

## NGO Opening Statement – Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement – June 2007

The NGOs note, with appreciation, the steps taken to improve the format and tripartite nature of the ATC this year, and we look forward to continuing discussion on ways to further enhance and maximize the value of these important annual consultations.

Over the past year, the NGO community has benefited from the positive leadership provided by Vincent Cochetel and his colleagues at the Resettlement Service Section of the Division of International Protection Services. NGOs have appreciated the Section's openness to receiving proposals for pilot projects aimed at strengthening NGO-UNHCR collaboration. There is still much work to be done in translating these proposals into viable collaborative projects. However the NGO community commends UNHCR for taking this important first step toward expanded use of the expertise and resources of the NGO community to meet our shared goal of improved refugee protection. Persistent efforts to promote and enhance this collaboration must remain a priority of the Resettlement Section.

A cause for grave concern is the increasing invocation of national security by governments as the basis for an over-cautious approach to resettlement. The material support barrier, which has plagued the US resettlement programme for the past two years, is an example of how this new perspective has frustrated a more generous resettlement programme. Such overreaching provisions inevitably result in the mischaracterization of legitimate and harmless refugees as prospective threats to a country's security. While the need for heightened security is not disputed, security measures should incorporate definitions that make reasonable distinctions between *those who do*, and *those who do not* pose a threat.

NGOs would like to work with UNHCR and states to build a more responsive and coherent global resettlement system. Such a system should enable refugees in need of resettlement to obtain timely and durable solutions. Preserving principles of fairness for refugees and burden sharing among resettlement countries must underpin this system. In this context, NGOs are concerned that regional or bilateral agreements, based primarily on domestic political agendas, can undermine the integrity of resettlement as a critical plank in the global protection system. The "Safe Third Country Agreement" between Canada and the United States and the informal agreement between Australia and the US are examples of agreements that appear to have been put in place to 'solve' specific state concerns, without considering their broader implications on resettlement principles.

NGOs recognise the challenges faced by governments and civil society when resettling refugees. We also understand that successful integration requires a partnership between governments, UNHCR, NGOs, civil society and refugees themselves. If done well, it can strengthen public confidence and support for refugee resettlement as a whole. However, NGOs also believe that the use of 'integration potential', as a primary determinant in the resettlement selection process, erodes the primacy of "*protection and need*" as the most critical factors in selection decisions. The use of integration potential as a major determinant is discriminatory, and unjustly locates responsibility for successful integration at the feet of refugees living in dire circumstances - before they have even stepped foot on the shores of a potential country of resettlement. We hold the view that the responsibility for successful integration resides first and foremost with resettlement countries. Receiving states should provide programmes that maximise opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives with dignity and respect. We have the collective expertise to achieve this, and we recommend the continuing development of tripartite initiatives that strengthen the integration capacity of resettlement countries.

There is a need for more countries to embrace the responsibility and opportunity to provide protection and durable solution for refugees through resettlement programmes. The NGO community emphasises the growing evidence that, nations that have maintained generous resettlement programmes, have not only demonstrated a commitment to their global humanitarian responsibilities – but have also enriched the social and economic fabric of their societies.

