

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS
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DISCUSSION PAPER

Session title: ***Regional session ASIA***

Date: ***Thursday 15 June***

Time/Room: ***10h30 – 13h00 – Room 4***

Background and link to the theme:

Asia and the Pacific has long been a region of substantial migration and forced displacement. Today, it is home to approximately 3.7 million refugees, 2.4 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.6 million stateless people. As of February 2017, only 20 of the 45 countries and territories in the region had acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. However, there has been a long-standing tradition of hospitality towards displaced people across the region and of sub-regional engagement – i.e. the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese refugees, and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan refugees).

However, in many countries today, global displacement trends are being countered by increasingly nationalistic policies. Host countries, especially those with large refugee populations feel insufficiently supported and are showing greater impatience to see solutions to refugee producing situations and protracted displacement.

In spite of these worrying trends, 2016 has witnessed several milestones in refugee protection in the Asia Pacific region. Notably, leaders of 45 countries almost exclusively from the Asia-Pacific region came together under the Bali Process in March 2016 and adopted the Ministerial Bali Declaration on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. This Declaration - developed in the aftermath of the regional response to the Andaman Sea/ Bay of Bengal crisis of 2015 - makes strong commitments at the regional level with regard to predictable disembarkation, reception, temporary protection, local-stay arrangements and legal pathways for asylum-seekers and refugees. It also notes the importance of comprehensive, long-term solutions to address mixed

migration flows and highlights responsibility sharing by countries in the region to find solutions.

The Bali Declaration emphasizes the need to engage with partners, including civil society and the private sector to combat human trafficking and related exploitation. Overall the Bali Declaration provides a strong foundation for the coordinated regional action required to manage and respond to mixed movements in a safe and humane way. It also contributed towards laying the ground-work for the September meetings in New York - as it already encompasses some of the elements of a regional compact on refugees and migration, including the call for strong regional cooperation and strengthened partnerships.

Such regional cooperation is aligned with the development of a Global Compact on Refugees based on the more equitable and predictable sharing of responsibilities between a wide range of stakeholders including local and national authorities, humanitarian and development actors, the private sector and civil society.

The majority of Heads of State from Asia and the Pacific participated at the 19th September UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants and endorsed the New York Declaration, including its Annex on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. A number of leaders also made pledges towards strengthened refugee protection and solutions at the 20th September Leaders' Summit on Refugees.

Although less than half of the Asian states are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, countries in the region host over 11 percent of the world's refugees and displaced persons. The Bali and New York Declarations are of major importance as they reflect the commitment of countries in the Asia Pacific region to protect refugees and work together towards solutions. Past examples of regional cooperation include the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese refugees and the still current Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR). These recent developments are encouraging, especially in the face of dwindling numbers of third country resettlement places and shrinking financial resources for humanitarian aid.

There are growing numbers of displaced people who have been unable to find solutions for prolonged periods, many of whom now reside in urban areas. This is a pronounced trend in Asia which makes a comprehensive approach as set out in the CRRF particularly called for in this challenging context. In addition, the region has been demonstrating a number of good practices upon which to build. The possibility of applying a CRRF approach in the region in the lead up to the Global Compact on Refugees 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.

This session will start with an overview of developments in the region and discussion of the implications of and opportunities presented by the New York Declaration, including the CRRF and Global Compact on Refugees. The session will then break into groups to discuss and reflect on existing national and regional good practices, as well as challenges and lessons learned, aligned with the pillars of the CRRF and the broader New York Declaration.

Objectives of the session:

The Asia regional session of the Annual Consultations will draw on the experience and expertise of participants to discuss and reflect on the appropriate application of the CRRF in the Asia and Pacific context. The objectives of this session will include:

- A reflection on the implications of and opportunities posed by the New York Declaration, CRRF, Global Refugee Compact in the Asia and Pacific context;
- Identification of specific lessons learnt and good practices from the region which could inform the development of a program of action and contribute to the General Assembly's discussions on a Global Compact on Refugees in 2018.

Desired outcome of the session:

Strengthened mutual understanding of how NGOs and UNHCR can best work together with respect to supporting the appropriate application of the CRRF approach in Asia

- Shared analysis of interlinkages between the NYD, including CRRF and both established and evolving regional infrastructure and initiatives, including associated opportunities and implications
- Shared examples of good practices and lessons learned relevant to the application of CRRF/ development of GCR program of action and agreed follow up actions to sustain and apply such exchanges

Methodology:

Plenary presentations and group discussion (45 min)

The session will start with presentations by UNHCR Acting Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and civil society representatives, followed by discussion facilitated by Yiombi Thona.

Break-out sessions (60 min)

The session will then break into three groups for discussion on the pillars of the CRRF, merging pillar two and three, and aiming to contribute to the operationalization of the CRRF in Asia and the Pacific, through highlighting lessons learned, good practices and specific recommendations.

Group discussion will be introduced by UNHCR and a presentation by a representative of Civil Society on an example of a good practice in the region.

- (a) Reception and admission - These discussions could include, for example, registration, identification and biometrics models; good practices in regional processes and responses, including search and rescue; and building national asylum systems (also relevant to and for discussion in breakout group b).

- (b) Support for immediate and ongoing needs for the population of concern as well as host communities - These discussions could include arrangements to assist host countries and communities to respond to movements of refugees; how to better support the delivery of services through national systems for the benefit of refugees and host communities; initiatives to enhance refugee self-reliance; 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; and specific ways to increase and expand solutions. This group could also focus on efforts to prevent and address root causes of displacement in and from countries of origin.

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 (45 min) –A representative from each group will report back on their findings and recommendations in plenary which will be followed by a cross cutting exchange, and conclusion by a representative of Civil Society and the Acting Director of the Asia Bureau.