

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Forum
12 March 2004

Convention Plus Work on Targeting Development Assistance to Achieve Durable Solutions

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF NGOS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs.

Many NGOs have had, for several years, an integrated, long-term approach to programmes in support of durable solutions, and we believe that this experience can be of value when seeking to gain wider acceptance for such strategies. We hope, therefore, that the contribution and concerns from NGOs will continue to be taken into account when developing new initiatives.

We are convinced that the provision of equal, long-term assistance to refugees and IDPs, as well as to host communities, is necessary and crucial when promoting social and economic recovery and minimising the potential for conflicts. Furthermore, eventual return and reintegration is far more likely to be sustainable if refugees have been assisted in ways that seek to strengthen their financial, social, and human capacities while still in asylum. As such, the inclusion of refugees in national development planning and assistance is a sensible element in any strategy that seeks to promote peace and stability in developing countries affected by protracted crises.

For the same reason, NGOs have welcomed UNHCR's catalytic role in promoting transitional initiatives that fill the gap between humanitarian assistance and development aid. The Framework for Durable Solutions, the 4Rs initiative, Development Aid to Refugees (DAR) and Development through Local Integration (DLI) have served to bring together humanitarian agencies with key development actors, such as UNDP and the World Bank, in a vital and constructive attempt to establish joint policies and strategies that promote sustainable solutions for refugees.

Having said this, we should also like to highlight some major concerns related to this particular Convention Plus initiative on Targeting Development Assistance.

Firstly, the allocation of development assistance to refugees and host countries should not come at the expense of either long-term poverty reduction programmes or humanitarian aid. Refugees and IDPs are among the world's poorest and we strongly encourage this initiative to be fully based on allocations of *additional* funding from donor countries. Such additional funding would reflect strengthened donor commitment to international burden sharing in the search for durable solutions for refugees. Development assistance to support sustainable repatriation or local integration is equally important.

Secondly, it should be recalled that the effective protection of refugees is the ultimate goal of any initiative under Convention Plus. The increased focus on development aid should, in no way, be at the expense of the right to seek asylum. On the contrary, it is essential that industrialised countries respect and uphold their obligations to establish and maintain fair, transparent, and rights-respecting asylum procedures. Based on the principles of international burden-sharing, this should include an expansion of resettlement opportunities. Furthermore, increased allocations for development assistance may well be coupled with initiatives to promote the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in countries affected by a refugee influx. Hence, the strengthening of protection capacity is not just a question of improving material welfare among refugees and host communities. It also concerns the strengthening of basic legal instruments and guarantees and we call upon governments to fulfil their obligations.

Thirdly, and building upon the previous point, we call upon donors to recognise the fundamental importance of re-establishing and reconstructing justice and the rule of law to achieve sustainable peace and an environment of adequate protection for citizens, refugees, and asylum-seekers. With the core institutions of justice and rule of law in place and functioning, a country's obligations are significantly increased. This is a sector in which strong strategy and integration between its various components have been weak to date in post-conflict situations. We take this opportunity to highlight the importance of the sector for refugees, asylum-seekers, and host populations in order to prevent future conflict and promote sustainable development.

Fourthly, there is a tendency for the debate on targeting development assistance on refugees to remain focused on the national level. We would argue that in order to promote effective protection and durable solutions there is a need for a **regional perspective** when planning and implementing assistance programmes. By their very nature, refugee problems transcend international borders and so should the search for appropriate durable solutions. Therefore, initiatives at the national level cannot stand alone, but must be conceived and coordinated within a regional framework that addresses root causes and needs on both sides of a border, as well as in neighbouring countries of refugee-hosting States.

Fifthly, we strongly encourage that any methodologies developed ensure refugee participation in the development of plans and their implementation.

Allow us to also draw your attention to the role of NGOs and their continued contribution to the development of strategies for achieving sustainable and durable solutions. NGOs are in a unique position when it comes to facilitating the bridging between relief, rehabilitation, and development efforts. NGOs can contribute through their local knowledge; close contacts with civil society; their proximity and work with refugees and IDPs, who would be targeted by such initiatives; and their co-operation with local communities and authorities. Strong cooperation between the UN, governments, and NGOs can contribute to the achievement of the ultimate goal of sustainable solutions. Finally, we would like to express our willingness and interest in actively participating and contributing to the work that will take place under this strand of Convention Plus.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.