

**UNHCR Solidarity Resettlement in the Americas
(Implementation of the Mexico Plan of Action)
NGO Statement from Traditional Resettlement Countries**

Mr. Chairman and esteemed colleagues,

The Canadian Council for Refugees, the Refugee Council USA, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, together with our other international NGO colleagues who are not here today, thank you for hosting this first meeting on solidarity resettlement in the Americas. We express our appreciation to UNHCR for its role in planning and organizing this event in the spirit of a full tripartite collaboration and we offer our recognition and acknowledgment of this significant initiative. We would also like to thank the Ecuadorian government for their generous hospitality and the Canadian government for their financial contribution towards the NGOs' participation.

We recall the celebrations last year surrounding the 20th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration—the forward thinking and new commitments expressed in the Mexico Plan of Action—to promote protection and achieve durable solutions for refugees and the internally displaced in this region. We welcome this opportunity to engage in this initiative in particular the strengthening of the *Ciudades Solidarias*, *Fronteras Solidarias* and the *Reasentamiento Solidario*. Latin America has a rich history of solidarity across borders and we are sure that this new effort to provide coordinated responses to the needs of refugees is rooted in the many spontaneous and effective responses to previous crises in the region.

The search for durable solutions for the thousands and thousands of refugees displaced from Colombia, who seek protection in the countries of the region, must include capacity building and strategic partnerships which can provide a platform for the future in addressing similar forced migrations and supporting host countries to sustain their economic, social and political stability. As the implementation for the Mexico Plan of Action moves forward, we urge all states to fully support this Plan as well as seek to ensure that this initiative will benefit the majority if not all of the Colombian refugees throughout this region and to develop the necessary capacity to respond globally.

Resettlement is a vital tool of refugee protection. In recent years, states, NGOs, and UNHCR, working together, have diversified resettlement efforts worldwide while promoting consistent resettlement criteria, as embodied by the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook. Through this partnership, resettlement has become a more effective tool of protection, durable solution, and instrument of responsibility sharing.

Resettlement will provide protection to those refugees who are in vulnerable situations and for whom neither local integration nor repatriation is the preferred option.

Resettlement, when used strategically, as a tool of protection for individuals and identified groups or refugee populations, can also enhance the potential for broader use of

local integration by assisting host countries through responsibility sharing and with international solidarity.

Resettlement creates the direct link between those who are refugees and those in the receiving country's civil society. Positive experiences of resettlement for the refugees and the receiving communities create support in the civil society for addressing refugee issues and an enthusiasm to increase the resettlement efforts.

In the traditional resettlement countries, non-governmental organizations are partners with government and the UNHCR and we play key roles in all aspects of refugee resettlement. In some resettlement programs, such as the United States and Denmark programs, NGOs working abroad are implementing partners in the identification, selection and pre-departure phases of resettlement.

In many resettlement countries such as Canada and the United States, NGOs are also actively engaged in the reception and integration phases. NGOs, especially, community-based organizations are the bridge between the newcomer refugees and the civil society into which they will eventually integrate. Our presence in the cities and towns where refugees settle is an essential connector to assist the refugees in adapting to their new society but, equally important, we have learned that community-based organizations also facilitate the adaptation of the receiving society to welcoming the resettled refugees.

As NGOs from traditional resettlement countries, we encourage new resettlement countries to draw on the wealth that already exists to support the capacity building of expertise specific to refugee resettlement and integration. To this end, we offer our support and willingness to share the lessons we have learned over the many years of our programs' development and offer to work with you on how some of these programs can be adapted to specific countries in this region. We recognize clearly that you are the experts within your communities and what was successful in the traditional resettlement countries may not be useful in the socio-cultural context in which you work. The collaboration and involvement of NGOs in the process of refugee resettlement is crucial at all points in the resettlement process. Creative partnerships between UNHCR, NGOs and resettlement countries (new and emerging) should be developed and encouraged to augment and enhance UNHCR's resettlement capacity in this region.

We encourage strengthening regional partnerships among NGOs, UNHCR and states to share information and provide needed training and technical assistance on specific resettlement services that could be adapted to be country-specific. For example, the psychosocial assessment developed by HIAS (Argentina) and used for the Colombian refugees in Ecuador and Argentina has proven to be such a successful tool that it is now been replicated in Darfur. Other examples are the faith community (Red Ecumenica Latino Americana) that works with faith base groups and NGOs in Ecuador, Peru and Chile. Another example is the partnerships of the Church World Services from USA.

From our part, we extend an open invitation to you to visit resettlement programs in the traditional resettlement countries in Canada, the US, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, etc.

We further take this opportunity to bring to your attention, the particular protection problems faced by Colombian refugee women and children in the host countries. We urge this body to take immediate action to find a lasting durable solution for these vulnerable groups, before they become victims to traffickers and other scrupulous parties. We ask those resettlement countries who are taking women-at-risk for resettlement, to expedite their processes for cultural orientation and departure and during the waiting period to facilitate some skill training projects that can be beneficial in their new resettlement country. We also bring to your attention the importance of utilizing the UNHCR guidelines for the Best Interest Determination for the Child (BID) while seeking a lasting solution for unaccompanied /vulnerable refugee minors. We further urge resettlement countries to facilitate, to the best of their ability, the expedited identification, process and resettlement of those refugees who are identified for resettlement.

Finally, the NGOs who are present here today are part of a global network of organizations assisting refugees. We wish to take this opportunity to welcome each new resettlement country, into this global network and to offer our support for their full participation. With that goal in mind, we welcome your participation in the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement that occur in June of each year in Geneva and the Canadian Council for Refugees invites NGOs from the new resettlement countries to an international conference on refugee rights to be held in Toronto, Canada also in June of this year. We expect to continue discussion on resettlement and integration issues and we will welcome the participation and contributions of Latin America.

We look forward to a most constructive dialogue in these two days.

Thank you.