

### **NGO Statement on International Protection**

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

NGOs welcome UNHCR's Strategic Plan for Climate Action, which includes principles for protection-sensitive climate action programming, as we see firsthand climate change making humanitarian crises and conflicts worse, creating new risks and threats of forced displacement and of becoming 'trapped in place', with disproportional effects on women and girls, children, people with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+.

As UNHCR implements its Strategic Plan, we call on three international protection priorities.

#### **First, international protection claims in the context of adverse climate impacts:**

UNHCR's Strategic Plan notes the growing link between climate change, conflict, and displacement. Importantly, climate change is not only a vulnerability multiplier increasing displacement risks from violence and conflict – it also drives displacement for vulnerable communities living on the front lines, constituting a human rights threat.

UNHCR's 2020 legal considerations paper provides guidance on applying existing international refugee law, including the Refugee Convention and regional instruments, to claims for international protection made in the context of adverse effects of climate change.

Already, climate-vulnerable communities worldwide face serious threats to life, livelihoods, and physical and/or psychological integrity, from extreme weather events, and slow-onset processes. In forced displacement situations, existing international protection frameworks should apply. UNHCR should strengthen applicable case law at national level, and engage NGOs, civil society, and impacted communities in relevant legal efforts.

We urge UNHCR to develop guidelines on international protection for climate-related cases, and provide legal interpretative guidance for governments, legal practitioners, judiciary, and UNHCR staff involved in refugee status determination.

This does not diminish the need for in-place climate protections or safer climate mobility pathways. States – especially climate-polluting – must fulfil commitments to avert and minimize climate-induced displacement through adaptation funding, contributing to the Loss and Damage mechanism, in addition to robust climate mitigation measures. Furthermore, the New Collective Quantified Goal should establish an ambitious target. These efforts are all critical to reduce climate-induced displacement and address protection needs.

#### **Second, refugee and IDP access to durable solutions in climate vulnerable locations:**

Durable solutions are scarce, including for persons displaced into climate vulnerable locations and by climate-induced disasters. Climate change can also make return and long-term recovery in places of origin unviable.

NGOs welcome guidance from the Executive Committee on the role of third country solutions amid climate change and natural disasters including simplifying registration of refugees fleeing disasters and promoting mechanisms for additional resettlement quotas. UNHCR is also encouraged to include climate vulnerability among resettlement assessment criteria and develop related identification methodologies.

UNHCR and its partners should also leverage their expertise to strengthen planned relocation, both as a durable solution and preventative measure for climate-induced displacement. Planned relocation for those affected by climate-induced disasters have often failed due to, among other things, lack of support for livelihood opportunities or for protecting land rights; inadequate community participation in planning; inaccurate information and lack of resources.

UNHCR and intergovernmental partners should support leadership by climate-impacted communities and displaced peoples' networks to identify and develop viable and community-centered approaches. UNHCR should also continue to deepen its approach to age, gender, and diversity inclusion within climate responses.

**Third, refugee and IDP inclusion in climate adaptation and resilience planning:**

As States develop National Adaptation Plans, they must ensure participation and inclusion of refugees, IDPs, and other forcibly displaced populations, analyzing vulnerabilities from an age, gender, and diversity lens. Displaced women and women's groups must be targeted and included in the NAP consultation process, as well as displaced children and youth, people with disabilities, and other groups with particular protection risks.

Excluding forcibly displaced persons from decision-making processes threatens to make these plans ineffective. It also multiplies the potential protection needs of forcibly displaced populations living in climate vulnerable locations, and of climate-affected populations being compelled to move.

NGOs welcome UNHCR's new climate resilience fund. In addition, we express our support to the ExCom Conclusions Process on Climate Action in 2025.

We look forward to discussing how NGOs can best partner with stakeholders to advance the priorities outlined in this statement.

Thank you.