

HIGH-LEVEL OFFICIALS MEETING - DECEMBER 2021

REFUGEE STATEMENT

Introduction

As millions of refugees around the globe, who are desperately seeking solutions to their daily needs and challenges, we experience desperation and feel vulnerable — but we are also resilient, resourceful, and hopeful for a better future. On behalf of 30 refugee-led organisations that signed this statement, we welcome the opportunity today to participate in this important dialogue to deepen our collaboration with UNHCR, States, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

Identity

We experienced stressful situations because of political, ethnic, racial, or religious oppression, persecution, smuggling, war, and conflict. We are not homogenous; our identities are complex and not only formed by our beliefs, ethnical background and cultural traditions, but also by the economic, political, and social situation in our host countries. Over time, refugees undergo a complicated process of identity change when we flee to another country, where host communities perceive us as outsiders, creating an 'us' and 'them' paradigm that can compound the feeling of being the 'other'.

Right to Seek Asylum

As conflict continues States remain the first duty bearers of international protection, and we call on you to uphold access to fair and full asylum processes for all refugees, while supporting their inclusion, integration, and participation and formally suspending deportations of asylum seekers before their claim has been fully assessed.

The priority must be addressing the root causes of forced displacement such as poor governance, disregard for rule of law, transitional terrorism, ethnic cleansings and discrimination and political instability, exacerbated by unequal share of natural resources; climate change and extreme poverty.

Access to Services

Access to and recognition of documentation still remains a major challenge that hinders smooth integration of refugees and their access to services in host countries, such as education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities. Education is not only prerequisite for refugees to realise many of their dreams; it is also the foundation of peace, development, co-existence and integration. While education systems are struggling to meet refugees' needs, progress was made with respect to the participation of young refugees in tertiary education, increasing from 3% to 5%. It's critical for humanitarian and development actors to support inclusive education at all levels.

Mainstreaming Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) considerations in responses is essential to ensure that every person gets access to the safety and support that she or he requires. Age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, indigenous status and other characteristics may lead to barriers to obtain documents to access basic services; and in the worst case can put people at risk of harm and violence. Only 30% of all pledges addressed age, gender and diversity, out of which less than 1% addressed the protection needs of LGBTIQ+ displaced people and only 3% mentioned persons with disabilities. We ask you to increase the number of your pledges that considers AGD to 100%. If you say 'all refugees', it must be ALL refugees.

Expanding third country solutions

We further call on States to expand refugee resettlement schemes at the upcoming Resettlement Forum by prioritizing the most vulnerable, making ambitious pledges to welcome more refugees, including by broadening the definition of the nuclear family. Moreover, we urge all States to expand opportunities for community sponsorship and humanitarian corridors; open up migration pathways; and develop innovative complementary pathways like economic and educational mobility opportunities for refugees.

Meaningful participation

The Global Compact on Refugees recognises that: "responses are most effective when they actively and meaningfully engage those they are intended to protect and assist." The global community has recognized the value of refugee participation at different events, including the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

Refugee participation is not only an 'ethical imperative' but allows us to bring our knowledge and experience into policy formulation and decision-making, further legitimizing the later. It contributes to changes in policy, law and solutions by the consideration of new ideas, which can result in more effective,

innovative, sustainable and impactful policies and programs.

We urge States, UNHCR, and NGOs to increase active participation of refugees in their decision-making structures and throughout all domestic refugee-related measures, and to include them in their national delegations to all consultations on the global refugee regime. We moved from the “if” to the “how”.

Inclusive COVID-19 Responses

The Covid-19 response reiterated the value of refugee engagement, where refugees and Refugee-led-organisations were the first responders at the frontlines, leveraging available resources to support their communities. Responses included raising awareness among refugee and host communities, providing psychosocial support, as well as locally producing face-masks, liquid soaps, hand sanitizers and reusable sanitary pads, all of which was critical in a time, where access to basic services was restricted.

We have already proven to be meaningful actors, not just beneficiaries. It is imperative that in the post-COVID response, the international community creates space for us, refugee leaders, to tackle the challenges and fill the gaps that we see in our communities. Creating such space means *inter alia* facilitating sustainable and accessible funding; capacity strengthening and providing opportunities for continuous learning and supporting transparency and accountability towards meaningful partnerships.

Conclusion

With unprecedented numbers of people displaced around the world, we need to work together—now more than ever— to come up with practical, and effective responses through multidimensional, multidisciplinary, and intersectional approaches. We need more solutions, more partners and more protection for refugees (from the right to seek asylum to the effective access to services and integration).

The call for ‘nothing about us, without us’ is not merely a call to meaningfully engage with refugees, but to refrain from taking decisions without us and to allow us to contribute directly to solutions. It goes beyond storytelling and requires meaningful, substantive and sustained refugee participation to have the potential to affect outcomes.

On behalf of our refugee networks, we would like to thank you for the support for working towards meaningful refugee participation and we look forward to more and new collaborations.

Signatories:

- Action pour les Progres
- ATCR Refugee Advisory Group
- Asia Pacific Network of Refugees
- Australia National Committee on Refugee Women
- Coalición por Venezuela
- Dadaab Response Association
- Empower Youth Trust
- European Coalition of Migrant and Refugee (EU-COMAR)
- Forcibly Displaced People Network (LGBTIQ+ refugee-led organisation)
- Fundación de atención inclusiva social y humana (FUVADIS)
- Global Refugee Led Network (GRN)
- Global Refugee Women Led Network (GIRWL)
- Global Refugee Youth Network
- Global Youth Advisory Council (GYAC)
- Great Step Initiative
- Geutanyoe Malaysia
- Hero2B

- IMPACT
- ISOKO Partners for Peace and Gender Equality
- Jumpstart Refugees Talent
- Molham Team
- New Women Connectors
- Mouvement des Femmes et filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité (MFFPS)
- Refugees Seeking Equal Access to the Table (R-SEAT)
- RELON Kenya
- Refugee Congress USA
- Refugee Youth Education Hub
- Tertiary Refugee Student Network
- Colectivo Migrantes y Exiliados con la Paz (MECOPA)
- Red de Víctimas Colombianas por la Paz en Latinoamérica y el Caribe REVICPAZ LAC