



International Council of Voluntary Agencies

Joint Report on the HC’s Structured Dialogue on NGO UNHCR Partnership

11 December 2012

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Executive Summary

1. On December 11, 2012 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees presided over a four-hour meeting between seventeen NGO representatives, twelve senior UNHCR managers and an IFRC representative. The content of their discussion, which had been prepared over the course of eight months, centred around issues related to general partnership as well as opportunities for joint advocacy, local partner capacity development and urban refugees. The Dialogue was framed by a background paper entitled “Partnership Aspirations,” reflecting and summarising the thinking that had taken place. The tone of the discussion was collegial, and many people contributed to the conversation. The High Commissioner agreed to many of recommended actions, including:

1. A simple annual report on partnerships
2. A review of the Annual Consultation process
3. A pilot regional consultation
4. A focal point “mechanism” for channeling communication
5. A simple guidance note on joint advocacy
6. A dialogue on protection focused on two or three concrete objectives
7. An institutional strategy for local partner capacity development
8. A pilot program to improve urban programming

In addition, the High Commissioner proposed taking the opportunity of the February 2013 UNHCR Global Representatives meeting to share thoughts on partnership philosophy and culture. He urged for renewed attention to the IDP issue and appealed to international NGOs to do more to support national NGOs.

2. The Steering Group will convene one last meeting to plan next steps. Then a smaller Task Force will oversee implementation of these recommendations in the run-up to the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultation.

Introduction

3. Daniel Endres, UNHCR Director for External Relations, opened the meeting by thanking the Steering Group for their hard work leading up to the Dialogue.

4. António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, affirmed his belief in a humanitarian system based on equality, transparency and complementarity among the three pillars: NGOs and civil society, the Red Cross Red Crescent movement, and the UN. He recognized that the UN occasionally “misbehaves” and tends to play a dominant role. He observed the entire humanitarian community is facing challenges and stresses, with an increasing number of crises coupled with lingering protracted situations. He warned that megatrends, including climate change, population growth, urbanization, water scarcity, and food insecurity, will have dramatic humanitarian consequences. He expressed concern about the restriction of humanitarian space, the multiplicity of actors in conflicts, and the blurring of lines between military and civilian responses to conflicts

(including the UN's notion of "integrated missions"). He worried that the private sector could soon enter the humanitarian sector seeking profits. In light of this context, he underscored the need for UNHCR to deepen its partnership with civil society, both at the strategic and field levels. To do this, he said, partners must detect and overcome existing gaps.

5. Tanya Wood, ICVA Senior Policy Officer, explained the purpose of the Structured Dialogue: to develop a common understanding of existing problems in the partnership between UNHCR and NGOs and gain consensus on how to address these problems. She outlined the Steering Group's work on overall partnership issues, advocacy, urban refugees and capacity development. She explained how the July reflection workshop demonstrated the tensions between various concepts: equality vs. diversity, predictability vs. flexibility, and risk management vs. innovation. She urged participants to proceed with the Dialogue keeping four things in mind: 1) the hard work that went into the joint presentations; 2) the aspirational tone of the ideas; 3) the need to be realistic on behalf of colleagues not in the room, especially those in the field; and 4) the need to crystalize thinking on joint objectives and produce ideas for the way forward.

6. Sue Le Mesurier, IFRC Senior Policy and Programme Support Officer, described how the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has been following refugee issues, including at its 31st conference and in the 2012 World Disasters Report on Forced Migration and Displacement. She noted the significant partnership between UNHCR and IFRC, and expressed support for the Dialogue.

Themes

Partnership

7. Kathrine Starup, DRC Policy Advisor, presented a paper entitled, "Reflections on NGO-UNHCR partnership." She drew attention to the importance of equality, transparency, trust, communication, dialogue, and respect for partners' different roles and mandates. She highlighted the following recommendations:

- **An annual progress report on partnership based on country-level input.** This would be discussed at the Annual Consultations and in the Rapporteur's report to ExCom.
- **A review of the Annual Consultations process and proposals for alternatives.** This could include the addition of regional consultations in one or two pilot locations.
- **The creation of a simple mechanism to report and address problems as they arise.** This could involve the designation of an interlocutor situated in UNHCR Headquarters.

8. Daisy Dell, outgoing UNHCR Director of External Relations, expressed support for the recommendations listed above. She urged that they be addressed through existing processes (rather than the creation of new processes). The annual report should be “light” and feed into the annual consultation. The annual consultation should be more strategic and focused. Regarding the idea to have a more predictable institutionalized mechanism, problems identified in the field should be “escalated” locally (raised with UNHCR management) before they are raised at UNHCR headquarters.

Joint Advocacy

9. Jason Knapp, Church World Service Program Officer, presented the paper entitled, “Advocating Together for the Protection of Persons of Concern.” He highlighted the largely untapped potential of joint advocacy between UNHCR and NGOs, and underscored the discrepancy between collaboration used in clusters vs. refugee situations. He recognized the sensitivity of some issues, and the need for trust and respect for confidentiality. He outlined the following recommendations:

- **Enhanced collaboration in developing and implementing advocacy strategies for refugees and stateless persons.** This recognizes that the existing humanitarian architecture, including the Global Protection Cluster and country protection clusters, is a crucial means for developing and implementing advocacy strategies.
- **A guidance note on advocacy during 2013.** This includes advocacy for the protection of refugees, stateless persons and IDPs at the country, regional and international levels.
- **Resumption of the one-day Dialogue on Protection in 2013.** The first Dialogue should be used as a forum for reflection.
- **A guidance note on information sharing.** This would talk about the importance of information sharing, and would provide details on relevant confidentiality protocols.

10. Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Director of the Division of International Protection, expressed support for the notion of joint advocacy geared towards achieving results. He highlighted areas of common interest, including asylum access, detention, SGBV, child protection, and xenophobia. He suggested more could be done to promote government responsibility, and suggested NGOs help UNHCR promote implementation of state pledges made at the December 2011 commemoration of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1961 Statelessness Convention. He expressed interest in developing a simple guidance note, and suggested the theme of the 2013 UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultations could be “Advocating Together for Protection.”

Local Partner Capacity Development

11. Vladimir Hernandez, Community and Family Services International's Philippine Program Director, presented a paper entitled, "Strengthening Capacity through UNHCR-NGO Partnerships to Assist Refugees and Other Persons of Concern." He outlined the following recommendations:

- **An institutional strategy for strengthening capacity in its work with NGOs.** This would be based on past lessons learned and include a mechanism to monitor progress.
- **Capacity strengthening plans in each country.** These should build in means to enhance the longer-term sustainability of local partners.
- **Capacity strengthening plans and budgets included in partnership agreements.** These plans should have clear and realistic budget allocations. National and local partners should also try to mobilize funds.

12. Amin Awad, UNHCR's Director for the Division of Emergency Security and Supply, briefed participants on the status of an ongoing pilot project involving training for eleven national NGOs in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Once the project is completed in August 2013, these NGOs will become UNHCR standby partners for emergency response. UNHCR plans to review and share lessons learned from the pilot. The challenge is to be innovative.

Urban Refugees

13. Steve Corliss, UNHCR's Director of the Division of Program Support and Management, explained UNHCR's 2009 urban refugee policy's special features: it considers cities to be places of protection and it advises against building parallel services.

14. Mitzi Schroeder, Director for Policy at the Jesuit Refugee Service/ USA, outlined five recommendations:

- **Revise or create an addendum to the urban refugee policy.** This could take the form of a guidance note or documentation of good practice.
- **Map the urban refugee environment.** This would include location, demographic characteristics, and vulnerabilities of refugee populations, and the availability of community services and government institutions.
- **Improve outreach to the most vulnerable.** This would include a menu of options for strengthening referral, such as joint assessments, joint action plans and regular coordination meetings.

- **Provide social support through community centers, mobile outreach units and satellite offices.** These can serve as reception centers for newly arrived refugees.
- **Build bridges between host and refugee communities.** This could include efforts to address xenophobia and foster coexistence and tolerance.

15. Mr. Corliss expressed support for these concrete and actionable recommendations, breaking them into two categories: working together and better knowing the environment. Mr. Corliss discouraged the revision or amendment of the Urban Refugee Policy, but recognized that the partnership dimension of the policy could be strengthened with operational guidance and the identification of good practice. Mapping is ongoing with the support of JIPS in a New Delhi pilot. Outreach and referrals could be considered as a “force multiplier.” He advocated for virtual outreach (the use of phones and web portals), and the replication of the Iraqi refugee outreach program launched in Syria. He suggested NGOs could participate in UNHCR’s urban steering group.

Plenary

16. Patricia McIlreavy, InterAction’s Senior Director of Humanitarian Policy, encouraged participants to hone in on the top priorities for 2013, underscoring the need for these priorities to be relevant to the field.

17. Syed Mazher Hussain, Executive Director of the Confederation of Voluntary Associations highlighted a key challenge in the partnership between UNHCR and NGOs: the tension between increasing needs and decreasing resources. He asked UNHCR to reach out to more civil society partners and highlighted the importance of making refugees a concern on the agenda of the whole local community.

18. Aimee Ansari, Oxfam International’s Humanitarian Policy Representative, repeated NGOs’ interest in a mechanism to handle issues of concern and a yearly progress report on partnerships. She affirmed Oxfam’s commitment to: advocacy, especially related to protection; sharing information on assessments, funding, and program priorities; joint assessments; and building mutual capacity.

19. Mary Pack, the International Medical Corps’ Vice President for Domestic and International Affairs, commended participants for the useful process leading up to the Structured Dialogue. She suggested designing the annual reporting in a way that avoids overburdening the field, and encouraged UNHCR and NGOs work together to select indicators that could be used to measure progress. She offered to share IMC’s experience working with urban refugees and engaging in capacity strengthening, and warned that partnership requires constant nurturing.

20. Anoop Sukumaran, Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, echoed

support for Annual Consultations at the regional level, pointing out that national NGOs can play a stronger role. He reported that his network is helping ICVA establish a regional hub in Bangkok.

21. Ingrid MacDonald, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Resident Representative, asked for clarity on the path forward. She encouraged participants to be realistic and avoid over-burdening the field. Recalling the NRC's active role in the Global Protection Cluster and increasing role in urban environments, she offered the NRC's assistance in drafting guidance. She supported the idea of review the annual consultations process.

22. James Thomson, the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Act for Peace, National Council of Churches in Australia, suggested the NGO Vice Rapporteur could track progress on the recommendations made in the Annual Consultations. In particular, he/she could review progress made to date following the July 2010 session on partnering with national NGOs in complex and insecure environments. He suggested UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service could provide a guidance note outlining new and upcoming policy documents, and asked UNHCR to use its existing operational guidance for urban refugees.

23. Mamadou Ndiaye, Directeur Général of the Office Africain pour le Développement et la Coopération (OFADEC), underscored the importance of developing the capacities of national NGOs and highlighted efforts already underway in West and Central Africa. He gave examples of successful urban programming in Senegal and advocacy towards states. He suggested participants evaluate their progress in partnerships and change course if needed.

24. Grace Muthungu, Senior Programme Officer at the National Council of Churches of Kenya, urged participants to consider as a priority the security of humanitarian workers. She described, as an example, the complex operating environment in Dadaab and the influence of the host government and host communities.

25. Misikir Tilahun, Head of Programmes at Africa Humanitarian Action, expressed support for recommendations made regarding annual reports, a mechanism to handle concerns and capacity development. He asked how to "cascade" -- from Geneva to the field -- a shift in the *culture* of partnership. He appealed to the High Commissioner to enforce partnership principles, and specifically inquire about partnership during his field visits.

26. George Okoth-Obbo, UNHCR's Africa Bureau Director, committed to the outcomes of the aspirations document. He asked the Steering Committee to figure out how to implement the recommendations in the context of existing processes (like UNHCR's annual programming process). He suggested UNHCR's urban policy needs at least another two or three years of implementation before it is revised again. He sought NGOs' cooperation (rather than public criticism) in emergency response, and asked NGOs to share with UNHCR information about their activities. He pointed out four significant challenges to partnership in the field: 1) security; 2) lack of funding, critical in

several (protracted) operations; 3) UNHCR's complicated systems; and 4) due diligence and demonstrating results. The last issue was the most critical current challenge, and our joint performance in this area is vital for future donor support and the credibility of refugee operations.

27. Jane Bloom, Washington Liaison Officer of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), elaborated on the "force multiplier" effect of joint advocacy, particularly related to the Commemorations pledges. She agreed with Mr. Okoth-Obbo's points on funding, and recalled that UNHCR's urban policy is an "unfunded mandate."

28. Mark Hetfield, President and CEO Interim of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, expressed support for UNHCR's effort to enhance accountability by developing a new "Implementing Framework." He predicted this initiative would help "level the playing field" in an environment that currently suffers from an imbalanced power dynamic and lack of transparent procedures. He suggested, when evaluating partners, UNHCR review not only their performance but also their advocacy.

29. Marta Juarez, Americas Bureau Director, described constructive engagement between UNHCR and NGOs in Latin America in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. She encouraged North American NGOs to link up with Latin American NGOs to share experiences.

30. Pascale Moreau, the Acting Director of UNHCR's Europe Bureau, listed issues in Europe that would benefit from joint action, including: preserving asylum space, improving tolerance, hearing the voice of refugees, and understanding the impact of European integration.

31. Kasidis Rochanakorn, the outgoing Director of UNHCR's Asia Bureau, suggested partnership should not be considered as "bitter medicine." He echoed support for moving the dialogue closer to the point of delivery. Urban refugees will be his Bureau's key theme in 2013, informed by mapping carried out in 2012.

32. Yacoub El Hillo, the Director of UNHCR's Middle East and North Africa Bureau, noted the absence of Middle Eastern NGOs at the Dialogue. He urged participants to seize the opportunity provided by the Arab Spring to foster civil society in a region that currently lacks a culture of NGOs. He encouraged participants to prepare for new actors to arrive on the scene, and work more closely, in a principled way, with Islamic NGOs. He warned against initiating unsustainable projects, which could exacerbate existing misperceptions in the region about the humanitarian community.

33. Volker Türk, the Director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, urged NGOs to help UNHCR follow-up state pledges made at the 2011 commemorations of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1961 Statelessness Convention. He asked NGOs to continue referring to these pledges in their Executive Committee statements.

34. Ms. Starup, from the Danish Refugee Council, committed to supporting the annual report and applauded the idea of an additional regional consultation. She urged the High Commissioner to continue his involvement with the process. She told him that the mechanism to jointly advocate for internally displaced persons is clear, but NGOs are unsure about their role with regard to refugee-related advocacy.

35. High Commissioner Guterres reacted to the presentations and plenary discussions, first by noting the importance of a permanent flow of communication that influences UNHCR's way of doing business. Although the preponderance of the Dialogue's recommendations were directed towards UNHCR (rather than NGOs), he argued for a "two way street" and "mutual accountability." He could understand why there were tensions in the field between UNHCR and NGO representatives, given the sharp growth in the amount of UNHCR's funding administered by partners as well as UNHCR's increasingly complex reporting requirements.

Next Steps

36. The High Commissioner outlined his suggested way forward:

- **Creating conditions for relationships to be more effective.** Participants in the Dialogue could draft a paper outlining issues around partnership culture, to be shared with UNHCR's Representatives at their meeting in February. He reiterated that the dimensions of our partnership discussions should be inclusive, optimizing the roles of UNHCR and NGOs.
- **Enhancing partnerships.** The High Commissioner agreed to the idea of an annual report on partnerships, but only one that is "agile," not bureaucratic. He agreed to review the Annual Consultation process, and pilot one or two regional consultations. He agreed to the idea of a "mechanism," noting that a focal point could be useful given the number of departments involved with partners.
- **Enhancing joint advocacy.** The High Commissioner agreed to consultations at different levels, developing a simple guidance note, and pursuing a dialogue on protection focused on two or three concrete objectives.
 - **IDPs:** The High Commissioner specifically proposed joint advocacy on internal displaced persons, given the diminishment of donor and IASC attention towards IDPs. Ms. MacDonald and Ms. Pack agreed on the need to add IDPs back to the agenda.
 - **Durable Solutions:** Mr. Okoth-Obbo urged advocacy with regard to durable solutions (e.g. Angolan refugees in the DRC who are waiting to repatriate and Rwandan refugees facing the cessation clause in Summer 2013).

- **Statelessness:** Anoop Sukumaran, Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, urged more joint advocacy on statelessness.
- **Developing capacities.** The High Commissioner “provoked” international NGOs to do more to support the capacity development of local NGOs. Mr. Okoth-Obbo echoed his suggestion. He agreed to the creation of an institutional strategy for local partner capacity development. However, UNHCR is not financially able to provide an additional 5 percent in funding to all of its 800 partners, so it will need to prioritize which partners benefit from the initiative. He thought ECHO might be interested in funding a pilot initiative, and monitoring will be very important.
- **Doing more for urban refugees.** The High Commissioner agreed to all five recommendations related to the urban policy. He suggested rolling out the effort in two to three selected cities in different regions, perhaps in Kenya, Lebanon, South Africa and Ecuador. Mr. Awad added that a strategy for emergency response in urban settings could be developed, such as in Japan or Korea. Mr. Corliss suggested linking up with the University of Michigan’s forthcoming website dedicated to best practices. Ms. Schroeder underlined the importance of more systemic outreach towards faith-based organizations.

37. Ms. Dell proposed that one last formal Steering Group meeting would be held to agree on a final version of the Partnership Aspirations paper, taking into account the discussions at the Dialogue. This would provide a common platform for taking forward more specific recommendations. The Steering Group would also agree on how the various recommendations would be followed up and by whom. A small task team would monitor the mainstreaming of the recommendations into existing processes. The agenda of the 2013 Annual Consultation will be modified to take into account these initiatives. Ms. McIlreavy noted that other NGOs would like to be involved in the follow-up process.

Participants

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