

Executive Committee (ExCom) of the High Commissioner's Programme

77th Session

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Agenda item 3: General Debate

Collective NGO Statement

Oral Statement

Dear Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of NGOs, many led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

We meet at a moment of grave urgency. The unprecedented scale of forced displacement continues, with millions fleeing conflict, violence, and an increasing number displaced by disasters. Behind each figure stands a family facing the same choice: to stay, to flee, or to move once again.

Unfortunately, when responsibility sharing is needed most, we are seeing less and less of it. Those countries hosting the majority of refugees have been generously doing so for decades. Yet, opportunities for resettlement are at an all-time low. The necessary funding to meet needs is in freefall, while the percentage of earmarked is rising.

Asking UNHCR to prioritise while providing tightly earmarked funding is not just counter-productive, it places UNHCR's ability to fulfil its mandate at risk. You are asking UNHCR to do the impossible.

As the Refugee Convention turns seventy-five, externalization policies, unsafe returns and growing restrictions on access to asylum undermine the protection that the Convention was designed to secure.

These developments are not inevitable: they are choices. The decisions made in this room will echo across refugee settlements, camps and urban settings, impacting -- for the better or worse -- those most at risk, such as women, children, survivors of violence, LGBTIQ+/SOGISEC refugees, refugees with disabilities, and older persons.

We know that the current challenges appear intractable. But it is precisely when it is hard that it matters the most. Now more than ever we need to see collective action, solidarity, and partnership, not fragmentation and polarisation. As humanitarians, we all know what is at stake.

We therefore urge collective action on the following priorities:

First, to States, we ask you to provide flexible, multi-year, unearmarked contributions to UNHCR. And, our ask to UNHCR is to keep sustainably and fairly funding local and national partners.

Second, uphold the Refugee Convention in practice. We see circumvention clearly, and with concern. Externalisation arrangements that transfer responsibility are not the answer. We urge States to respect the principle, and practice, of non-refoulement and ensure returns are voluntary, safe, dignified and independently monitored.

Third, share responsibility fairly, and with due respect to the generosity of States already hosting large numbers of refugees in protracted displacement. Anchor responsibility-sharing in the Convention; effectively promote the whole-of-society-approach, restore resettlement, family reunification and other complementary pathways thereby genuinely upholding the true spirit of the Global Compact for Refugees. NGOs support the High Commissioner's vision of 50 by 35, but we must see stronger emphasis on the pursuit of durable solutions as well as self-reliance.

Fourth, even where UNHCR's footprint contracts, its protection functions, including its statelessness mandate, must remain intact, and resources must follow needs. Local and refugee-led organisations are operating in an increasingly high risk and shrinking humanitarian space – an adequate understanding of this risk must be central in response prioritisation and resource allocation.

Fifth, we ask States and UNHCR to preserve NGO space and maintain momentum on meaningful engagement with us, especially refugee-led organisations, to ensure we can genuinely influence decision-making with our expertise.

Finally, the impact of climate change on displacement should be included as a core protection response.

Dear Chair, a protection system that merely manages decline is not neutral. Its consequences are plain: a clinic closes, a resettlement process halts, a family is compelled to flee again because food rations are cut, and lives are lost.

We stand ready to work with States and UNHCR to turn these recommendations into concrete action.

Thank you.