

NGO Statement on Asia and the Pacific

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. We appreciate the opportunity to recommend the following actions:

1. Increasing support for Afghans within Afghanistan

The humanitarian situation inside Afghanistan is rapidly deteriorating. Two-thirds of Afghans are unable to afford basic needs, and nearly 3.2 million children will be affected by severe and moderate acute malnutrition in 2023. We also remain concerned by violations of women's and girl's rights. As it pertains to aid provision, the ban on female NGO workers has meant that the humanitarian system has struggled to ensure that women and girls receive equal access to aid and other services. We urge the *de facto* authorities to immediately reverse this ban and to respect the rights of all Afghans.

Despite the severe humanitarian needs, most aid agencies are still unable to include development programming in their work. However, humanitarian aid only to Afghanistan is not, and will not, be enough. The NGO community reiterates previous calls to UNHCR and States to immediately expand development funding for resilience, livelihoods, and socio-economic recovery initiatives.

2. Expanding protections for displaced Afghans in neighboring countries

We commend Pakistan and Iran for generously hosting Afghan refugees for the past four decades. However, in Pakistan, Afghan arrivals post-15 August 2021 have been unable to register for international protection through UNHCR, nor have they been able to avail themselves of services available to pre-2021 arrivals. Whilst we appreciate the unprecedented domestic challenges as a result of the 2022 floods, this makes them increasingly vulnerable to labor exploitation, trafficking, and detention. Deportations from both countries to Afghanistan, despite UNHCR's non-return advisory, is also a serious concern.

To support ongoing work towards achieving short-, medium-, and long-term solutions for Afghan refugees, we look forward to revitalized and engagement through the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Refugees. This remains the primary regional vehicle for addressing Afghan displacement, and the NGO community is both essential and ready to support through ongoing engagement.

3. Addressing escalating needs in Myanmar

Two years since the military takeover in Myanmar, conflict continues unabated. 1.5 million persons are internally displaced with a million more predicted to be displaced in 2023. The recently enacted *Registration of Organisations Law* places extreme restrictions on Myanmar civic space including through the introduction of criminal penalties for non-registration of NGOs operating in Myanmar.

Donors must take all steps to ensure that NGO's funding and capacity to deliver timely and quality support to people in need is not compromised, including through procedural waivers, flexible funding and simplified compliance requirements.

4. Strengthening regional responses to Rohingya displacement

In 2022, more than 3,500 Rohingya travelled irregularly by boat from Bangladesh and Myanmar to Southeast Asia – a fivefold increase from 2021. Of this number, approximately 350 either died or were lost at sea. It is essential that all actors, including the Bangladesh Government, UN and NGOs engage in awareness raising of the risks of maritime journeys.

The NGO community commends Indonesian authorities for continuing to allow for disembarkation and encourages all States in the region to follow this lead. Moreover, States within and beyond the region are requested to improve and implement coordinated search, rescue, and disembarkation procedures, as well as redouble efforts to work with the Bali Process to strengthen its governance, regional engagement efforts, and implement its existing early warning capabilities.

5. Understanding, preventing, and responding to climate and displacement

As the world's most disaster-prone region, understanding, preventing, and responding to climate displacement is an urgent priority. Repeated hazards, like the reoccurring drought in Afghanistan or floodings in Bangladesh, can lead to populations being displaced multiple times, having their rights, and ability to earn or access services seriously impacted.

The NGO community commends the Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement for highlighting the importance of finding ways to prevent and develop durable solutions for internally displaced people. While the primary responsibility remains with States, the NGO community is committed to contributing its experience and expertise to this process.

6. Implementing alternatives to immigration detention

The detention of refugees, asylum seekers, displaced and stateless persons– including vulnerable groups such as Rohingya and Uyghurs – remains worrying. In many countries, detention facilities remain overcrowded, and access to essential services is limited.

NGOs recognize and appreciate the move by countries such as Thailand and Malaysia to implement alternatives to detention, however, policy and implementation gaps persist. We reiterate the physical, and psychological harm that detention inflicts on individuals, and call on all States to actively implement non-custodial measures and community-based care arrangements.

7. Fulfilling and delivering new commitments as part of the Global Refugee Forum

Since 2019, more than 1,600 pledges supporting refugees have been made. Of the 152 In Asia, 79 were made by States. According to the UNHCR tracker, at present, only 14% of pledges have been fulfilled. NGOs encourage States to make good on existing pledges, and to work towards new and resourced pledges for equitable and predictable responses for refugees.

8. Addressing barriers to statelessness

Across the region, statelessness remains an issue of concern, with low ratification of key international conventions. Stateless persons are unable to access fundamental rights including education, the right to vote, identification documents, or formal employment. NGOs encourage States to protect everyone's right to a nationality.

We acknowledge and congratulate the Philippines for joining the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness last year. Furthermore, we welcome statements made by the Government of Malaysia to prioritize an amendment to the Federal Constitution to uphold women's and men's equal rights to confer nationality to their children and look forward to the implementation without delay.

Further details are available at icvanetwork.org

Thank you, Chair.