

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME  
60th Meeting  
24-26 June 2015

**NGO Statement – International Protection**

Agenda Item 2a  
Oral Version  
841 words

Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

We would like to draw the Standing Committee's attention to 6 key areas for follow-up.

**First, we uphold the importance of ensuring the Centrality of Protection in humanitarian action.** We welcome the recently released report of the Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in Humanitarian Crises. The report offers an important opportunity to correct protection weaknesses within our system, and we urge UNHCR to commit to taking the recommendations forward. We call on donors to provide the necessary support.

**Second, we ask States to making saving the lives of the refugees and migrants at sea the first and top priority.** Protection at sea is a global reality. We call upon States to set the example of regional and international cooperation and responsibility sharing by working together, and we ask UNHCR to support States in this endeavour. Today, we call on States to act upon the proposals from the Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, and to work together to protect people in distress at sea in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. We urge the EU to shoulder the responsibility with the frontline states receiving mixed migrants arriving by boat on the Mediterranean. Because solutions to protection at sea will depend on making available more and new legal avenues for access to the territory, we call for new labour mobility agreements, family reunification schemes, and a real commitment to a common resettlement programme.

**Third, we call on governments to respect, in all circumstances, the principle of *non-refoulement*.** As a part of customary international law, non-refoulement is binding on all States even if they are not parties to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol.

We express deep concern regarding protection provided by South-East Asian States and reiterate the need to cease pushing boats back out to sea. We are concerned about the introduction of recent changes to legislation in Australia that fail to comply with Australia's international protection obligations and have set a dangerous precedent for other States. We are equally concerned about the threat from the Kenyan government to close Dadaab camp. As we welcome UNHCR engagement in this area, we encourage all

parties to respect the principle of safe and truly voluntary return.

**Fourth, we encourage UNHCR and States to promote sustainable policies, legal frameworks, predictable and multiannual funding and enhanced coordination for internally displaced persons (IDPs).** We urge UNHCR to deliver on the commitments made by the High Commissioner during the 2013 Dialogue on IDPs, including by issuing its 2014 *Provisional Guidance on Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement*. This Guidance must form part of a wider policy from UNHCR on solutions, including on alternatives to camps. National legal frameworks provide key entry points for preventing and responding to protracted IDPs. In Africa, UNHCR must take on a stronger role in supporting states as they take steps to domesticate and implement the Kampala Convention. We further encourage both States and international agencies to prioritise disaggregated data-collection on internal displacement. Addressing data gaps is a prerequisite for effective protection and the provision of longer term solutions.

**Fifth, we urge UNHCR to keep child protection a priority.**

1) We call on UNHCR, host and donor governments to provide quality basic education, but also secondary education for refugee and displaced children to enable them to realize their full potential and equip them for the future. Communities and children themselves consistently call for prioritization of education in ranking their needs.

2) We encourage robust consultation with displaced children, as their own views are central to effective protection.

3) We stress that protection must include supporting a child's enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health including nutrition.

4) Access to family tracing and reunification (except when not in a child's best interest) should continue to be a protection priority for unaccompanied or separated children.

5) Finally, any age assessment procedures should be undertaken as a measure of last resort, and should always give the benefit of doubt to the individuals whose ages are being assessed.

**Finally, we call on UNHCR to strengthen its fight against Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), including SAFE.** We welcome the impending release of the revised inter-agency *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*, as well as UNCHR's new strategy on *Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE)*. We urge UNHCR to prioritize SAFE implementation in those countries where women and girls are at great risk of assault during firewood collection—for example, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan. We encourage donors to routinely include funding for cooking fuel in their contributions to UNHCR and WFP programmes. We also highlight the need to include persons with disabilities in SGBV Programmes, as refugees and displaced persons with disabilities are at heightened risk of sexual violence during conflict and in displacement contexts.

**Finally,**

Thank you, Mr Chair