

The High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue on NGO-IFRC-UNHCR Partnership *An initiative to improve partnership between UNHCR and NGOs in 2012 and beyond*

Partnership Recommendations

Background

At the end of 2011, the High Commissioner called for a review of the quality of partnership between UNHCR and NGOs, which became known as the HC's Structured Dialogue. The Dialogue process has been guided by a Steering Group comprising of representatives and members of ICVA, InterAction and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), with the broad goal of achieving mutual respect and trust evidenced through open communications, transparency in decision making, and clear accountabilities between UNHCR and respective partners.

A Reflection Workshop was held on 6 July following the Annual Consultations with NGOs, with the participation of 45 international and national NGOs, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and UNHCR senior staff. The Workshop provided a platform to identify modalities of partnership that could be strengthened and improved. Informed by background papers specific contexts were discussed and informed as much as possible by field level realities: *Partnership in Urban Refugee situations*, *Strengthening Capacity through UNHCR – NGO Partnerships to Assist Refugees and Other Persons of Concern* and *Advocating together for the protection of persons of concern*. A session was also dedicated to addressing the overarching theme of partnership.

As a follow up, small task teams comprised of NGOs, the IFRC and UNHCR developed the thematic papers further and jointly presented them at a meeting on 11 December 2012, the culminating event of the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue. The High Commissioner, UNHCR's Regional Directors and Directors of International Protection, Emergency Response, Programme Support Management, and External Relations, the IFRC and 18 NGOs took part in the Dialogue. This paper outlines key priorities agreed for strengthening partnership. Participants also agreed on next steps to carry forward the various recommendations in 2013 and to enable appropriate follow-up at the Annual NGO Consultations between UNHCR and NGOs in June 2013.

Summary

As demands on the humanitarian community continue to increase, in terms of both scale and complexity of crises we are also facing increasing expectations from the affected populations we work to support, the donor community and other stakeholders. It is essential that UNHCR, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the NGO community better understand each other's specific roles and mandates. It is critical that we strive to work together more effectively and efficiently to better assist, protect and contribute to lasting solutions for the tens of millions of displaced and stateless persons worldwide. Through mutual understanding of mandates, objectives and specific roles, and the implications these have for relationships with host governments, affected populations and communities, we can ensure complementarity of each other's skills, experience and particular roles. Through improved partnerships, we can expand and reinforce the depth and breadth of our joint responses and learning, resulting in a more positive impact of our collective work.

The *Principles of Partnership* (PoP) provide the building blocks within our relationship. We recognize that partnerships are numerous and diverse, reflecting differing skills, expertise and humanitarian response in different contexts. We strive for mutual respect and trust, evidenced through open communications, transparency in decision-making and clear accountabilities.

Recommendations for Strengthened Partnership

1. Acknowledging an effective response will benefit from engaging the expertise, experience and capacities of all key partners, UNHCR, NGOs and the IFRC will come together in the early days of a crisis for **joint assessment and analysis, prioritization and strategic planning** and at critical moments thereafter. This should ensure shared priorities and objectives and capture how we can complement each other's efforts.
2. Acknowledging that working together in humanitarian response requires trust and transparency, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs working together during an operation agree to consult each other in order to ensure strategic **information-sharing**. Mutual expectations will be clarified and agreed in a transparent way from the outset of collaboration.
3. Acknowledging the complementarities in roles, expertise and relationship to other stakeholders in the response to refugees and stateless persons, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs will enhance their collaboration in **developing advocacy positions and strategies** at field level on issues of mutual concern. A simple guidance note will be jointly developed to maximize the impact of advocacy through partnership at various levels (field, regional, global). An annual dialogue on advocacy at the global level will underpin efforts to identify good practice, beginning in 2013 when the Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations will centre on the theme of advocacy for the protection of refugees and stateless, and will include an additional half-day to examine joint approaches, strategies and tools.
4. **Putting IDPs back onto the agenda** of the international community is a major priority for joint advocacy in the coming months. One aim is to increase the interest of the humanitarian community in supporting critically under-funded operations. Another major issue is access to IDPs, and the need to strengthen awareness of the risks and impact for IDPs due to lack of access.
5. An important platform on which to launch or build advocacy initiatives aimed at increased state responsibility in all regions is the set of **government pledges** made at the December 2011 commemoration of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Statelessness Convention.
6. UNHCR, the IFRC and NGO partners recognize the need for a more comprehensive, strategic and systematic approach to **strengthening capacity** for collective response, involving the mutually reinforcing roles and capacities of UNHCR, international and national NGOs. The performance of UNHCR, the IFRC and the NGO community in joint implementation and in managing risk in complex and insecure operating environments is a critical issue for our partnership in the context of today's humanitarian response. It is a challenge we must take on together, reinforcing each other's capacities to optimal effect.

Learning from existing initiatives, UNHCR will seek to strengthen its institutional strategy for capacity development of national NGOs, on the basis of a trilateral partnership - UNHCR, International NGOs, and National NGOs, and to build on their respective capacities and roles. Recognizing that capacity-strengthening strategies are usually best determined at field level, UNHCR and the NGO community will develop plans which ensure specific capacity strengthening is built into partner agreements where needed.

7. Recognising that the protection of refugees, stateless and other displaced persons in **urban settings** poses new challenges yet affords new opportunities for partnership, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs will further strengthen their engagement and collaboration. This will be accomplished through taking forward implementation of UNHCR's Urban Refugee Policy, exploring innovative approaches, identifying new partnership ideas, successful approaches, and good practice and promoting their systematic application. A key dimension of improving protection and assistance for displaced and stateless in urban settings will be the further expansion of partnerships with local institutions, services-providers and communities.
8. Noting concerns of refugees, stateless and other persons of concern vary across contexts and that objective and outcomes of consultation and dialogue among partners also vary, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs will **review current fora for collective dialogue**, and provide recommendations to strengthen or change them. This could encompass consultation mechanisms at field, regional and global levels, including the Annual UNHCR-NGO Consultations. The goal is to improve strategic engagement in pursuing common priorities, and to ensure opportunities for frank and transparent dialogue on improving partnerships.
9. UNHCR, the IFRC and NGO partners commit to a **transparent and agreed process and mechanism for handling issues of concern** that need to be raised above and beyond field level, to ensure faster resolution of problems, more transparency and a positive impact on field operations.
10. Recognizing that the pursuit of positive partnership is crucial for maximizing impact and not an end in itself, UNHCR, the IFRC and NGOs seek to review the quality of their partnership at the country level and develop **a simple yearly progress report** outlining actions taken and improvements made towards strengthening partnerships.

January 2013