refugee youth are often the most resilient and passionate students. If thousand miles of walking to reach safety, countless numbers of days spent hungry, and frightening escapes from danger and death did not shatter our dreams, surely nothing else will. Refugee students bring diverse cultural traditions. They inspire cross-disciplinary discussions, upend prejudices and are motivated to give back to the organizations and institutions that fought for their rights and recognized their potential. Refugee students are role models to the younger children who follow in their footsteps. Refugee students never take their chance for education for granted.

It's no secret that quality education has the power to change lives. Education transforms; and in that transformation, we gain skills and knowledge, we amplify our potential and we find our pathways to self reliance, with strong values and high expectations. Finally, with education we are better able to achieve improved living standards, safety and security for our families and most of all, the promise of opportunity for the children who follow in our footsteps. Education makes it possible not only for us to survive but also to thrive.

Andrea Ayala Melendez - Gender Audit Team

The Gender audit team, includes two academics and 9 refugee women from diverse backgrounds, came about because issues relating to women and girls, age, gender and diversity, and sexual

and gender-based violence were often not acknowledged, at international meetings or included in the meeting reports.

We were determined that this would not happen in the Global Compact on Refugees.

Drawing on our lived experience and expertise we brought the voices of refugee women and girls in our communities to the meetings. We made presentations, and produce reports, consistently highlighting the impacts of SGBV and the urgent need for the Age, Gender and Diversity approach to be A VISIBLE TOP PRIORITY.

We're proud to contribute to the strong commitments to all refugee women and girls included in the Global Compact on Refugees. **This however was only the first step.**

The real success of our work will be measured in the number and quality of the pledges made at this Forum to meaningfully include women and girls in all of our diversities and to prioritise addressing the major barriers to gender equality which continue to marginalise and exclude refugee women and girls, most particularly sexual and gender-based violence.

We were proud co-sponsors of the Spotlight sessions on SGBV and AGD and were inspired by the frank discussion and the strong commitments by all key stake-holders; as the Ambassador of Botswana stated, this needs to start by naming the problem- "Rape is a crime!! It must come out of the shadows."

Plan International stated, "We must look at child and forced marriage as SGBV. It is an institutionalisation of daily rape".

However, the USA noted, 'Prioritising women and girls is still not part of the DNA of emergency responses.'. And we add that DNA must include lesbian, trans and queer women who are also victims from this systematic violence against refugee women.

This is what needs to change and that change needs to start here.

The commitments to women and girls in the GCR need to move from the side lines into the DNA of all pledges made at this forum, to become a major indicator of the forum's success and of what is monitored going forward.

Unless this happens, the rights of refugee women and girls will continue to be condemned to oblivion through the myth of mainstreaming. We have raised our voices, now is the time not only hear us but to **include us**.

Arash Bordbar - Global Youth Advisory Council

The final draft of the GCR has 17 specific mentions of youth.

I would like to remind us of Paragraph 77 of the GCR, which states: *The empowerment of refugee and host community youth, building on their talent, potential, and energy, supports resilience and eventual solutions. The active participation and engagement of refugee and host community youth will be supported by States and relevant stakeholders, including through projects that recognize, utilize and develop their capacities and skills and foster their physical and emotional well-being.*

Young people can play a big role in implementing the outcome of the GRF that will work for refugees. Organizations can partner with community-based refugee initiatives – including those led by youth that are working to protect refugees in all aspects of age, gender, and diversity and disability.

The Global Youth Advisory Council serves as a consultative group on issues relating to the protection and development of young people who are refugees, internally displaced and/or stateless, and their communities in countries of asylum and in countries of resettlement to bring a youth perspective on a broad range of issues into the work of UNHCR and its implementing partners at all levels.

In the GYAC pledge - “INVEST IN YOUTH, BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE” - we commit to provide strategic leadership and technical assistance to strengthen the skills, capacity and networking abilities of refugee, internally displaced and host community youth, in all their diversity. This pledge supports the potential, leadership and advocacy of youth, in displacement settings. Through this youth-to-youth initiative and our collaboration with Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action and SG envoy on youth, young women and men will empower themselves and each other protect, celebrate their diversity, and use their skills to contribute to their communities.

We are seeking State and other actors to join Switzerland, Women’s Refugee Commission, UNHCR and others in supporting this Pledge to facilitate the implementation of the GCR at all levels especially at the local level. We are asking States and other stakeholders to take a step with us. This means:

- Include refugee, stateless, and other displaced youth in national youth strategies, and national sports and cultural initiatives.
- Support initiatives to facilitate learning the national language/s for refugee youth.
- Facilitate the acquisition of personal identification documents, including machine readable Convention Travel Documents.
- Ensure that all security, immigration, and asylum services are well-trained in refugee rights and appropriate, youth-friendly procedures.
- Facilitate recognition of refugees' educational certifications from their country of origin and other countries they have lived in.
- Expand access to legal employment for refugee youth.
- Facilitate opportunities and programmes for refugee and host-country youth to share experiences and cultural orientation information with newcomers prior to their arrival, and on an ongoing basis once they arrive.

Participation does not mean, just listening to us, but really translating our voices into policy and programming. We are in dramatically shrinking protection space, no one should be excluded, different actors have different roles to play.

We have to remember that the bottom line is to enhance the protection environment and solutions, especially for the people who are in desperate need. Shared responsibility is shared humanity.

Tina Dixson - Refugee Co-Sponsors and Conclusion

Protection of refugees is about three things: visibility of displacement experiences, safety from sexual and gender-based violence and recognition that a refugee life has value. Our experiences of forced displacement are not just stories. They are knowledge to pass on and learn from. Inclusion of refugees benefits all, refugees themselves and the host communities. We must also ensure inclusion of diverse groups within refugee communities such as LGBTIQ people and people with disabilities whose experiences are being constantly erased. Such erasure is violence that prevents people from living their lives to the fullest potential. We cannot claim that everyone counts, when we deny their human rights. For everyone to count, words must translate into actions.

Looking ahead, it is clear that we can achieve so much when we work collaboratively and as equal partners. We call on all of you – all of us – to make sure our next steps are considered, and

meaningfully build on some of the key pledges and contributions that have been made at this Forum.

We are here to engage with you in a full partnership and to collaborate with all of you in the implementation of the GRF outcomes at the global, regional and local level.

We need to hold each other accountable on those pledges and ensure their effective implementation that takes into account and mainstreams age, gender and diversity approaches.

We have produced the Meaningful Participation Guidelines and other tools that would help us ensure that the next meeting, project, and policy on refugees are made with refugees. We are committed to positive collaboration, we are doing our part. NOW we call on you to do yours!

Thank you.