

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
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NGO Protection Statement
Agenda Item 5(a)

Mister Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations. It has been drafted in consultation with, and aims to reflect the diversity of views of, the NGO community.

General Reflections

Mister Chair, at UNHCR's June Standing Committee meeting Mr. Volker Türk underscored how, at a time of unprecedented displacement, "maintaining protection at the center of all our activities is an imperative for us." We cannot agree more.

(i) We believe it applies to the work of this Executive Committee, and have therefore been disappointed by the lack of a 2014 Conclusion – though we would like to thank the ExCom Rapporteur Guillermo Reyes Castro for his significant efforts.

(ii) We believe it applies to UNHCR leadership, and have therefore been surprised that the post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection has remained vacant for over a year - though we would like to express our appreciation for the excellent work that Mr. Volker Türk has done in the interim.

(iii) We believe it applies to humanitarian action, and we applaud the efforts done to align response coordination in mixed situations. This is a big step forward and we support UNHCR. Isn't it time, then, to end any turf battles over coordination mechanisms in several important humanitarian operations?

Above all, we call on national governments to fulfill their protection role to refugees.

Mister Chair, we would like to dedicate the last few minutes to four country situations.

Syria

For the fourth year in a row we commend the tremendous efforts of the neighbouring countries hosting Syrian Refugees. For the rest of the global community, it is proving not enough to open generous wallets and say "thank you" to Syria's neighbors for keeping their hearts and borders open.

A global Comprehensive Plan of Action is needed. It is the natural next step of UNHCR's call for "international responsibility-sharing." We need more countries expanding routes for refugees from Syria into their territories. Specifically, we need:

- 1) Temporary protection programs to absorb refugees fleeing Syria;
- 2) Expanded resettlement programs prioritizing the most vulnerable. This includes the adoption of protected entry procedures for particularly vulnerable refugees at European countries' diplomatic missions; and
- 3) We need States to expand their emergency programs, such as humanitarian, special visas and family unity visas already in existence, to prioritize assistance to displaced persons from Syria.

Today Europe hosts 3% of the 3,000,000 registered refugees from Syria. We commend Germany and Sweden for accepting the greatest part by far, and the UK for its Vulnerable Person Scheme. Yet we are deeply concerned by the fencing and increased surveillance of European borders. Such actions lead to dangerous sea journeys for refugees, to more "coffin boats". The High Commissioner's Dialogue, this December, on Protection at Sea is very welcome and urgently needed.

Kenya

Kenya is the second-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. A new influx of refugees from South Sudan is anticipated over the coming months. We urge the Government of Kenya to accelerate and conclude ongoing negotiations that would provide more land for refugees near Kakuma. We also urge the donors to support livelihood programmes as they are vital for refugees in Kenya where joining the work market is still restricted.

2014 witnessed relocation of several thousand urban refugees from Nairobi camps, and in certain cases, from Somalia. Relocation and the launch of the Usalama Watch security operation further resulted in widespread harassment of refugees and in family separations. We call upon the Kenyan Government and UNHCR to apply UNHCR's 2009 policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban situations in this respect.

Finally, we welcome the renewed commitment made in August in Addis Ababa by the governments of six countries, including Kenya, with UNHCR and other parties, to secure durable solutions for the hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees still in exile. We remind all parties that all refugee returns to Somalia must be voluntary, dignified and in full conformity with international law.

Central America

NGOs are alarmed at the dramatic increase in unaccompanied children from Central America who are being forcibly displaced, internally and across international borders. Girls and boys are increasingly the deliberate targets of forced recruitment, gender based violence and other horrific abuses perpetrated by gangs and other non-state actors.

We call on the international community to recognize the mixed nature of this migration movement and take decisive action under the framework of UNHCR's *10 Point Plan of Action for Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration* to respond to a growing child protection crisis. Children in transit to asylum must be protected from *refoulement* and provided with the required support upon arrival. It is also imperative that these children be provided with a "Best Interest Determination" and, when appropriate, assisted with family reunification.

Australia

We remain deeply disturbed by the continuing deterioration of protection standards for asylum seekers in Australia. The deaths of two asylum seekers held at the Manus Island detention centre this year have unequivocally demonstrated the risks of sending asylum seekers to countries which are not equipped to provide protection to people fleeing persecution. Despite this, Australia has signed a deal to transfer refugees to Cambodia, a country with very little capacity to provide support to refugees.

We are alarmed by the increasingly extreme measures used by Australia. Deterrence does not solve the complex protection challenges that compel asylum seekers to risk their lives at sea. We urge Australia to abandon its current policies and begin to work more constructively with its neighbors to lift standards of protection and provide durable solutions for refugees in Asia.

Statelessness

To conclude on a note of hope, we would like to express strong NGO support for UNHCR's campaign to eradicate statelessness globally. Two seeds of hope have recently come to light in two different regions – namely Brazil and the Netherlands, which have committed to implementing a statelessness determination procedure. Many more such seeds need to be planted if UNHCR's ambition to end statelessness within a decade is to be realized.

A longer version of this statement will be posted at www.icvanetwork.org.

Thank you, Mister Chair.