

IFRC Statement
Global Refugee Forum
December 2019

Mr/Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the floor.

IFRC welcomes and commends the inclusive approach by UNHCR team in organizing this Forum, in particular their outreach and engagement with civil society organizations, refugee led organizations and refugees themselves.

We believe that refugee voices, opinions, actions, contributions and leadership are essential to implementation of the Global refugee Compact, and that this week we are taking some early steps towards making this a reality.

This is why I am speaking here on behalf of IFRC. My name is Qerim Nuredini, I am a refugee but also a staff member of British Red Cross, working with other refugees in my daily life.

Growing up in Kosova, which was part of the former Yugoslavia, I had many dreams for my future. I wanted to travel, meet people, learn and have the same opportunities that people my age had. One thing I never dreamed was that one day I would become a refugee.

I am an ethnic Albanian and as such I was treated as a second-class citizen in my own country so none of those opportunities were accessible to me. Throughout my adult life I had to keep my ID document with me at all times as I was often stopped by the police and if I did not have the ID or couldn't speak the right language, I was either beaten up or had to bribe my way out of the situation. I had no freedom.

When the war broke out I was forcibly removed at a gun point from my house and my country. I was stripped of my personal documents and the belongings I was carrying, to erase my identity and any trace that I had ever existed. I ended up in a refugee camp with nothing but the clothes I was wearing, I felt I had no identity, no nationality, no citizenship, no future, no hope.

After few weeks at a refugee camp I was evacuated to UK under a humanitarian evacuation programme. I was given a chance to rebuild my life piece by piece. I got the freedom I longed for my whole life, I was given back my dignity and my respect and was able to access opportunities like everybody else. My hope in humanity was restored.

I want to make 3 points today.

My first point is about humanity

The numbers of refugees and asylum seekers around the world reflect an increased need for international solidarity and humanitarian assistance to people fleeing persecution. However, efforts by humanitarian organizations to support people in need have often been challenged by national strategies to control migration and which, in some instances, have limited humanitarian assistance through interference, bans and even criminalization, preventing people in vulnerable situations from accessing life-saving support.

We call on States to make saving lives a top priority, including by ensuring that border management policies do not put refugees' lives at risk and that national procedures at borders, especially those that might result in denial of access to international protection or in returns, conform to States' obligations under international law, including the principle of non-refoulement.

At the same time, States need to ensure that national laws and policies support refugees' effective access to essential services, including food, shelter, health care, access to justice, psychosocial support, information about relevant rights, entitlements and processes in host countries, and support in restoring family links. We must also work together to protect refugees' right to family unity, including through protection from family separation.

National Societies around the world are already working with governments and UNHCR to provide many of these services. The IFRC and our National Societies around the world stand ready to support further efforts where relevant and appropriate.

My second point is about promoting and encouraging refugee self-reliance and contributions to society.

Refugees around the globe like all people, aspire to a good life; and desire access to opportunities to develop and contribute to society, such as through work and education. Refugees should be treated with dignity and adequately supported in these areas to facilitate self-reliance.

Refugees also have so much to offer, and this is something that is very important to me. This is the reason I have spent the last 20 years of my life working with refugees and asylum seekers coming to UK, to make them feel safe and help them build their lives, reach their full capacity, value their talent and make them feel equal. We need to recognize the vital contributions that refugees themselves can make to society

Dignity and self-reliance is also **about inclusion and participation** in decision making processes, in accordance with the commitment that States and all of us will “*facilitate meaningful participation of refugees, including women, persons with disabilities, and youth, in Global Refugee Forums, ensuring the inclusion of their perspectives on progress.*” (para 106). We have pledged to support the participation pledge proposed by the refugee-led coalition. And I hope that many of you have also joined or will do so.

But we must go beyond pledges and commitments, and actively engage refugee populations and promote better accountability to affected populations through a “participation revolution” at all levels of response and decision making. I therefore challenge all present today to consider how they can do this in all of their activities, anywhere in the world – be it in policy discussions in Geneva, in national policy consultations, in discussions around service design or delivery in all contexts.

My final point is about the vital role of local actors, including refugee-led and host-led organizations:

All actors have a role to play in this. We appreciate the recognition in GCR paragraph 3 of the key role that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (including National Societies), plays in implementing the GCR, as part of a multi-stakeholder approach.

While National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies collectively is one of UNHCR’s largest implementing partners, we want to stress the many important contributions made by local and national actors, including

refugee-led and host community-led organizations. This is recognized in the GCR.

The GCR also recommends (and I paraphrase paragraph 37) “*support to strengthen institutional capacities... at the local level, including through funding and capacity development.*”

For this reason, we have developed a joint pledge, open for any who want to join it, which commits to investing in the capacities of local organizations, including refugee-led organizations providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and host communities. UNHCR and a number of other actors have also joined this pledge. Furthermore, the Grand Bargain workstream on localization has prepared guidance notes on how to do this, which can offer a useful guide as to how to best support the capacities of local actors to better meet the needs of refugee and host populations and other communities in need.

Finally, I hope that we are moving toward the outcome envisioned long ago by the League of Red Cross Societies during the time of the League of Nations -- *that every child, woman and man whose own State can no longer guarantee their safety, may seek and be granted refuge in the larger community of States, in full respect of their dignity and humanity.*

Thank you, Mr/Madam Chair.