

On behalf of NGOs:

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Intergovernmental Event on Commemorations

7 - 8 December 2011 PM

**NGO Statement**

*Mr. Chair,*

*This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.*

In this year of Commemorations of the Refugee and Statelessness Conventions, NGOs call on States to strongly reaffirm their commitment to the founding principles of these two exemplary documents.

***1) Refugee Convention***

NGOs call on States to fully respect the principle of ***non-refoulement*** as one of the cornerstones of the Refugee Convention.

We also ask that alternatives to the increasingly practiced **immigration detention** are made a priority by States, particularly for vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, stateless persons, victims of torture and trauma, trafficking victims, individuals with health issues, children, the elderly, and women at risk.

States, UNHCR, and NGOs must re-commit to addressing **gender-based violence** in a systematic, consistent, and effective way. NGOs applaud the pledge made by the High Commissioner in this regard at the opening of this meeting. We endorse

the findings from the recent Dialogues with Refugee and Displaced Women and Girls which call for greater efforts to end impunity and prosecute perpetrators of gender-based violence; provide survivors with immediate and effective responses; and promote awareness raising and training to combat gender-based violence.

NGOs encourage States to develop formal, transparent, and expedited procedures for emergency and urgent resettlement cases as a means of providing protection for refugees facing imminent security risks. NGOs call on industrialised States to urgently increase their **support to the developing countries** hosting an estimated 80% of refugees.

NGOs urge States, with the support of UNHCR and civil society, to fully respect the rights of refugees to **access basic services** as outlined in the 1951 *Convention*. A briefing paper on basic services has been made available at the back of the room. State with reservations on any of those rights should lift them. NGOs call on host States to uphold refugees' right to work and on donors to support **livelihood** initiatives, which will benefit refugees and host communities in need.

The large number of **refugees in cities** already strained by population growth face particular challenges. Developing and strengthening new partnerships with national and local governments and civil society is essential in order to ensure effective implementation of the welcome 2009 Urban Refugee policy. States should support the inclusion of urban refugees into local economic development programmes and help provide access to existing basic services, such as health care and education.

In line with UNHCR's Guidance and the 2010 ExCom Conclusion, NGOs call on States to make sustained commitments to ensure access to right and services to **refugees with disabilities**, who are among the most marginalised of all displaced and often face particular protection risks.

## **II) Statelessness Convention**

NGOs strongly support UNHCR's increased **efforts to address statelessness** across the globe, and to encourage accessions to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions and their implementation by States.

States must respect their obligations under the 1961 Statelessness Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide a nationality to any child born on their territories who would otherwise be stateless. NGOs urge States to increase the rate of registration of children and improve registration systems. We once again call on members of UNHCR's Executive Committee to develop and implement a conclusion on universal **birth registration** in 2012.

Due to a lack of **statelessness determination procedures** in most States, stateless persons who are in need of protection are often compelled to go through asylum procedures, often resulting in detention or destitution for stateless persons that have no country to be returned to as failed asylum-seekers. As a first step, States need to identify stateless persons on their territories. In this regard, more States are encouraged to replicate the good practice in Hungary, France, Italy, and Spain which operate statelessness determination procedures which can in turn lead to a solid protection status for stateless persons.

### **III) Supporting the implementation of the Pledges**

NGOs urge States to start thinking about the next steps that need to be undertaken to implement the pledges they made at this meeting. NGOs strongly recommend putting in place a system to measure progress and document successes and challenges in their implementation. It could take the shape of a standing item at the June Standing Committee devoted to reporting back on the pledges made during the Ministerial for the next five to ten years. NGOs stand ready to propose and document different models, as well as to assist States in monitoring the implementation of the pledges.

On this anniversary, the NGO community pledges its renewed commitment to insisting on, and assisting in, the protection of people threatened by persecution or armed conflict and we call on States and UNHCR to join us in this pledge.

*A longer version of this statement is available at the back of the room.*

*Thank you.*