

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS
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DISCUSSION PAPER

Session title: ***Regional session AMERICAS***

Date: ***Thursday 15 June***

Time/Room: ***10h30 – 13h00 – Room 18***

Background and link to the theme:

The North of Central America (NCA) suffers high levels of violence stemming from organized criminal groups, including record high homicide rates, sexual violence, disappearances, forced recruitment into armed gangs and human trafficking, extortion and forced evictions. This violence affects a diverse range of people including children, adolescents, women, members of indigenous communities, people of African descent as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. Insecurity is also compelling an increasing number of persons to flee their homes and to seek international protection, particularly in bordering and nearby countries. The United States of America, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and El Salvador are all affected, either as countries of origin, transit or destination, and in some cases, in a combination of these.

Significant outflows from these three NCA countries are occurring for a complex set of reasons. UNHCR considers that many of these persons would qualify as refugees. Traditionally, NCA citizens seeking international protection request refugee status in the U.S. and Canada. In recent years, however, other countries in the region have experienced a drastic increase in the number of asylum-seekers from the NCA, particularly Mexico (156.3 per cent increase in 2016, compared to 2015), Costa Rica (319 per cent increase over the last two years) and Belize, but also, although to a lesser extent, Nicaragua and Panama. In response to the protection crisis, UNHCR developed a multi-year Protection and Solutions Strategy (2016 – 2018) within the framework of the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action.

Enhancing regional cooperation and partnerships to implement responsibility-sharing arrangements is an essential component of the strategy. Accordingly, the governments of the region held a High-Level Roundtable on the protection of people forcibly displaced by violence in the NCA in July 2016. As a result, they signed the San Jose Action Statement, acknowledging the need for stronger protection of asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people. Together with the Organization of American States (OAS), UNHCR and other UN agencies, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, national human rights institutions, national and regional NGOs, civil society and academia, the governments pledged concrete responses to address the many protection needs arising from this forced displacement crisis.

Such regional cooperation is fully aligned with the New York Declaration, and its Annex 1 which calls for a comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) based on shared responsibilities between a wide range of stakeholders including local and national authorities, humanitarian and development actors, the private sector and civil society. Such a comprehensive approach would aim at enhancing immediate protection whilst working for tangible improvements in local conditions, eventually allowing for the return in safety and dignity of those displaced, which would ultimately reduce the pressure on host countries. In addition, host countries would benefit from targeted assistance to support their reception mechanisms and asylum systems, and to enhance opportunities for local integration. As such, a pilot CRRF in the region presents an excellent opportunity to combine humanitarian and development approaches, and further contribute to making progress in the four objectives set out in Annex 1 of the New York Declaration.

Annex: Documents on High-Level Roundtable 6-7 July 2016: “Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America” are available at <http://www.unhcr.org/roundtable-on-protection-needs-in-the-northern-triangle-of-central-america.html>

Objectives of the session:

The session presents a unique opportunity to bring together representatives from the civil society of countries of origin, transit and destination, including national and international NGOs, grassroots organizations as well as non-traditional partners from the private sector and the academia. The regional session of the Annual Consultations will draw on the experience and expertise of participants to discuss and reflect on the application of the CRRF to the NCA situation as well as contribute recommendations for its adoption and development. The objectives of this session would include:

- A reflection on the progress made toward the efforts made to address the protection situation in Central America;
- Building upon the San Jose Action Statement, discuss and analyse the operationalisation and possible contributions of traditional and non-traditional partners towards the pillars of the CRRF in the context of the NCA situation;

- Identify specific lessons learnt and good practices from the region which could be replicated in other regions and could contribute to the General Assembly's discussions on a global compact on refugees in 2018.

This session will ultimately aim to inform the potential development of a CRRF and the adoption of a global compact on refugees in 2018.

Desired outcome of the session:

As one of the official consultations of UNHCR on the CRRF, the desired outcomes of the regional session are:

- Carry out a **preliminary assessment** of the progress made as well as gaps and challenges in addressing the protection situation in Central America;
- Discuss the engagement of traditional and non-traditional partners towards the pillars of the CRRF and **design an operational plan with a range of possible contributions and concrete recommendations** for the adoption and development of a CRRF in the context of the NTCA situation;
- **Develop a comprehensive overview of lessons learnt and good practices** from the region which could be replicated in other regions and could inform the General Assembly's discussions on a Global Compact on Refugees in 2018.

A short report with the findings and recommendations would support the preparations and discussions for the San Jose II conference later in the year as well as inform articulation of the global compact on refugees, particularly its programme of action.

Methodology:

Panel discussion (30min)

The session would start with a panel discussion chaired by a moderator whereby three panelists would provide an insight on the progress made as well as gaps and challenges in countries of origin, transit and asylum following the issuing of the San Jose Action Statement. Each panellist will have 5 – 7 presentation time. Presentations should take no longer than 20 min in total to allow 10 min of comments from the audience.

Break-out sessions (1.20hrs)

The session would then break into three thematic groups that would foster the discussion on the pillars of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) aiming to contribute to the operationalization of a regional CRRF in the Americas, through highlighting lessons learned, good practices and specific recommendations.

Group discussion would be facilitated by the three local NGOs. The facilitators are expected to share guiding questions with the group and to ensure a focused discussion within the available time. Facilitators would also be expected to act as rapporteurs for the groups. Participants will be asked to sign up for groups in advance to ensure they have time to

reflect on their contributions ahead of the session. Each group should also identify a secretary to keep notes of the discussion.

- (a) Reception and admission - These discussions could include, for example, registration, identification and biometrics models; good practices in regional processes and responses; and building national asylum systems.
- (b) Support for immediate and ongoing needs for the population of concern as well as host communities - These discussions could include standby arrangements to assist host countries and communities to respond to large movements of refugees; how to better support the delivery of services through national and local service providers (including education and health) and thus enhance livelihoods for the benefit of refugees and host communities; and ways to enhance cooperation between humanitarian and development actors.
- (c) Durable solutions - Discussions could include elaborating conditions for sustainable return; self-reliance of refugees and returnees; increased use of resettlement; and specific ways to increase and expand admission pathways (such as the Protection Transfer Agreement). This group could also focus on the efforts to preventing and addressing root causes of displacement in and migration from countries of origin in line with the commitments under the San Jose Action Statement.

NB – in order to ensure enough time for discussion, two CRRF pillars (“Support for immediate and ongoing needs” and “Support for host countries and communities”) were merged for the purposes of the regional session.

Plenary presentation and concluding remarks (40 min) – Facilitators would report back on their findings and recommendations in plenary. The Moderator would provide concluding remarks.