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2021 UNHCR Consultations with NGOs – ExCom Reporting

Review of the consultations with non-governmental organizations

Dear Chair, Excellencies, UNHCR and NGO colleagues,

I am honored to report on behalf of UNHCR and NGOs on the consultations that took place this year, including monthly consultations at global level, and seven Regional Consultations organized in the Americas; the Asia and the Pacific; Europe; the Middle East and North Africa; East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes; Southern Africa; and West and Central Africa. Expanding the geographic reach of the consultations and holding them online in the COVID-19 context, ensured a more inclusive approach and allowed to reach larger audiences and new actors. They included diverse relevant stakeholders from local and international NGOs, including faith-based, community-based, and refugee-led organizations, as well as UNHCR colleagues.

We consider that the consultations between UNHCR and NGOs were a success as they facilitated a regular dialogue, exchange of information and best practices, reflection of inputs from NGOs in the development of UNHCR policies and strategies, and a collective approach to current displacement issues. The thematic focus and detailed sessions were developed through a collaborative bottom-up approach, involving working groups and surveys to gather inputs from NGOs and organizations led by persons of concern in determining priority themes. The partnerships and collaborations between UNHCR and NGOs were informed by the Principles of Partnership. The regional consultations provided space for region-specific contextualized discussions, while at the same time contributed to a coordinated approach and information-sharing globally. The consultations also adopted a more outcome-driven approach, developing concrete recommendations and follow-up action points.

At global level, in 2021, UNHCR and ICVA organized eight interactive monthly exchanges on operational, policy and advocacy priorities such as Climate Action, Funded Partnership Reforms, Countering Xenophobia, Racism and Discrimination, Child Protection, Protection of LGBTIQ+ People, the Global Refugee Forum Follow-up. These meetings included exchanges with High Commissioner Grandi and other senior leadership of UNHCR and the NGO community. In addition, *ad hoc* meetings on emerging issues, such as the Afghanistan situation, are organized upon request and interest of NGOs.

At regional level, following UNHCR's Regionalization and Decentralization process, for the first time the consultations were organized with all seven Bureaus. These Regional consultations attracted a record number of around 3,000 participants, helping to jointly discuss challenges, solutions, and responses notably in the context of the pandemic.

The main theme of the Regional Consultations was "**Localization of humanitarian action and engagement with communities in the COVID-19 context**". This theme was particularly timely as the pandemic has emphasized the critical role of local responders. The consultations also featured exchanges on subthemes relevant to each region, such as on **Climate Action, Partnership Reforms,**

the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, Socio-Economic Inclusion, Protection of Stateless Persons, Engagement with Faith Actors, Arts and Culture.

Localization was also reflected in the organization process. An important aim of the regional consultations was to increase space for participation of local actors, recognizing their leadership and making concerted efforts to increase their participation in coordination mechanisms and decision-making.

Particularly important was the participation of a high number of organizations led by refugees and other persons of concern. I personally represent a Refugee-led Organization, Youth Voices Community from Kenya, and this is the first time that a representative from a Refugee-led Organization is delivering a statement on UNHCR's consultations with NGOs at UNHCR's Executive Committee. The commendable and constructive trend towards increasing and supporting meaningful engagement of organizations led by refugees and persons of concern in shaping conversations needs to be sustained in coming years.

The pandemic has shown that working with communities, especially those led by refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, helps to maintain a vital link to populations of concern. These groups should be better recognized for their work in coordinating relief efforts and included into policymaking, coordination, and funding structures.

From our discussions, we have compiled a non-exhaustive list of recommendations for States, UNHCR and NGOs, which I will now share with you.

First, on Localization, NGOs strongly recommended improved communication and strengthened channels between UNHCR and local organizations, calling to share partnership opportunities, support existing capacities and strengthen mutual learning between local and international actors, including UNHCR. It is also important to invest in local networks for knowledge sharing, mapping, and participation in joint advocacy. UNHCR's move to provide more direct support to RLOs was commended. Greater focus should also be put on dismantling barriers to participation and seeking involvement at all stages to inform policies, programs, and supporting governments to be more inclusive. UNHCR was encouraged to translate global ideas into local reality, ensuring local NGOs, community organizations and refugees feel empowered to act and take a leading role. Further, we call on UNHCR and Donors to make funding more accessible, predictable and flexible with regards to refugee-led organizations, with simplified processes and reporting requirements, as well as financial management and monitoring support. UNHCR and NGOs also ask you, Member States, to regard refugees, internally displaced people, stateless persons as partners rather than beneficiaries. We need to collectively increase visibility and participation of local actors responding to the various humanitarian situations.

The recommendations specifically addressed to States on Localization include: Member States should recognize that local organizations have broad networks in their locality and know the community. Member States should also facilitate the registration of organizations led by persons of concern and ensure forcibly displaced and stateless persons are given greater freedom of movement, the right to work and engage in non-profit activities to support their communities through a youth and gender-sensitive lens.

Second, on Climate Action, the consultations highlighted the need for increased advocacy for climate action, investing in research and facilitating flexible funding for NGOs. Partners should be supported with knowledge-sharing and capacity-building on climate action for populations of concern, including through specific coordination fora and the dissemination of best practices. Further, we recommend

that partnerships on climate action should evolve in the broader context of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

The recommendation specifically addressed to States on Climate Action include: Member States should facilitate funding mechanisms that will mainstream climate action and strengthen preparedness and response.

Third, on Funded Partnerships Reforms, NGOs recommend strengthening partnerships and making UNHCR's engagement with partners more transparent, predictable, and consistent. It is also important to build capacity and mutual trust with partners, as an integral part of current reforms, building on the ongoing consultative process.

Fourth, on advancing the implementation of the **Global Compact on Refugees**, UNHCR and NGOs recommend merging short- and long-term objectives for programming and funding opportunities to strengthen the humanitarian-development approach. Support to low- and middle-income countries hosting large forcibly displaced populations should also be expanded. Further, we recommend complementarity between the GCR objectives and financing institutions on enhancing social welfare, increasing security and social cohesion. We recommend fostering socio-economic inclusion; ensuring improved access to documentation, education, livelihoods and social protection schemes; removing legal and administrative barriers and providing assistance and services that meet the needs of persons of concern. UNHCR and NGOs will work together more proactively on complementary advocacy such as on the refugee narrative and the dialogue with host communities.

On the **Global Refugee Forum**, recommendations specific to States include: Member States should uphold their commitments by encouraging greater whole-of-society collaboration on key policy issues and work collaboratively with UNHCR and NGOs to realize pledges made there.

I would like to close by thanking all participants of the consultations. I commend UNHCR's approach and NGOs' commitment. UNHCR-NGO consultations have been an important vehicle for NGOs to share their thoughts on how we can best work together. We do hope this process will continue in 2022 with the Global Consultations, which will build upon this year's Regional Consultations and act as a vehicle to reflect on the implementation of our recommendations.

Thank you.