

ATCR 2017 NGO Statement

1. Much has happened since the 2016 ATCR. Some developments have been encouraging, others a cause for concern. Beginning on a positive note, in September, at the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, the first ever summit for refugees and migrants was convened by the Secretary General. This was followed by the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in New York, hosted by the United States and co-hosted by the leaders of Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico and Sweden. In these meetings, the heads of state and foreign ministers of 52 countries made concrete commitments to do more to meet refugee needs, including the doubling of annual resettlement spaces to 360,000 globally. We strongly support this.
2. NGOs urge UNHCR and each host country of the summit – four of whom are in this room – to work together to deliver on these pledges for refugees. NGOs ask those countries to specify: which government or governments will assume responsibility for follow up to the summit, and what is the role of UNHCR in tracking the pledges? We also believe that there needs to be meaningful engagement with civil society to ensure that the global compacts benefit from the knowledge and expertise of our organisations. We strongly support the push to provide resettlement places for 10% of the world's refugees as was originally pushed for in the lead up to the New York Summit in 2016.
3. As NGOs we are willing and able to be partners in the global compact on refugees. As experienced resettlement agencies we know that for this resettlement challenge, realistic and achievable solutions can be found that will bring benefits to both host and resettled communities.
4. Unfortunately, other actions embarked upon by some governments have become increasing matters for concern. We are particularly worried that the USA, a key leader on resettlement, is dramatically changing course. NGOs around the world watched with dismay as the new President of the United States, shortly after taking office, signalled the intent of his Administration to turn away from America's historic leadership in refugee resettlement. This intent was manifested not only in the declaration of a moratorium on all refugee resettlement for 120 days, but also by plans to reduce the US annual resettlement commitment from 110,000 to 50,000 refugees for 2018. This would be the lowest admissions level set by any Administration since the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act. The implementation of these new policies has been on hold pending legal challenge in US courts, but if they were to move forward would come at a tremendous human cost for the tens of thousands of refugees denied or delayed in their resettlement in the US – as well as at a significant moral cost as the world faces the largest global refugee crisis since the Second World War.
5. As NGOs who work in host countries and in resettlement countries, we resoundingly dispute policies based on the premise that refugees fail to integrate and pose a security risk, or that it would be more "cost-effective" to keep people where they are, rather than resettling them. Firstly, we believe that security vetting of refugees is already appropriately robust and sophisticated. Secondly, the history of resettlement globally

demonstrates that when a warm welcome is provided alongside appropriate integration support, refugees of all ethnic and religious backgrounds successfully integrate and become productive, contributing members of society. Finally, resettlement is a crucial safety-net which functions alongside humanitarian assistance; it is not an either-or situation. NGOs urge the United States to continue to demonstrate the global leadership that has made the US resettlement program one of the most dynamic and successful in the world, providing a positive model for other states in overseas processing, reception and long-term integration. We urge this nation to continue to shine its' light.

6. Resettlement to Europe has come a long way over the last few years, with larger numbers and more countries offering resettlement places. These efforts need to be encouraged and strengthened. Yet, Europe can do much more to take a fair share of the global needs. We welcome current initiatives to establish an instrument for a European Union Resettlement Framework, as this has the potential to strengthen the participation of European states and the quality of programmes offered. However, it is important to ensure that resettlement maintain its humanitarian function and not serve political objectives of migration control and deterrence. Resettlement must stay a durable solution. Therefore resettled refugees should be granted a permanent and not a subsidiary status in all EU states. We call on Europe to create a Regulation that increases both the quality and quantity of places, while maintaining access to asylum for those reaching the European Union's territory. UNHCR should maintain a primary role in the referrals under the EU Resettlement Framework. Any additional efforts by European States should complement their resettlement contributions via the EU resettlement framework.
7. A key to fighting hostility and xenophobia is strong government leadership in recognising the importance of refugee resettlement for the protection of people. In a year marked by the cynical conflation of refugees and terrorists for political purposes, very few world leaders stepped forward to resolutely reject the scapegoating of refugees. Yet we see in many contexts the difference when governments choose to show leadership to fully support resettlement. As NGOs we know that as host communities work together to welcome the newcomers, social connections are created that combat fear and intolerance and that these links are by far the strongest foundation for a more inclusive and cohesive society that benefits all members. We want to see governments show leadership in working towards positive solutions that are ambitious enough to deliver protection at the right scale, while creating confidence in all parties and drawing on the expertise of civil society.
8. NGOs continue to advocate for a more strategic use of resettlement, exploring how resettlement quotas can be used as part of a suite of strategies to enhance protection for refugees who will not be considered for resettlement. Resettlement states should use the dynamic of cooperation with host states generated by resettlement to advance the argument that it is better for everyone if people are granted the rights and opportunities to contribute fully and positively to a host society. In South East Asia, for example, most refugees remain without any legal status or permission to work, despite resettlement states collectively resettling more than 180,000 refugees over the past decade from

Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. We call on states to improve support for host countries through continued diplomatic engagement and targeted aid to bring about long term change. Resettlement states can also play a significant role in supporting longer term voluntary repatriation, for example to Myanmar, particularly by insisting that refugees must be centrally involved in this process if repatriation is to succeed.

9. The increasing scale of response in the Middle East should not decrease the response to other areas of deep concern. NGOs are concerned about the decreasing number of resettlement places, specifically in Africa and parts of Asia. Any significant reduction in the U.S. Resettlement Programme will worsen this. There is disproportionately little attention given to African refugee situations – both in terms of humanitarian aid and resettlement quotas. Likewise, Rohingya refugees and other cultural and religious minorities living in countries of asylum in the Asia Pacific region are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Any further reduction in access to protection for these groups may encourage onward and dangerous journeys. NGOs therefore strongly encourage resettlement states to increase their quotas from Africa and parts of Asia.
10. We are particularly concerned that recent trends in key resettlement countries will result in a decrease in overall spaces for the resettlement of children at risk, including unaccompanied minors. The US Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program has been the largest of its kind and we urge the government to continue leading by example. NGOs strongly believe there is a role for other resettlement states to play in increasing resettlement to this highly vulnerable group. NGOs in different countries have developed expertise in supporting the integration of children and young people, and are willing and able to work with states to increase programs for the resettlement of children at risk.
11. Protection for refugees means permanent resettlement solutions and providing full access to family reunification schemes, as we know that keeping families together is key to successful resettlement and integration. NGOs call on both resettlement countries and UNHCR to do much more to preserve family unity in the resettlement process. In cases where states do not facilitate this under national and regional family reunification laws, this should be through resettlement – including nuclear families and all first degree relatives, adult children with their parents, and siblings with one another. This is particularly important when there are indications that in the country of origin, or the country of first asylum, the family formed an important support network for one another.
12. NGOs welcome initiatives in some states to increase alternative pathways for refugees outside of established resettlement programs – including through labour mobility schemes, student visas and family reunion pathways. We affirm support for community sponsorship models and would like to see strong government and UNHCR support in ensuring that these become stable and accessible complementary pathways. We call on states to ensure that these alternative pathways increase the overall capacity for legal permanent admissions and not replace or undermine existing state-led resettlement programs. We commend the Japanese initiative to work with communities, Universities and the private sector to provide resettlement spaces for Syrian refugees. We congratulate the Australian government for increasing its humanitarian program by 2,500 places in the 2017/18 program year. However, it is regrettable that the recently

announced Australian extension of its Community Proposal Pilot to become an annual program of 1000 places will be allocated within this scheduled increase. We are also concerned that the up-front costs to be borne by sponsors, as required by the Australian Government, are prohibitively expensive, counterproductive and unfair. We believe that in all cases such places should be in addition to scheduled increases to refugee programs. Economically and socially, there is considerable potential for all resettlement countries to increase their humanitarian intake by tapping into direct support available from the community at large, the private sector and refugee diaspora communities. We urge Governments to pursue this without reducing the planned intake of the most vulnerable under their general programmes. We encourage resettlement countries to examine the Canadian community sponsorship program as an effective model for advancing this as a tool for resettlement including its carefully designed distribution of cost and incentives.

This statement has been endorsed by the following organisations:

- AMES Australia
- Foundation House
- Migrant and Refugee Resettlement Services
- Refugee Council of Australia
- Settlement Services International
- Caritas International Belgium
- Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
- National Settlement Council
- World University Service of Canada
- Action Réfugiés Montréal
- Canadian Council for Refugees
- Danish Refugee Council
- Forum réfugiés - Cosi
- Amnesty International Germany
- German Caritas Association
- Amnesty International Australia
- European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
- Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration (ORAM)
- RefugePoint
- International Rescue Committee
- International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
- Forum for Refugees Japan
- The Sasakawa Peace Foundation
- Dutch Council for Refugees
- Refugee.pl Foundation
- Romanian National Council for Refugees
- Caritas Sweden
- British Refugee Council
- Refugee Action
- Church World Service
- The Refugee Centre
- Refugee Council of America