

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Sixty Fourth Session, Geneva, 30 September – 4 October 2013

UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs Rapporteur's Presentation to UNHCR's Executive Committee Karina Sarmiento, Rapporteur for the Annual Consultations

Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This June's UNHCR-NGO Annual Consultation brought together a record number of representatives: some 441 people from 220 different NGOs, UN agencies and international organizations. My presentation today will cover the Consultations' main points, including overarching themes, regional issues and thematic concerns.

Overarching Themes

The primary theme of the Consultation was "Advocating Together for Protection." Participants agreed on the need to work together to promote protection and durable solutions. They recognized that effective advocacy by UNHCR, civil society and affected populations themselves requires open communication, information sharing, mutual respect, transparency, and the understanding of partners' different roles and complementarities. Upcoming opportunities for collaborative advocacy include: the December 2013 High Commissioner's Dialogue on IDPs, the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention on Stateless Persons, and the 30th anniversary of Cartagena Declaration.

The second key take-away from the Consultation was that while the Syria situation certainly deserves international attention, we should not neglect other pressing emergencies and protracted situations.

Third, refugees and IDPs live outside camps in all regions. We should pursue creative and practical strategies to promote income generation, safe employment and social inclusion for this underserved population.

Regional Sessions

The **Middle East/North Africa** regional session focused on the Syrian refugee crisis, which by now represents the region's worst humanitarian crisis. Echoing interventions made here earlier this week, participants agreed that Syrian refugee-hosting countries should not be taken for granted. Other populations in the region, such as the Malian refugees in Mauritania, also require urgent attention.

The **Asia and Pacific** session contemplated the absence of legal and institutional protection frameworks in the region. More resources are required to protect asylum seekers in mixed flows, through and parallel to the Almaty and Bali processes.

The **Africa session** acknowledged the benefits of advocating together for protection. Funding shortfalls in Africa are particularly acute, prompting a heightened need for joint planning and more participatory processes.

The **Americas** session focused on specific protection needs of LGBTI, unaccompanied minors, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants. To reinforce public policies, multi-faceted advocacy strategies need to be developed that bring together local, national and international actors in regional cooperation.

The **Europe** regional session highlighted inadequate asylum procedures (in particular when applying the 'safe-third-country rule') and the lack of specific protection safeguards. Rising xenophobia needs to be countered by enhanced cooperation among stakeholders with a focus on education, health care and employment.

Thematic Sessions

The session on (1) **durable solutions for internal displacement** lauded the Kampala Convention as a major step forward. Despite the humanitarian reforms launched in 2005, we have yet to enjoy a humanitarian system that consistently provides robust, responses to internal displacement from conflicts and natural disasters. The need remains for sustained engagement with development actors beyond the humanitarian emergency phase. National authorities should be engaged as they continue to carry the prime responsibility for resolving protracted situations of displacement.

The session on (2) **sexual and gender-based violence** underscored the importance of SGBV prevention and response programming and prioritization at the beginning of an emergency response. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, including male members of communities in programming and cash-based assistance developing community-specific approaches through local consultation are good ideas.

The session on (3) **advocating together to resolve statelessness** focused on collaborative advocacy between UNHCR, civil society, academia and stateless persons themselves in the resolution of protracted situations of statelessness.

Recognizing that over 60 per cent of UNHCR's operational budget is channelled through NGOs, the session on (4) **UNHCR's Framework for Implementing with Partners** emphasized the importance of consultations between UNHCR and NGOs on the revision of the Framework. Many participants hope the forthcoming roll-out of the revised Framework will result in a more predictable working relationship between UNHCR and funded NGO partners.

The session on (5) the **High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on Partnership** concentrated on efforts underway to improve the application of the Principles of Partnership in daily interactions between UNHCR, the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement, and NGOs. Participants underlined the need to move from Structured Dialogue to 'Structured Action,' including through the implementation of the Dialogue's recommendations and roll-out of the Dialogue to the regional and field levels.

The session on (6) **protection of children** underlined the necessity for effective partnership in the implementation of UNHCR's Framework for the Protection of Children. Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) remain a major concern, both in terms of their increasing numbers moving across borders and the return of UAMs to their countries of origin.

The session on (7) **national asylum systems** recognized that states carry the primary responsibility in the protection of refugees. Very few states have "no" national asylum system, but all systems are in transition. Creating ownership among local stakeholders is of utmost importance to ensure sustainability. In addition, xenophobia and racism need to be countered.

Acknowledging that only slightly more than 10 per cent of those in need of resettlement are provided this durable solution, the session on (8) **refugee**

resettlement emphasised the essential importance of systematic, consistent and transparent identification systems and close collaboration between UNHCR Protection, Community Services and Durable Solutions staff and NGOs in the field.

The session on (9) **alternatives to immigration detention** noted with concern the increasing use and normalisation of immigration detention. The 2012 UNHCR Guidelines set out legal standards, establishing that detention should always be used as a last resort. There is a pressing need to promote alternatives to detention.

The session on (10) **advocating together for protection** recognised that best results for advocacy come when partners focus on their respective mandates and capacities in a complementary and flexible approach. Participants explored opportunities for advocacy at the global, regional and field levels.

Side events

The side event on **cash-based interventions** highlighted the value of cash and vouchers, including in non-camp settings. The side event on **faith and protection** reported on the follow-up to the 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, including the endorsement of the "Affirmation of Welcome." Additional side events dealt with the kidnapping of refugees for ransom, harnessing the potential of displaced youth, advocating for the protection of stateless Rohingya, refugee status determination in Latin America, professional standards for protection work, and refugees' sexual orientation and gender identity.

As rapporteur of the Annual Consultations, I challenge UNHCR, governments and NGOs to work together in finding the solutions to make refugee rights a reality. I encourage you to read the full report for more details. And I gladly hand over the rapporteur role to Jessica Thomson of CARE Canada, and wish her success in following-up key recommendations of the Consultation.

Thank you Madame Chair.