

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

65th Session
29 September – 3 October 2014

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

Agenda Item 8

Mister Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNHCR's NGO partners worldwide, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the report of the 2014 Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations. While the Consultations covered a diversity of issues, these remarks will focus on the theme set out for this year's Consultations: *Women's Leadership and Participation*, as despite decades of work on this topic, women and girls continue to face significant obstacles in claiming and enjoying their rights.

Displacement and statelessness all too often serve to exacerbate existing inequalities, amplifying the discrimination and hardship faced by women and girls. Throughout the Consultations, women and girls reminded us that they are not just survivors, but also committed leaders, advocates and allies. Men and boys emphasized that they too have a critical role to play as champions of women's empowerment. The High Commissioner himself called for "a meaningful commitment from all of us to do everything possible to make this empowerment happen."

During the Consultations, NGOs recalled the 2001 High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women and the 10 core protection areas identified by displaced women themselves in the 2011 Regional Dialogues with Refugee Women, noting the need for the expansion of the Commitments to include stateless, returnees and internally displaced persons. In my statement today, I will summarize the highlights and the recommendations of the Consultations against the Five Commitments to Refugee Women.

Commitment #1: To Meaningful Participation

Throughout the Consultations we heard that meaningful participation remains elusive for women and girls. The Consultations reminded us that meaningful gender-balanced participation is fundamental to effective emergency response and must continue well into the achievement of durable solutions. Women and girls underscored that they do not simply want to participate: they also want to lead. We therefore call on ExCom members to consider how you can help UNHCR to achieve Global Strategic Priority #6, which seeks to improve participation of women in leadership and management structures in both refugee and IDP situations as a priority. This leadership fundamentally begins with education. With only 12% of refugee girls enrolled in secondary school, refugee youth argued that more needs to be done to ensure girls are supported to become leaders. To this end, we must consider how we can help UNHCR to implement its education strategy, particularly in the face of so many new emergencies and significant unmet needs.

Commitment #2: on Registration and Documentation

NGOs expressed serious concern about the continued plight of stateless people, recalling that statelessness is all too often caused by gender-blind or gender-biased laws. The High Commissioner noted that in 27 states women are not legally allowed to pass on nationality to their children. Even more alarmingly, in over 60 countries, women are not permitted to acquire, change or retain their nationality on an equal basis with men. NGOs therefore welcomed the launch of the International Campaign to End Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws, recognizing that only when we challenge discriminatory laws, will we achieve the dream of eradicating statelessness by 2024. NGOs encourage ExCom members to support the full implementation of the 2013 Conclusion on Civil Registration and call on ExCom members to work with UNHCR to achieve Global Strategic Priority #2 on birth registration.

Commitment #3: on food and non-food items management and distribution

NGOs and UNHCR both challenged traditional assumptions around protection and assistance for persons of concern, calling for a total revision of this commitment. This is particularly relevant in light of efforts to move away from encampment towards non-camp refugee hosting arrangements. We must consider the particular needs of women and girls both in the five-year review of UNHCR's urban refugee policy and in the implementation of UNHCR's new policy on alternatives to camps. NGOs highlighted the increasing role of cash programming in meeting the needs of women of concern, and questioned the targeting of women on the basis of assumed vulnerability, as opposed to clearly identified needs. NGO participants and UNHCR called for a closer look at the impact of cash assistance on family dynamics, power relations and decision-making at the household level. NGOs further reiterated that we must look beyond the provision of food and non-food items, recognizing the countless other needs and rights, including those less 'visible', such as access to mental health services and psychosocial support.

Commitment #4: on Economic Empowerment

NGOs welcomed the exciting progress in efforts to promote self-reliance and livelihoods, including for women and girls of concern. Meaningful livelihoods will only be achieved by empowering women and girls as decision-makers, putting them in the driver's seat and providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to identify their own self-reliance strategies. NGOs recalled that livelihoods inherently come from private sector activity, challenging us to rethink the role of the market and the private sector in effective livelihoods approaches. NGOs emphasized that refugee work rights must be at the heart of efforts to promote self-reliance and livelihoods. In this context, we must consider how gender inequality affects women and girls' ability to access markets and realize their rights. NGOs emphasized that promoting economic empowerment is an urgent protection intervention for women and girls, recognizing that self-reliance and livelihoods are fundamental to preventing the negative coping strategies, including

survival sex, early and forced marriage and child labour. Yet despite this important progress and a renewed recognition of the importance of economic empowerment, in the face of so many new emergencies, resources are more stretched than ever and self-reliance and livelihoods strategies are at risk of being forgotten. We must see self-reliance and livelihoods as life-saving and call on ExCom to fully support UNHCR in its efforts to achieve the livelihoods targets set out under Global Strategic Priority #7.

And finally, commitment #5, on Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Despite the fact that more than ten years have passed since the Five Commitments to Refugee Women were drafted, sexual and gender based violence remains a critical issue of concern. Reiterating the Call to Action to address violence against women and girls in emergencies, participants at the Consultations cited countless examples across multiple humanitarian crises that demonstrate the necessity for urgent and meaningful change. We welcome the efforts that have been made by governments, NGOs and UN agencies, including UNHCR, to move this Call to Action forward. We must ensure that we address gender-based violence as a priority need from the onset of all emergencies. NGOs also recalled the needs of men and boy survivors, as well as the specific risks faced by young women, elderly, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQI persons. We would therefore like to reiterate the commitments set out under Global Strategic Priority #3 to ensure that all known survivors receive appropriate support. This commitment must be made to all survivors without discrimination.

To conclude, it is clear that there is more work to be done and that change will only come when we stand together in support of the empowerment of women and girls. Taking up the High Commissioner's call to action, we are appealing to UNHCR, Member States and NGOs to update the Five Commitments to Refugee Women and to create a time-bound action plan and measurable goals to ensure the full implementation of the Five Commitments in the next five years. We cannot let yet another ten years pass without significant progress on these basic commitments to women and girls of concern.

Mr. Chairman, the full version of my report is in the back of the room. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.