

A Guide for NGOs to Participating in UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs



With Additional Information on UNHCR's Executive Committee, the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement



Authors

Eileen Pittaway and James Thomson

October 2008

Acknowledgements

This Guide has been jointly produced with the generous funding and support of UNHCR's Inter-Agency Unit (IAU) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). It was produced by James Thomson, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Act for Peace, National Council of Churches in Australia, and Eileen Pittaway, Director, Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales, to strengthen NGO participation in UNHCR's consultative and decision-making processes. The authors regularly attend UNHCR meetings and this guide is based on their experience.

Special thanks go to:

- ✓ Claire Loxley who undertook research for various sections of the Guide and who contributed to the first draft;
- ✓ Damayanthi Muthukumarage for the wonderful graphics;
- ✓ Geraldine Doney for her input;
- ✓ Judi Tucker and Anne-Marie Kerrigan-Deriché for layout;
- ✓ ICVA for their valuable feedback and editing of the Guide and;
- ✓ The IAU for their support of this project, their continuing assistance, encouragement of the non-governmental sector, and their desire to share this Guide with as many people as possible.

How to Provide Feedback

The Guide is intended to be a 'living document' and will be updated as required. As such, we would really appreciate your thoughts on the Guide and its usefulness.

E-mail comments to ICVA (secretariat@icva.ch), the IAU (interagency@unhcr.org) or the authors: jthomson@ncca.org.au and e.pittaway@unsw.edu.au.

The Guide is available on the UNHCR and ICVA websites: www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations and www.icva.ch.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
<i>How to Provide Feedback</i>	2
Acronyms	5
About This Guide	6
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>How Will This Guide Help You?</i>	7
<i>Why Should You Attend?</i>	7
<i>What Can You Do in Geneva?</i>	7
<i>How Can You Participate Without Going?</i>	8
What is UNHCR?	9
<i>Mandate and Functions</i>	9
<i>Some of UNHCR’s Important Tasks Are:</i>	10
<i>The Executive Committee (ExCom)</i>	11
UNHCR’s Annual Consultations with NGOs	12
<i>Introduction</i>	12
<i>Who Plans and Organizes the Annual Consultations?</i>	12
<i>Where Are the Consultations Held?</i>	12
<i>Who Attends the Consultations?</i>	12
<i>What Happens During the NGO Consultations?</i>	13
<i>ICVA Orientation Session</i>	13
<i>Regional Sessions</i>	13
<i>Thematic Sessions</i>	13
<i>Side Meetings</i>	13
<i>The Role of NGO Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations</i>	14
<i>Parallel Events</i>	14
<i>How to Register for the Annual Consultations</i>	14
<i>Criteria and Access</i>	15
Participating in the NGO Consultations	16
<i>ICVA Orientation Session</i>	16
<i>What Can You Do at the Formal Meetings?</i>	16
<i>Where Do You Sit in the Meetings?</i>	16
<i>Languages – Live Interpretation and Document Translation</i>	17
<i>How to Ask a Question?</i>	17
<i>The Importance of Planning and Preparation</i>	18
<i>Displaying Documentation</i>	18
<i>Where to Find Key Documents</i>	18
<i>Other Documents</i>	18
<i>How to Make Contacts and Arrange Informal Meetings</i>	18
<i>Arranging Side Meetings</i>	19
<i>Arranging Informal Meetings</i>	19
<i>Networking: Opportunities to Meet and Identify People</i>	19

UNHCR’s Executive Committee	20
<i>What is UNHCR’s Executive Committee?.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Who Attends the Annual ExCom Meeting?</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>What Happens During ExCom?.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Participating in UNHCR’s ExCom Meeting	21
<i>Seating at the ExCom Meeting</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>ExCom Working Languages</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Side Events</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Can NGOs Arrange Informal Meetings?</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>NGO Participation</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Where to Find Key Documents.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Meeting People at the ExCom Meeting</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Attending the ExCom Meeting as an NGO on a Government Delegation</i>	<i>24</i>
How to Make the Most of Your Time in Geneva	26
<i>Informal Networking with Other NGOs</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Linking into Formal NGO Networks</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Bilateral Meetings with UNHCR Personnel.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Who Else Should You See in Geneva?</i>	<i>28</i>
Preparing for the Meetings – How to Provide Input into the NGO Consultations or the ExCom Meeting	30
<i>With Whom Do You Need to Be in Touch?</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Preparation for Input to the Meetings.....</i>	<i>31</i>
Advocacy in Geneva	33
<i>General Awareness-Raising</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Exchanging Views</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Written Material:.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Important Points when Preparing Written Materials Are:</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Notes for All Types of Advocacy.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Coordinating and Working in Groups</i>	<i>36</i>
The High Commissioner’s Dialogue.....	38
<i>What is the High Commissioner’s Dialogue?.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Who Attends the Dialogue?.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>A Frank and Open Dialogue</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Further Reading:</i>	<i>39</i>
The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.....	40
<i>What is the ATCR?</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>How is the ATCR Organized?.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Who Can Attend the ATCR?.....</i>	<i>41</i>
Where to Stay, Eat, and How to Get Around Geneva	42

Acronyms

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Full Title</i>
ATCR	Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CICG/ICCG	International Conference Centre Geneva
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exile
ExCom	Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
IAU	UNHCR's Inter-Agency Unit
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)
Pre-ExCom	UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization (UN)

About This Guide

Introduction

Every year over 300 representatives from around the world attend UNHCR's *Annual Consultations with NGOs* in Geneva. While the Consultations started out as a half-day discussion where UNHCR talked with NGOs about the upcoming ExCom (the reason why it is often called 'Pre-ExCom'), it has now grown into a major international meeting point for NGOs and UNHCR. It provides a forum to network, gather and share information, hear about new policies and best practice, discuss protection gaps, and identify joint solutions. It has become the major international forum for NGOs working with refugees, IDPs, and other persons of concern.

To date, however, very little information has been available to help NGOs consider the value of attending and to help them participate more effectively. This lack of information and advice has made participation particularly difficult for people coming for the first time and smaller, or less-well funded, national or indigenous NGOs with little international presence. Indeed, first-time participants in these meetings often end up spending much of their time working out how to get involved, rather than actually taking advantage of the opportunities available. Hence the frequent comment: *"I was just finding my feet when it was time to leave"*.

This guide aims to provide information and advice to help NGOs participate in the Annual Consultations and ExCom and, in so doing, strengthen the partnership between NGOs and UNHCR in providing protection and assistance to persons of concern. The guide also covers the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.

How Will This Guide Help You?

- ✓ By increasing your knowledge and understanding of UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs, UNHCR's Executive Committee (including its annual Plenary and Standing Committee Sessions), the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.
- ✓ By explaining the role and function of these meetings, how they are organized, and what opportunities you have to engage in these consultations.
- ✓ By referring you to more detailed sources of information and organizations that help you participate, such as UNHCR's Inter-Agency Unit (IAU) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).
- ✓ By giving you handy tips on how to prepare, strategize, and seek advice.

Why Should You Attend?

- ✓ To highlight the protection and assistance needs of refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly protection and assistance gaps.
- ✓ To share information, get to know, and consult with, other NGOs.
- ✓ To influence UNHCR policies, processes, and programmes.
- ✓ To raise awareness of emerging issues.
- ✓ NGOs attending these meetings usually return home with new contacts, better sources of information, new policies, examples of good practice, and useful resources to assist them in their work. Sharing these new resources and information with other NGOs back home will help strengthen their work and collaboration. To network and gather good contacts and sources of information.

What Can You Do in Geneva?

- ✓ Arrange meetings with Geneva-based UNHCR staff, including UNHCR senior managers, to discuss and highlight issues of concern.
- ✓ Circulate position papers and briefings outside the meeting rooms.
- ✓ If you have proposed and had your suggested topic accepted in advance, you will be involved in planning and over-seeing that session on the day.
- ✓ Meet people working with NGOs in very different settings and not only learn from them, but discuss common issues.
- ✓ To lobby UNHCR and State representatives. NGOs often find that members of State delegations are more willing to meet with them in Geneva as they expect that NGOs attending UNHCR meetings are well-briefed and have a high level of credibility.

How Can You Participate Without Going?

- ✓ By arranging for other NGOs to raise your concerns at the Consultations, meeting with them beforehand, and de-briefing.
- ✓ By providing timely information and updates to NGOs and UNHCR.
- ✓ By disseminating the report from the Consultations.



What is UNHCR?

Mandate and Functions

UNHCR was created by the UN General Assembly in 1950 to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and to resolve refugee problems. UNHCR works with NGOs, regional organizations, and governments to seek solutions for refugees, according to the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951 Convention), and its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR provides protection and assistance to refugees irrespective of their race, religion, political opinion, or gender.

The head of UNHCR is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR's ExCom and the UN General Assembly have authorized the organization to assume responsibility for other groups. "These include former refugees who have returned to their homeland; internally displaced people; and people who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed" (UNHCR Mission Statement).

UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, and works to find long term solutions for refugees such as returning home voluntarily, integrating in the asylum or host country, or resettling in a third country. These are referred to as durable solutions.

For further information, consult UNHCR's website: www.unhcr.org.



Some of UNHCR's Important Tasks Are:

- ✓ To work closely with governments to persuade them to adopt the international conventions relating to refugees, and to develop national laws in line with international refugee law.
- ✓ To protect the right of people to seek asylum under procedures that are fair and equitable.
- ✓ To assist with refugee status determination.
- ✓ To co-ordinate and deliver protection and assistance to refugees and other persons of concern.



The Executive Committee (ExCom)

The work of the High Commissioner for Refugees is guided by the Executive Committee, which comprises 76 Member States as of 2008. The Executive Committee holds an annual five-day meeting in Geneva in the first week of October, which is also referred to as the “Plenary Session” or simply “ExCom”.

The Annual Cycle of ExCom and UNHCR Meetings:

The work of ExCom is done through an annual cycle of meetings, consisting of the ExCom Plenary meeting (in October) and the three Standing Committee meetings, which are usually in March (focusing on operational issues), June (which focuses on protection) and September (which focuses on budget and administration issues). A planning meeting is also held in December each year.

Other meetings of UNHCR and ExCom include:

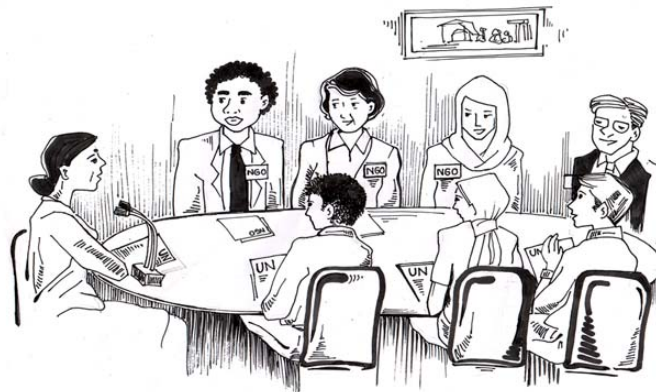
- ✓ ***Informal Consultative Meetings*** of the ExCom called by the Chairman for topics requiring in-depth discussion;
- ✓ ***Informal Preparatory Consultations*** (open only to Members of ExCom), held to consider Conclusions and Decisions of the Executive Committee;
- ✓ ***High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection***; and
- ✓ ***The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement***.



UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs

Introduction

The Annual Consultations between UNHCR and NGOs have been held for approximately 30 years, and have grown significantly over time. They started as a half day meeting for NGOs before ExCom and are often referred to as “Pre-ExCom”, but they have now developed into a busy three-day forum. The Annual Consultations provide an important opportunity for NGOs to raise issues, network, and exchange views with UNHCR and other NGOs. Information on the Consultations is made available on the UNHCR’s website, at: www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations.



Who Plans and Organizes the Annual Consultations?

UNHCR’s Inter-Agency Unit is responsible for organizing the Annual Consultations in collaboration with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

Where Are the Consultations Held?

The meeting is held in Geneva, in the International Conference Centre (CICG/ICCG) and/or the ‘Palais des Nations’ (home of the UN in Geneva).

Who Attends the Consultations?

In 2008, over 350 representatives from 206 different organizations attended the Consultations, including 93 participants representing national NGOs. Participants included representatives from a diverse range of NGOs, international and UN organizations, including UNHCR staff, community-based refugee organizations, UNHCR operational partners, human rights groups, and humanitarian agencies. In recent years, there has also been a welcome increase in the number of refugees attending who provided valuable insights. Organizations range from national or indigenous NGOs and community-based organizations to international NGOs with budgets exceeding

UNHCR's. Although the Consultations are between UNHCR and NGOs, State delegates (government representatives) are also invited to attend the thematic sessions.

NGOs must register to attend the Consultations by applying to the IAU.

What Happens During the NGO Consultations?

The Annual Consultations begin with an opening plenary session, followed by concurrent thematic and regional sessions, before a closing plenary on the morning of the last day. The thematic and regional sessions are supplemented by a programme of side meetings held before or after the formal programme of meetings or during the lunch breaks. An "Agenda at a Glance" is published on the UNHCR website <http://www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations> in advance of the Consultations, and a detailed programme of meetings is available before the Consultations commence.

ICVA Orientation Session

On the first morning of each year's Consultations, ICVA organizes an orientation session for NGOs attending the Consultations for the first time. For details of this meeting, see the "Participating in the Annual Consultations" section of this guide.

Regional Sessions

Each of UNHCR's five Regional Bureaux conducts a Regional Session on issues relevant to that region. The Directors of the Bureaux often provide a brief overview of priorities in the region and then open the floor for questions and discussion.

Thematic Sessions

Topics for the thematic sessions are proposed by both UNHCR and NGOs, and selected by NGO vote several months in advance of the Annual Consultations. All NGOs that have attended the Consultations in previous years are involved in the selection process. The NGO (or UNHCR section) proposing the topic is asked to organize the session, including selecting a moderator (usually an NGO representative) and speakers for the panel. The panels are diverse and generally comprise speakers representing UNHCR, an NGO, and one other (NGO, UN, inter-governmental organization, State, academic, etc.), thus bringing different perspectives to the discussion. Speakers make short presentations to allow for maximum discussion when the moderator opens the floor for questions and comments.

Side Meetings

NGOs can request to run formal side meetings on their issues of concern, while some topics are merged with other sessions. In this case, the NGO wishing to organize a side meeting should send its request to the IAU well in advance of the Consultations. Once confirmation is received, the NGO must organize the meeting, including a moderator and speakers for the panel and publicising the event.

The Role of NGO Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations

Each year, one NGO representative is selected, in advance of the Annual Consultations, to be the Rapporteur (the meeting reporter). The primary role of the Rapporteur is to report back to the Annual Consultations on the last day during the closing Plenary Session, highlighting the major developments, recommendations, and issues that need to be addressed. The Rapporteur provides a verbal and written report to ExCom on behalf of the NGOs.

Parallel Events

NGOs have frequently organized events before, during, or after the NGO Consultations. For example, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) has regularly held its Annual General Meeting in September during the weekend between the Annual Consultations and ExCom. The Steering Committee of the International Detention Coalition (IDC) meets during the NGO Consultations and the World Council of Churches' Global Ecumenical Network on Migration often holds its Annual Meeting in the week prior to the Consultations.

Tip! Check to see what else might be on when you are planning to visit Geneva. Attending several key meetings can make your trip to Geneva much more worthwhile.

How to Register for the Annual Consultations

Notify UNHCR's IAU early if you are planning to attend!

NGOs interested in attending the Consultations must notify the IAU in Geneva as early as possible (interagency@unhcr.org). UNHCR will send an "Information Note" by e-mail to all prospective participants three months prior to the meetings. The note contains information about the criteria for participation, how and when to register, and advice on finding accommodation and maps. If you need a visa for Switzerland, it should be obtained before your departure, and if you require assistance, the IAU will be able to assist you.

You must complete the registration form, either by mail, fax, or on-line and also send a credential letter from your organization to the IAU. You will also be asked to provide information about your position and the work of your organization. This information is compiled by UNHCR and made available to NGOs as part of the "List of Participants" and the "NGO Profile in Brief", which has more detailed information about your organization. This information is intended to facilitate networking and to help you identify organizations with similar or complementary areas of interest. The NGO Profile is posted on www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations along with the agenda and other information. Participant lists are included in the meeting pack, which you receive on arrival.

Registration is required for temporary accreditation to the UN for gaining access to the Palais des Nations and the CICG/ICCG. To meet the strict security requirements, you should ensure that the name on your registration form and credential letter are exactly the same as shown on your passport, and that you bring your passport and a copy of the registration form with you when collecting your badge. Individuals with permanent UN accreditation must still register as described.

Criteria and Access

NGOs wishing to attend should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have consultative status with ECOSOC (please consult the UN website at www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/ for further details on accreditation with ECOSOC);
- Be a member of ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) – please refer to www.icva.ch;
- Be an implementing partner for UNHCR in the preceding or current year; and
- Be an operational partner of UNHCR (with a written recommendation from the UNHCR Field Office concerned).

Participating in the NGO Consultations

Note: In the past, UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs have been held in the last week of September in order to directly precede UNHCR's Executive Committee in the first week of October. This fact enabled some NGOs to stay in Geneva for both meetings. In 2008, however, the Consultations were brought forward to June to coincide with ExCom's Standing Committee meeting. One reason for this change was to assess if the change in dates would provide an opportunity to link the outcomes of the NGO Consultations to the ExCom discussions.

ICVA Orientation Session

It is worthwhile making sure that you arrive in Geneva in time to attend the ICVA orientation session on the first morning of the Annual Consultations, which targets NGOs attending for the first time. The meeting begins with a short introduction by UNHCR, and then ICVA provides an overview of the forthcoming meetings, outlining the major themes and challenges. ICVA also explains how NGOs can participate in the meetings, including opportunities to feed into NGO statements, updates on the drafting of ExCom Conclusions, and any special events or meetings being held.

Participants are encouraged to introduce themselves and their organization, which provides a good opportunity to get a sense of who is attending and to identify people they may wish to meet. ICVA also runs through the agenda and introduces the Consultations' Rapporteur. Tea and coffee is served in the half hour before orientation begins, which also provides a good opportunity to meet and greet other NGOs and UNHCR staff informally, and to identify who is working on what issues.

What Can You Do at the Formal Meetings?

The Annual Consultations can seem intimidating, as many people seem to know each other and the language is often very formal and is generally in English. It is a big, busy meeting, often with simultaneous sessions and you may be unsure of which sessions to attend. Don't worry about asking for advice; people are usually pleased to assist, and if you are really lost, find someone from ICVA or the IAU and they will point you in the right direction. Chat to other participants. The coffee bar is often a good place to meet people, share experiences and find out what is going on. Some NGOs take a formal role in the proceedings, for example, sitting on a panel, or chairing a roundtable session. This involvement is often a natural progression from having a specific involvement in an issue, having worked on the statement drafting process, or from organizing side meetings.

Where Do You Sit in the Meetings?

Seats in the opening and closing plenary sessions of the Annual Consultations are allocated alphabetically according to the name of the organization you represent. Depending on the number of participants, UNHCR may not be able to provide one seat

per participant at the table with a microphone, but you will be able to sit in a second row and come forward to use a microphone if you wish to ask a question. You are free to choose where you sit in the thematic and regional sessions.

Languages – Live Interpretation and Document Translation

Under standard UN procedure, all formal UNHCR documents are provided in English and French, and translated into other UN languages according to need.

During the main Plenary Sessions of the Annual Consultations, simultaneous interpretation is provided in English, French, and Spanish through a headphone set located on the desks and by changing channels you can select the language. Often the speakers cannot be heard from the back of the room, so the headsets are useful to hear well. All speakers need to use a clear, measured tone to enable accurate interpretation and should provide a copy of their presentation in advance to the IAU staff in order to assist the interpreters. For the Regional Sessions, interpretation in Arabic or Russian is often provided depending on the region, but side meetings are usually conducted in English, and interpreters are not available unless specifically requested and pre-arranged.

How to Ask a Question?

During question time and debates in the Annual Consultations, those with questions indicate to the moderator that they have a question by raising their nameplate or placing it upright on the desk. Simply raise your hand to ask a question during the thematic and regional sessions. The moderator can then see who has a question and will call on the organization. S/He will indicate the order for your turn to take the microphone. Press the button on the microphone, so that the light appears, in order to talk. If the light does not come on, you must raise your hand or name plate to signal to the technicians (in the booths) that you need them to switch the microphone on in front of you. It is important to speak using the microphone (a) to be heard by all participants and (b) for your question or comment to be interpreted.

Begin your question or comment by first saying your name and that of the organization you represent. Questions need to be short and concise. Long statements or confusing questions are discouraged. If you want to ask a question, it is advisable to write it down and make sure it is easily understood before you then direct the question to a speaker on the panel. If a question cannot be answered, one of the speakers may take note of the question and then look into the matter later, but it is up to you to follow up with the speaker to get an answer. Asking specific questions of the panellists during the meetings is an important opportunity to get an issue on the record and is also one of the best ways to bring it to the attention of other people in the meeting.

The Importance of Planning and Preparation

Most people attend in order to represent their agencies and to advocate either with, or on behalf of, refugees. You should be familiar with the agenda items and what meetings you wish to attend in advance of the meeting. For example, if you are an NGO coming from Africa and you work with IDPs you would probably want to attend the regional sessions for Africa in addition to meetings regarding protection issues for IDPs.

Displaying Documentation

It is possible for your organization to display some documentation on tables available at the back of the room during the Consultations. Please ensure that you bring enough copies, as the Conference Room is not equipped with a photocopy machine (you will need around 150 copies). If you are giving a presentation, or are advocating for a particular issue, it is a good idea to bring a short, eye-catching briefing paper for distribution and ensure they are available at the time of the relevant session. This distribution is often more effective than bringing a longer report, particularly if you want people to respond during the Consultation, as the meetings are very busy and people do not have time to read. People do take longer reports home, but as they can weigh a lot, it is better to put large documents onto a CD for distribution. Alternatively, you can circulate a one-page flyer with a description of the report and the web address.

Where to Find Key Documents

Documents for the Annual Consultations are given to each participant during the registration at the UNHCR welcome desk and are available on UNHCR's website for the Consultations www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations. There you will also find maps of the CICG/ICCG and the Palais des Nations, a list of hotels and participants, reports from previous Consultations, and other useful information.

Other Documents

In the Palais des Nations, there is an information desk where you can request any UN document, provided it is in print and you are able to provide them with the document number. To find the information desk, enter at the Pregny entrance (opposite the Headquarters building of the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC) and turn left after entering the Palais building through Door 40.

How to Make Contacts and Arrange Informal Meetings

Tip! Don't wait for people to talk to you. Introduce yourself; ask where people are from and why they are at the Consultations – what do they want to achieve?

Tip! To get an idea of who attends the Annual Consultations, read through the NGO Profile from the previous year's meeting. This document will also help you get an idea of who you may like to meet. At the Consultations, you will also

receive three lists of participants: one sorted by name, one by organization, and another by country.

Tip! A copy of UNHCR’s Internal Telephone Directory is made available to participants at the Consultations, which will help you contact UNHCR staff in Geneva. To find other UNHCR staff, call the UNHCR switchboard, or ask IAU staff.

Arranging Side Meetings

As well as the formal sessions in the Annual Consultations, NGOs organize “side meetings”, usually in the mornings between 09:00 – 10:00hrs (9-10am) or during lunch time from 13:00 – 15:00hrs (1-3pm). A meeting room is provided by UNHCR for this purpose. A lot of important work happens at these meetings and NGOs from many different places come together to share issues, documents, and experiences. To organize a side meeting, a room must be booked through the IAU at least two weeks in advance of the Annual Consultations and the NGO must organize and promote the meeting to ensure attendance. Even if you do not want to hold a side meeting it is important to check each day to see what is on the agenda. The outcomes of these meetings are also included in the Rapporteur’s report to ExCom.

Arranging Informal Meetings

NGOs are also encouraged to meet with UNHCR staff informally to discuss issues of common concern and share information and ideas. For that purpose, the UNHCR Organizational Structure, as well as those of the Regional Bureaux will be available on UNHCR’s website for the NGO Consultations www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations and hard copies will be included in your registration folder. These will allow you to organize meetings directly with relevant UNHCR staff during your stay in Geneva.

Networking: Opportunities to Meet and Identify People

There are several opportunities for you to identify people whom you may wish to meet. At the Annual Consultations, ICVA’s orientation session begins with a round of introductions. UNHCR’s reception, usually held in UNHCR’s Cafeteria on the first night of the Consultations, also provides a great opportunity to mingle with UNHCR staff.



UNHCR's Executive Committee

What is UNHCR's Executive Committee?

The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) was formed in 1958 to advise the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the exercise of UNHCR's functions. ExCom meets in Geneva annually to review and approve UNHCR's programmes and budget, advise on international protection, and discuss a wide range of other issues with UNHCR and its intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

A "Bureau" of the Executive Committee is elected each year and is made up of three office bearers: a Chair, a Vice-Chair, and the ExCom Rapporteur. The Bureau's function is to liaise between ExCom Member States and UNHCR and they organise informal meetings on a regular basis.

Who Attends the Annual ExCom Meeting?

The annual ExCom meeting is attended by:

- ✓ Representatives of the ExCom Member States.
- ✓ Representatives of other Member States of the UN who attend as observers.
- ✓ Representatives of organizations of the UN system.
- ✓ Representatives of intergovernmental organizations.
- ✓ NGOs meeting the ExCom established criteria (i.e. ECOSOC accreditation and/or member of ICVA).

What Happens During ExCom?

The Plenary opens with comments from the ExCom Chair and presentations by the High Commissioner and a guest speaker. The following days are largely occupied by the "General Debate". The "General Debate" involves presentations ("interventions") by Member and observer States. There are also other specific agenda items that are addressed.

NGO statements on agenda items and the Rapporteur's Report on the Annual Consultations are delivered.

Participating in UNHCR's ExCom Meeting

The ExCom annual meeting is very different from the NGO Consultations. It is a formal meeting of UNHCR's governing body. NGOs attend as observers and engage in the debate through the NGO statements. All of the meetings are held at the Palais.

Seating at the ExCom Meeting

Seating at the ExCom meeting is by ExCom Members followed by observer States, inter-governmental organizations, and NGOs. Since NGOs participate as a collective body, individual name plates are not provided. Instead, NGOs sit behind or near the name plate marked 'NGO'. The seats behind each State are reserved for members of that delegation.



ExCom Working Languages

During the ExCom meeting, simultaneous translation is provided in the UN languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish – through a headphone set located on the desks or beside each chair with a control to select the desired language.

Side Events

During the week of the ExCom meeting, State delegations and UNHCR organize a considerable number of meetings on the margins of ExCom. These are held either in the morning before the formal session starts, or during the lunch break. NGOs are usually welcome to attend most of these, and they are often very worthwhile.

Can NGOs Arrange Informal Meetings?

During the ExCom meeting, short and informal meetings are most commonly held in the coffee lounge outside of the main meeting rooms in the Palais des Nations. Rooms for larger meetings can be booked through UNHCR's Inter-Agency Unit. For those that do stay, there is often more time available to meet during the ExCom meeting week than during the Consultations.

During the ExCom meetings, State delegates should normally not be approached during session, particularly when a member of the delegation is speaking or otherwise engaged in the debate. If you wish to make contact, wait for a meeting break or a break between speakers to approach them. Alternatively, you can leave a handwritten note asking for them to call you during the break to arrange a meeting.

Most State delegates also have mobile or cell phones that receive e-mails and text messages, which can be a useful way of arranging a meeting.

NGO Participation

ExCom Member States have permitted two mechanisms for NGO input in the formal proceedings: an NGO Statement per ExCom agenda item (NGOs can request permission for a second statement from the ExCom Chair), and the Report of the Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations to ExCom.

NGOs are not permitted to speak individually or ask questions in the ExCom meeting. Collectively, NGOs are allowed to make one intervention (verbal presentation) on each agenda item, which is co-ordinated by ICVA. NGOs make every effort to ensure that key points from the NGO Consultations are included in the NGO statements to ExCom. Some people question the value of attending these meetings when we have such a small official role. At the same time, NGOs who work primarily as advocates see this meeting as a very good opportunity to hear what the various governments have to say about key issues of concern. It is also a good opportunity to meet with many of these State representatives and discuss issues with them. These meetings usually happen in the coffee lounge at the Palais.



Attending the ExCom meeting gives NGOs an opportunity to hear what the High Commissioner and other senior managers have to say about the current situation for refugees around the world. There are also some excellent side events held in the mornings and during the lunch breaks. As with the NGO Consultations, to make the

most of attending the ExCom meeting, you need to come prepared and know what you want to achieve.

Where to Find Key Documents

Documents for the ExCom meeting are available at the back of the main meeting rooms. Many statements are placed on the tables after they are delivered.

Meeting People at the ExCom Meeting

Tip! During the ExCom meeting, a list of members of State delegations and their titles is provided to all attendees. This list will help you familiarize yourself with who attends as part of the government delegation, what staff your State has based permanently in Geneva, and who is heading the delegation.

Tip! A list of attending NGOs is also available.

Tip! Know who you are talking to! State and NGO representatives can be distinguished by the colour of their badge: usually they are brown for NGOs and red or yellow for States (including NGOs attending as part of a State delegation), and blue for UNHCR staff.

Tip! At ExCom, the main opportunity for networking is the High Commissioner's reception, usually held on the first evening where States, UNHCR staff, and NGOs meet together informally. This reception is a good opportunity for you to have a casual chat, ask questions and get to know some of the State delegates and senior UNHCR staff.

Attending the ExCom Meeting as an NGO on a Government Delegation

Some governments currently have 'NGO representatives' on their government delegation (e.g. Australia, Canada, Finland, and the USA). Be aware that this position is a different role to being an NGO observer. The government will establish protocols about the role you will take, and what you are allowed to say and do. You will be less free to advocate during the ExCom meeting as an independent NGO representative in formal meetings. However, in private settings you will be able to speak on behalf of your NGO by making clear you are speaking on behalf of your NGO.

What advantages will you have being on a government delegation?

- ✓ You have a greater level of access to key people from the government while in Geneva, which can build trust and relationships for your year-round advocacy and help you to build a greater understanding of how the government involvement in ExCom works.
- ✓ You will (depending on the attitude of the government) be invited to bilateral meetings with other governments and get an opportunity to get more understanding of the views of other governments, and also how the government interacts with other governments.
- ✓ You will almost inevitably pick up information which you would not hear being an NGO observer alone – but you may not be free to share this with your NGO colleagues.



Being on a government delegation works best when you can work with NGOs at ExCom who are not restricted by being part of a government delegation. Where appropriate, you can share information with NGOs, pass on input for possible inclusion in NGO statements and gather information from NGO representatives to ask questions of the government delegation.

Whether you are on a government delegation or not, you should encourage governments, especially of your home country, to meet for a meal and/or an (in)formal meeting during ExCom with the NGOs present from your country. Such meetings are very valuable for both sides: for the government to understand and get to know NGOs better and for NGO advocates to understand the pressures and limitations on governments (and to realize they are human after all).

Understand what the Government Delegation is doing:

Tip! Ask the government for a full list of meetings they intend to have during the week.

Tip! Once you have a list of meetings scheduled, ask what topics they will cover and what the government is recommending to UNHCR or other States.

Tip! Ask what meetings you can attend and whether you will be permitted to speak in the meetings.

Establish ground rules for your participation:

Tip! Ask to attend delegation briefings and debriefings. If that is not possible, ask for a member of the delegation to be assigned to you to keep you informed.

Tip! Remember that the government will start planning well in advance, so make sure you forward your requests well in advance.

How to Make the Most of Your Time in Geneva

While the main purpose of your visit to Geneva will be to attend the UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs or the ExCom meeting, there are many other important things that you can do while you are there.



Informal Networking with Other NGOs

People come from all over the world to these meetings, and from all sectors of humanitarian and refugee advocacy work. It is an excellent opportunity to build your networks with other NGOs who have travelled to Geneva. Most are actively working in the field or are refugee advocates. By working together with NGOs from different countries you can present a stronger case to UNHCR about common issues of concern.

It can be a useful space to identify and share common problems, to discuss potential solutions and an opportunity to learn about best practice in working with refugees. It also provides an opportunity for some refugees who are resettled in third countries to share their experience as refugees and during the process of resettlement.



Contacts made in these meetings can lead to international cooperation, exchange of information, training materials, joint research projects, and strong contacts between countries of origin, first asylum countries, and resettlement countries.

Linking into Formal NGO Networks

Identifying and building relationships with Geneva-based NGOs and NGOs who regularly attend the Annual Consultations and the ExCom meeting is critical, whether you are going to Geneva or trying to provide input from home.

As well as NGOs who travel to Geneva for UNHCR meetings, some NGOs have offices there. The role of their staff is to work as advocates. These NGOs may attend the Consultations and the ExCom sessions, as well as the various preparatory meetings and special briefings given by UNHCR.

One of the most important global NGO networks is the Geneva-based organizations is the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA, www.icva.ch), which works closely with UNHCR to facilitate input from NGOs into UNHCR meetings.

Many of the Geneva-based NGOs get to know people who work in the many government posts or consulates. Through these contacts they can informally present an NGO position to governments and UNHCR, and without them we would not have a formal avenue to make our voices heard.

It is very useful for NGOs that do not have a permanent presence in Geneva to get to know these organizations, and through establishing links and networks, have their voices taken to meetings when they can not attend.

Bilateral Meetings with UNHCR Personnel

One of the most useful aspects of going to Geneva is the opportunity to have informal meetings with UNHCR personnel ('bilateral' meetings). To make the most of this opportunity it is important to plan ahead whenever possible. The Annual Consultations and the ExCom meeting are very busy times for UNHCR as they arrange the conferences, prepare background reports, and sit on a number of the panels. To make the most of your time, it is important that you meet with the most appropriate person or section.

For example, if you want to discuss resettlement then you need to visit someone in UNHCR's Resettlement Section. If it is about something happening in Asia, you need to identify the most appropriate person in the Asia-Pacific Bureau. The people who can give you most assistance are the staff in UNHCR's Inter-Agency Unit. They are available to advise you who you should see about which issue, and to assist you to make appointments.

If you wish to have bilateral meetings with UNHCR staff it is important that you prepare before you travel to Geneva. Be very clear about what it is you wish to discuss and, if feasible, let them know the topic in advance. If possible, prepare a short briefing note and take supporting documentation with you. Make sure you are

fully informed about the issue; if you are discussing an incident, have details like times and dates available.

It is also important to be clear what you are asking UNHCR to do. Are you asking them to review policy, to investigate an incident, or to address an issue that has not previously been discussed? Do you want them to take action, or do you want them to support you or other groups to take action? The better prepared you are, the more likely you are to have a productive meeting.

A group of national or indigenous NGOs travelling to Geneva from the same region should also consider having a group meeting with the Director of the Regional Bureau. For example, each year, the Director and other senior staff of the Africa Bureau meet with African NGOs to discuss issues of concern and share ideas and experiences. The agenda is drawn up based on suggestions received from the NGOs in advance of the meeting. For many national NGOs, it is the only opportunity to meet the Director of the Bureau and, so, it is an initiative worth pursuing.



Who Else Should You See in Geneva?

Other UN organizations and some of the major international organizations also have headquarters or offices in Geneva. Depending on the focus of your work, you may find it useful to visit some of these agencies.

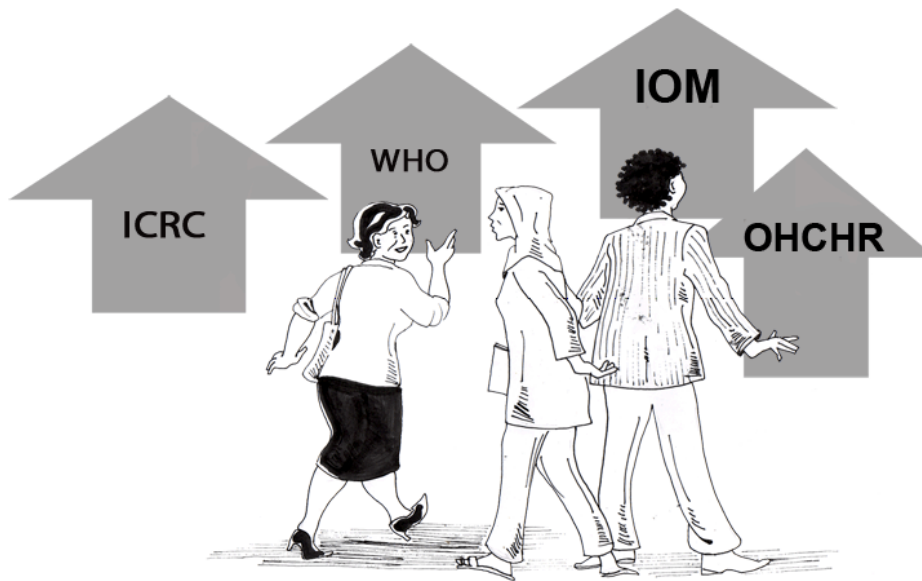
Many of these organizations deal with various aspects of humanitarian aid and address many of the problems we encounter in the field. It may be good for you to find out more about the role they play and for them to learn about what you do.

A list of humanitarian organizations with an office in Geneva can be found at the website of the "Centre d'Accueil Genève Internationale": www.cagi.ch/en/Humanitarian.htm. You can also find more details about these organizations in the "Briefing Book on International Organizations in Geneva 2004" at website: www.genevabriefingbook.com/contents.html.

Some of the international humanitarian organizations in Geneva are the following:

- ✓ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), www.icrc.org.
- ✓ International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), www.ifrc.org.
- ✓ International Organization for Migration (IOM), www.iom.int.
- ✓ The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), www.unaids.org.

- ✓ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), www.ohchr.org.
- ✓ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ochaonline.un.org.
- ✓ The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), www.unicef.org.
- ✓ World Health Organization (WHO), www.who.org



Preparing for the Meetings – How to Provide Input into the NGO Consultations or the ExCom Meeting

The Annual Consultations and the ExCom meeting provide us with many opportunities for advocacy, action, information collection, and dissemination.

These opportunities include the following:

- ✓ International networking with other NGOs;
- ✓ Awareness raising;
- ✓ Gaining support for future actions to assist refugees;
- ✓ Planning follow-up strategies;
- ✓ Talking with governments;
- ✓ Learning of, and suggesting, actions which might be taken to protect the rights of refugees;
- ✓ Learning and understanding more about how UNHCR functions;
- ✓ Learning about other NGOs and IGOs;
- ✓ Identifying “best practise” in refugee policy and service provision; and
- ✓ Identifying gaps and service failures, and suggesting solutions.

To do the above, you must prepare before you go to Geneva, be active while you are there, and commit yourself to following up when you return home

With Whom Do You Need to Be in Touch?

Even if you can not travel to Geneva you can follow what is happening via the web or e-mail. By working with people who are attending or NGOs based in Geneva you can make sure that your views are put forward into the proceedings. If you are interested in being part of the process, it is important that you are in contact with the UNHCR Inter-Agency Unit, and get onto their e-mail list at InterAgency@unhcr.org. They send out a constant stream of excellent information about the various UNHCR meetings and briefings, and background papers, which will keep you well informed about what is going on. Whenever appropriate, they provide opportunities for NGO comment.



The other key source of information is the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA – see: www.icva.ch). ICVA was founded in 1962 and is a global NGO network that brings together humanitarian and human rights NGOs as an advocacy alliance for humanitarian action. Focusing on humanitarian and refugee policy issues, ICVA draws upon the work of its members at the field level and brings their experiences to international decision-making forums. ICVA provides a means for the collective body of its members to work together to effect change, and also assists members to improve their own work through access to initiatives and tools that help to increase quality and accountability.

ICVA works in partnership with UNHCR to organize the NGO Consultations, and NGO input into other important meetings. ICVA is a network of NGOs and to fully access their excellent site you need to be a member. However, ICVA also sends out a lot of information to people on their mailing list, and importantly, they co-ordinate the drafting of NGO statements into all of the meetings. If your organization is not a member, it is suggested that you join.

Between these two organizations you will have access to most of the information that you need to guide you through the maze of formal and informal meetings in Geneva.

Preparation for Input to the Meetings

Thorough preparation prior to your visit to Geneva is vital for successful advocacy. While it is always interesting to hear what is happening in the world, and the experience of other participants, one of the most important reasons for going to Geneva is to present issues of concern from your work and your region. This advocacy can be done through good networking even if you can not attend. For example, NGOs from Australia do a lot of work with community-based organizations whose members

are refugees living in Thailand. They are not able to travel to Geneva, but they prepare materials and give these to Australian NGOs to present on their behalf. The Southern Legal Aid Network represents a broad constituency from African and other countries from the South and operates in a similar way.

Preparation should begin long before you come to Geneva. It is very difficult for refugees to travel to Geneva to speak on their own behalf. You are there to advocate for the rights of refugees and displaced people, your organizations, your constituents, not yourselves.

There are some important steps to take to do so. You could consult with refugees, and community-based organizations to hear their issues of concern and priorities for action. You could contact other NGOs in your country, your region, and internationally who may be working on similar issues. It is very useful to get to know the positions of various governments, and how they are thinking. You can prepare by corresponding with NGOs and by reading the reports from the UNHCR Standing Committee and other key meetings, which are available on the UNHCR website, www.unhcr.org.



Advocacy in Geneva

Advocacy is an important part of what you can do while in Geneva.



It is important to remember that you should not only work on advocating to the government of your home country, but you should identify other key delegations that may have some involvement or interest in your issues.

There are several types of advocacy that you can and should engage in whilst you are at UNHCR. Each method should be tailored to suit the person or group you are aiming to lobby. You should come prepared and know what your strategy is going to be. If it is your first time attending, the following information is useful in identifying what may be applicable given your circumstances. Key lobbying can be done in person during formal and informal opportunities. The importance of having confidence to approach delegates cannot be overemphasized. For further information on how to approach people please refer to “How to make the most of your time in Geneva”.

You need to be clear about:

- ✓ What you want to achieve through advocacy, and why?
- ✓ What are you asking to be done and who are you asking?
- ✓ What information do you need to back up our positions?
- ✓ Do you have enough evidence to talk about the issues?



General Awareness-Raising

If you are trying to draw attention to a particular topic, a good place to start is through general awareness-raising. Most attendees of these meetings have come with their own objectives to try and draw attention to their particular concerns. The key to being successful with this method is to come prepared, with a well documented and concise message.

Exchanging Views

As mentioned in previous sections informal meetings are one of the keys methods of communicating with other participants. General awareness-raising is a well accepted form of advocacy, and often leads to an exchange of views regarding your topic. It may be that the person you are talking to already has his/her own view of the situation and would like to discuss it with you either formally or informally.



Exchanging views can and should be an enjoyable experience. To make the most of these exchanges always come with an open mind and be ready to hear other points of view. By allowing other people to express their ideas they will be more open to hearing yours. If, however, you blatantly tell the other person that they are wrong, you will be disadvantaging yourself.

Exchanging views also works best if you have examples to justify your thoughts and ideas. If you have a well reasoned argument, you are more likely to gain the respect and interest of the person with whom you are engaging.

Remember if another person becomes hostile in these exchanges, it is best not to engage, simply agree to disagree and leave it at that.

Written Material:

Written materials should be an important component of your strategy. These should be clear, have sufficient contact details of your organization, be written in accessible language and, most importantly, be concise. Written material is particularly important as most delegates of both the ExCom meeting and the Annual Consultations want to be appraised of situations around the globe, but are often bombarded with information that they may not be able to absorb during the short time that the meetings run. They can carefully consider the information after the meetings have finished.

Important Points when Preparing Written Materials Are:

- ✓ Be sure you have thoroughly researched the issues you are presenting.
- ✓ Have a short concise summary of your argument.
- ✓ Have clear recommendations for UNHCR, governments, and other NGOs – people want to know what to do!
- ✓ Prepare a longer paper for people to take away and read later.
- ✓ Make sure that your summary document is strong and graphic, so that they will want to read the full document.
- ✓ Reference the issue you are presenting to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, the Agenda for Protection, and to other applicable UN documents and conventions, such as the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the Convention Against Torture, and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. They may strengthen your argument.
- ✓ Take sufficient numbers of your summary for distribution (at least 150 to the Annual Consultations and 150 to the ExCom meeting).

Notes for All Types of Advocacy

Regardless of what method of advocacy that you choose, it is absolutely vital to ensure that whatever you say or whatever you write is factually correct. Double check your facts and figures with reliable sources and have it checked with experts before releasing any information. If you fail to do so, your argument or opinion can be easily discredited along with your organization. Another pitfall that is common is to only use one case or example. If the example is not accurate, you run the risk of not only discrediting yourself, but also other advocates.

If you can, always use an example in the form of a person's story. It allows the people to whom you are talking to relate to something more than facts and figures.

Coordinating and Working in Groups

Working with other organizations in a collaborative and coordinated approach can be a very advantageous move for NGOs. Working in a team provides greater capacity to target specific individuals or to conduct research. Often attendees from within a specific regional group have the same concerns and questions as other NGOs in the region. By working together, you can avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Other NGOs may also have contacts that others do not and are willing to share these contacts as part of a collaborative effort.

When working in groups it is advisable that all participants have an agreed joint statement and, if time allows, a set list of other questions that can be explored.

Be clear about your policy objectives – and particularly which issues are relevant for UNHCR and which are primarily domestic issues that need to be taken up at home. Understand clearly for whom you are speaking and actively engage appropriate people from your constituency in contributing ideas. Give them feedback and develop a clear strategy to share with your constituency. Be clear about where your policy objectives converge with interests of governments and where they diverge.



Seek formal and informal opportunities to discuss the issues likely to come up at the ExCom meeting well in advance with members of the government delegation from your home country. Be open with governments about areas of common interest and also issues you will be taking up. Aim for honest and open dialogue where both sides understand the others' positions, accept differences, and work together on common goals.

If at all possible, formalize the consultation process with your constituency (invite people to participate in planning meetings, to put forward ideas, to share in the development – perhaps via e-mail if not in person – of a combined position). Also, try to formalize the consultation process with the government of your country, for example, by means of a government-NGO consultation well before the ExCom meeting to discuss the government's position.

**While these strategies take time, they will make your time in Geneva worthwhile.
You will be an active participant, not a spectator!**

The High Commissioner's Dialogue

What is the High Commissioner's Dialogue?

The idea of a flexible, non-directive consultation between the High Commissioner and States first emerged during UNHCR's Global Consultations on International Protection which took place between 2000 and 2001. The *Agenda for Protection*, endorsed by ExCom at the conclusion of that process, urged UNHCR "to maintain the positive momentum of the Global Consultations process" and "provide a forum for high-level and participatory dialogue on protection issues, emerging global themes and challenges, as well as specific protection situations, particularly those of an urgent character".¹

The High Commissioner has recognized the need for, and value of, a flexible mechanism at his disposal for dialogue on a broad range of protection issues, emerging global themes and challenges, specific protection situations, and potential responses. The Dialogue is intended to serve as this mechanism, without becoming a standing body.²

Who Attends the Dialogue?

The Dialogue aims to include stakeholders, partners, and those with specific expertise to offer on the chosen theme. Participation is, thus, not limited to ExCom Member States.

A Frank and Open Dialogue

The Dialogue provides an important opportunity for all participants, including NGOs, to raise issues, ask questions, and make recommendations. More importantly, it gives NGOs the opportunity to participate, on an equal footing, in a dialogue with States, UNHCR, IGOs, and academics. Such an opportunity is not available in the Annual Consultations (as State delegates rarely attend) or the ExCom meeting (as NGOs are only permitted to make one formal NGO statement per agenda item).

Unlike the ExCom meeting, where States deliver pre-written and pre-approved statements during the discussion, the High Commissioner encourages those attending to participate freely rather than deliver formal statements. The Dialogue was designed to encourage an interactive, informal, frank, and open exchange of views.

¹ *Agenda for Protection*, UNHCR, Goal 1, Objective 5.

² Concept Paper on the "High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges", UNHCR, 30 July 2007.

Further Reading:

- ✓ High Commissioner's Dialogue Home page:
www.unhcr.org/protect/473db6522.html, which includes a concept note on the Dialogue, the main background document, UNHCR's 10 Point Plan, and practical information on how the Dialogue was organized.
- ✓ High Commissioner's Dialogue Online Video:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1qLS7O8A5U.
- ✓ For related UNHCR videos see: www.youtube.com/unhcr.

The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

What is the ATCR?

The Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement (ATCR, sometimes referred to as ATC) is an annual meeting between UNHCR, governments, and NGOs of resettlement countries. It was first convened by UNHCR in October 1995. In 2008, NGO and government participants were from 22 countries.

The ATCR predominantly focuses on how UNHCR identifies people for resettlement, how States process refugees referred, and how governments and NGOs resettle refugees after they arrive. It plays an important role in raising awareness and building consensus for resettlement issues among ExCom Members. These issues may include:

- ✓ UNHCR's resettlement activities, operational issues, and key responsibilities for case and group identification, and referral;
- ✓ Establishing new programs;
- ✓ The regular sharing of information about resettlement needs;
- ✓ Program planning; and
- ✓ Analysis of policy issues.

The ATCR is one of the few opportunities where NGOs can discuss issues freely with government representatives and UNHCR personnel on resettlement. NGOs are there as participants in recognition of the critical role they play in resettlement, both in countries of first asylum and in countries of resettlement.

"The Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement"



The meeting allows all participants to exchange information and develop strategies for the identification of vulnerable populations in urgent need of resettlement, debate about the process of identification and processing of these populations, and the issues pertinent to the experience of resettled refugees in third countries. The countries involved include those that have an existing and established resettlement programme, but also those countries that are either considering or starting to develop a resettlement programme.

How is the ATCR Organized?

The ATCR meeting is held every year in Geneva in late June or early July. It is convened by the ATCR Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) and the work continues throughout the year to prepare for this meeting and its follow-up. The WGR is comprised of States and UNHCR. NGOs participate in one of the two working group meetings held each year. The Chair of the ATCR Working Group rotates between governments of resettlement countries on an annual basis. The NGO input into the meetings is coordinated by the ATCR NGO Focal Point, which changes annually. Traditionally, the NGO focal point is from the same country as the Working Group and ATCR Chair. UNHCR also holds regional resettlement consultations and meets with resettlement NGOs.

Who Can Attend the ATCR?

In order to preserve the informal character of the meeting, participation has been limited, but with equal numbers of government representatives and NGO representatives from each country. A small number of international NGOs that can show that their work has a direct link to resettlement can also attend. In recent years, the number of countries involved in resettlement has increased significantly, as has the interest of NGOs to attend these meetings.

Where to Stay, Eat, and How to Get Around Geneva



Tip: Book early, Geneva can get quite busy!

UNHCR and ICVA do not have the capacity to assist with bookings or hotel recommendations, although UNHCR usually provides a list of hotels that offer preferential UN rates (www.unhcr.org/ngo-consultations). The John Knox Centre also offers rooms with cheaper prices (www.johnknox.ch or e-mail: welcome@johnknox.ch).

MANDAT is an organization offering cheap accommodation for NGOs attending meetings in Geneva (approximately 20-30 Swiss Francs per night including breakfast). Preference is given to people applying from less developed countries. See: www.mandint.org.

Geneva has an efficient public transport network (www.tpg.ch), which covers the entire city. From the airport, you can take buses, trains, or taxis. You can also get a free bus ticket valid for one hour at the airport from a machine to the left, in the baggage reclaim area, before you pass through customs.

Most hotels provide a complimentary transport card, which entitles guests to free public transport around Geneva.

You can also consult the Geneva Tourism Office (see www.geneve-tourisme.ch, e-mail: info@geneve-tourisme.ch) for information both on hotels and on restaurants.