EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
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Review of the consultations with non-governmental organisations held in 2026

Speech delivered by NGO Rapporteurs:

- **Maholy Sanchez Rodriguez**, Representative from GARLOS - *Grupo Regional Articulador de Organizaciones Lideradas por personas refugiadas y desplazadas forzosamente en América Latina y el Caribe*

- **Hannah Cooper**, Oxfam International

Dear Chair, Excellencies, UNHCR and NGO colleagues,

We are honoured to report to this Committee on the 2026 UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs, held online from 28 to 30 September.

For more than three decades, the UNHCR-NGO consultations have been where UNHCR and NGOs come together to debate global themes and explore collaboration on advocacy and operational issues. NGOs thank UNHCR for its ongoing commitment, despite the recent challenges it has faced.

Strategic engagement with NGOs is essential to UNHCR's protection and operational response. NGOs bring operational reach, contextual and technical expertise, and close connections with displaced and host communities. This engagement must extend beyond operational coordination to meaningful dialogue, joint analysis and collective advocacy, ensuring that operational realities inform priorities, policy and decision-making.

The UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs is critical for advancing real progress on protection - particularly at a time when organisations that protect refugees and stateless people are under acute pressure, and in many contexts where the space in which they operate is shrinking. Preserving that space, and these consultations, is a precondition for protection itself.

This year's Global Consultations were titled Safeguarding Asylum and Strengthening Protection. We met as the 1951 Refugee Convention turns seventy-five and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness turns sixty-five.

The interest to participate from NGOs, in all their diversity, was extraordinary. More than 1,000 people from 663 civil society organisations across 109 countries and territories registered. More than two-thirds represented national, local and community-based organisations, including refugee-led, women-led, youth-led and stateless-led organisations. They were joined by organisations of persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ and indigenous peoples, international NGOs, networks and academic institutions.

To meet and leverage this diversity of expertise, the Consultations were rolled out in four languages, thanks to generous volunteer support, and were time zone sensitive. Guided by a

participatory Steering Group, together, UNHCR and NGOs planned the process and co-created draft recommendations. This was built on concrete written input received from 250 organisations. Concepts were expanded during interactive sessions to allow participants and experts to refine the recommendations.

And so now, we have the pleasure of presenting a summary of some of the recommendations under each key theme. The full, detailed recommendations, directed variously and specifically to UNHCR, NGOs and Member States, will be published and circulated within the final report.

First, under the theme of upholding the Convention as a global public good. Protection against refoulement and access to territory and asylum were discussed as the core of the international protection regime. NGOs and UNHCR underscored the need to strengthen coordinated monitoring and legal referral wherever that access is at risk. Participants insisted on closing the gap between access in law and access in practice. They called for stronger protection safeguards on returns, and for independent verification that departures described as voluntary truly are.

The right to seek asylum means nothing without effective access to asylum procedures and protection against refoulement, with protection-sensitive identification and referral along mixed and onward movement routes.

Statelessness is preventable. Every child should be registered and every person able to secure a nationality, free from discrimination in law or practice. In the discussion, participants recommended the importance of explicitly stating - and tackling – the political causes of statelessness, not only discussing in technical terms.

Second, under the theme of protection through local agency. Participants stressed that forcibly displaced and stateless people, host communities and local actors must shape protection decisions. Participants were clear that consultation is not influence. Affected people and local actors must be able to see what changed because of their participation. Local organisations must be primary partners, not implementers. One refugee leader asked how refugee-led organisations can contribute to their communities if they are treated as volunteers rather than partners. Participants answered with co-leadership, fair compensation, and to collaborate on protection-centred transition plans when UNHCR's funding or presence decreases.

Third, under the theme of countering anti-refugee narratives. Hate speech, xenophobia and false information about refugees, people seeking asylum, stateless people and humanitarian action are causing real-world harm, particularly through digital platforms. Participants outlined that refugees and stateless people must shape public communication as experts, authors and decision-makers. They called for strategies developed in partnership with refugees and for engagement with civil society, media and technology companies to address misinformation proactively and strengthen information integrity. Above all, we must never expose people to harm by making them visible. And refugee and stateless expertise must be compensated, not borrowed.

Fourth, under the theme of protection at the centre of durable solutions. Participants stressed that a solution is only durable if it is freely chosen. Every pathway, whether return, local integration or a third-country solution, must be grounded in safeguards, accurate information, independent legal counselling and informed consent. Voluntariness requires alternatives: if return is the only realistic option, there is no genuine choice. People must be able to raise concerns about pressure,

coercion or exclusion and receive an appropriate response. For long-staying refugees and generations born in exile, local integration, secure status and pathways to nationality can prevent protracted displacement from becoming a pathway to statelessness. As one refugee participant put it, refugees do not want to die as refugees.

Dear Chair, Excellencies,

There were also many recommendations for NGOs, and their successful implementation, in part, depends on the Principles of Partnership between UNHCR and NGOs, being a lived reality. We thank UNHCR for sharing the results of its 2025 partnership survey with participants of the Consultations. The findings describe a partnership that is relationally strong, yet structurally strained. Nearly 95 per cent of respondents rated their partnership with UNHCR good or excellent. Yet half of local NGOs and community-based organisations reported carrying most of the operational risk.

UNHCR's revisions to its partnership framework, including lighter controls for smaller partnerships and fewer financial reports, move in the right direction. However, during the Consultations, NGOs asked for more commitment on co-creation from the outset, as UNHCR's own programme handbook sets out; explicit risk sharing; funding that reaches local partners with its flexibility intact; and greater participation and influence in decision making spaces.

The High Commissioner reminded the Consultations that civil society is part of who UNHCR is, not something acquired along the way. The Consultations are where that becomes practice: a trusted space in which international, local and refugee-led organisations can speak frankly, disagree and build solutions together with UNHCR. Sustaining that space requires investment in interpretation, accessibility, connectivity and participation. By supporting the Consultations and their co-designed recommendations, States can give practical effect to their commitments on localisation and the meaningful participation of organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Participants welcomed the many reaffirmations of the Refugee Convention during its 75th anniversary year. But a Convention is measured by its practice, not its praise: whether a person arriving at a border is heard rather than turned away; whether a family remains together; whether a child goes to school; and whether a stateless person acquires a nationality.

The primary responsibility to protect rests with States. NGOs, and organisations led by refugees and stateless people, continue to accompany that responsibility with our expertise, our proximity and our principles.

This report concludes this year's Global Consultations, but the work is, really, yet to begin. The full and final recommendations of the Global Consultations will be published on UNHCR's and ICVA's websites. They will inform the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection and Solutions in December, and the road to the 2027 Global Refugee Forum.

UNHCR and NGOs are developing a shared strategy to follow through on and monitor progress against these recommendations, including a joint review next year of what has been implemented, and what has not. "Accountability" was the word participants returned to again and again. We intend to honour it.

Excellencies, Chair, to conclude, these recommendations are co-created, and co-owned. Seventy-five years ago, States chose to make protection a shared obligation. The NGO community continues to strongly support that – with UNHCR, with this Committee, and in partnership.

We thank you.