

NGO Statement on International Protection

Agenda Item 5 (a)

Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with, and is delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs and aims to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community.

Once again, the past year has seen dozens of situations around the world involving serious protection concerns for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons, and other persons of concern to UNHCR. NGOs would like to take this opportunity to highlight what we believe are some of the most serious examples of Member States' failures to protect the rights of persons of concern.

1. Africa

a) Democratic Republic of Congo

In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a lack of assistance has forced internally displaced persons (IDPs) to engage in risky behaviour giving rise to serious protection concerns, including risking sexual violence by armed groups when searching for food and firewood in remote areas, returning to insecure rebel-held areas where they risk a wide range of abuses, and engaging in survival sex to support families. NGOs fear that national elections expected in November will increase these protection concerns because of the high risk of increased insecurity during that time and because of pressure on IDPs to return to insecure areas to vote.

As part of the DRC's cluster system, UNHCR is responsible for protection, shelter, and camp management relating to IDPs. However, NGOs believe there is weak coordination between agencies working with IDPs, which, in turn, has contributed to donors' reluctance to adequately fund the clusters' IDP work. NGOs believe that in eastern DRC, UNHCR is the only agency with the necessary experience and expertise to respond adequately to the wide range of IDPs' protection and assistance needs.

UNHCR's current budget for refugees in DRC, including the limited number of returning Congolese refugees, is double its budget for IDPs, even though the country has ten times as many IDPs as refugees. Although UNHCR's 2012 Comprehensive Needs Assessment recognised IDPs' needs, a lack of funding means UNHCR has not prioritised IDPs' needs in its 2012 budget.

NGOs call on ExCom Member States to ensure that cluster partners in eastern DRC receive adequate funds to ensure strong leadership on IDP issues and call on UNHCR to reallocate part of its 2012 budget to IDP assistance and protection programmes.

b) Kenya

Kenya's Dadaab camps will soon shelter half a million mostly Somali refugees. Almost all are currently in or on the edge of three old camps designed for 90,000 refugees. Since July, UNHCR began emergency relocation of refugees to undeveloped land known as Ifo 3, where agencies have been providing emergency health, water, and sanitation support, and to Ifo 2 camp, which had been ready but standing empty since November 2010.

In late August, UNHCR also started moving refugees to undeveloped land called Kambioos; however, that relocation is now on hold due to opposition from the local community. UNHCR says that by November 2011, it will have relocated 180,000 refugees to Ifo 2, Ifo 3, and Kambioos. In July, NGOs reported on a significant number of cases of sexual violence committed by unknown perpetrators against refugee women and girls living on the edge of the old three camps and in Ifo 3; they are attacked in bushes nearby while they search for privacy to relieve themselves or try to find wood for cooking. Agencies struggle to provide them with protection because of the informal setting in which they live.

NGOs therefore call on the Kenyan authorities and UNHCR to urgently take steps to end violence against women and girls living on the edge of the old camps and in Ifo 3, to redouble efforts to relocate them to the more secure Ifo 2 camp and to ensure that all refugees receive full protection, including against sexual violence, in Ifo 3 and Kambioos camps once they have been properly developed.

c) Mozambique

On 6 May, UNHCR condemned the 29 April shooting of four Somali asylum-seekers by security forces in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, in which the authorities said they had launched an investigation which has yet to be published. According to media reports, on 27 July Mozambique's security forces shot and killed another four Somali asylum-seekers as they crossed into the country from Tanzania. NGOs call on the Mozambican authorities to immediately order their security forces to stop killing asylum-seekers, to investigate both incidents, publish the findings, and to hold those responsible to account. NGOs also note media reports that UNHCR has confirmed that earlier this year, Mozambican police seriously assaulted, robbed and then deported newly-arrived migrants, including potential asylum-seekers, to Tanzania. Mozambican officials have reportedly stated that migrants entering the country are a "threat to national security." NGOs call on Mozambique to end these abuses and to ensure that all asylum seekers entering Mozambique are given access to UNHCR.

d) Rwanda

Since 2010, a number of States hosting Rwandan refugees have discussed with UNHCR the possible invocation of the ceased circumstances clause on or after 31 December 2011 for Rwandans. The clause allows an individual refugee-hosting country, usually with UNHCR's agreement, to declare that a specific caseload of refugees no longer needs protection and should return home. UNHCR's 2003 Cessation Clause guidelines also make clear that any refugee wishing to be exempted from the application of the clause should have the opportunity for a fair hearing of his or her case.

On 5 September 2011, the Government of Zambia and UNHCR issued a joint statement saying that "the international community, including UNHCR, considers Rwanda to be safe for the absolute majority" and that Zambia plans to "declare a cessation of refugee status for Rwandan refugees on 31 December 2011." NGOs, therefore, note that at least in relation to Zambia, UNHCR is on record as supporting the invocation of the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees.

During advocacy meetings with NGOs over the past few months, UNHCR has repeatedly said it is working on a "roadmap" or comprehensive strategy for Rwandan refugees. UNHCR has said that the roadmap will set out its position on whether States should invoke the cessation clause for particular categories of Rwandan refugees and if so, how the process should be managed to guarantee effective protection for refugees not wanting to return to Rwanda. In line with NGOs' call, in June 2011 during UNHCR's Standing Committee, NGOs once again call on UNHCR to publicly state its position on the application of the clause, whether through the publication of the "roadmap" or other formal documents.

NGOs believe that UNHCR's public position should (i) include an objective assessment of current human rights conditions in Rwanda; (ii) address the variety of reasons why – and times when – Rwandan refugees fled the country by carefully assessing whether the conditions that caused a well-founded fear of persecution at various times and under different circumstances have ceased to exist;

(iii) contain UNHCR's guidance to States on the minimum standards required of exemption procedures and of procedures to process any new claims by Rwandans fleeing their country; (iv) set out UNHCR's plans for monitoring the safety and well-being of returnees to Rwanda.

NGOs recognise that where effective, fundamental and lasting change has taken place in a country of origin, use of cessation can be appropriate where protective measures, such as fair and thorough exemption procedures and effective monitoring of returns, are put in place. NGOs are concerned, however, about serious on-going human rights violations in Rwanda, including persistent violations of freedom of expression and association, and the government's intolerance of criticism or dissent, which means there is a real risk of persecution for some Rwandan refugees were they to be forcibly returned to Rwanda. We note that Rwandans, including some former returnees, continue to flee their country and are being recognised as refugees. We also note that many Rwandan refugees say they do not want to return to Rwanda despite the Rwandan authorities placing considerable pressure on them to do so and host States and UNHCR offering them incentives to leave.

NGOs, therefore, have serious reservations about applying the ceased circumstances clause to the entirety of the Rwandan refugee population, in part because in the current climate – both in Rwanda and in host countries where authorities have come under significant pressure from Rwanda to insist on return – there are considerable obstacles to applying the clause in a rights respecting way.

If UNHCR decides to support invocation of the cessation clause – particularly in the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, who together host almost 100,000 of the world's 125,000 Rwandan refugees and asylum-seekers, but also in relation to Zambia and other host countries – NGOs call on UNHCR to ensure that (i) it clarifies whether the clause should be applied to all Rwandan refugees, or to only one part, such as those who fled before or after a specific date, and if so on what basis refugees who fled before or after a certain date should be treated differently; (ii) procedures for the operationalisation of a cessation declaration are clear and fair; (iii) any refugee wishing to be exempted from the application of the cessation clause on one of the grounds mentioned in UNHCR's 2003 Cessation Clause guidelines (“any form of well-founded fear of persecution,” “particularly grave cases of previous persecution” and “refugees who have become long term residents in their host country ... resulting in strong family, social and economic links”) is allowed to claim exemption and have his or her case fairly adjudicated by the host country; (iv) any Rwandan fleeing Rwanda after the clause has been invoked by one or more host countries who claims asylum has his or her case fairly adjudicated; (v) the Rwandan government, working closely with UNHCR and independent NGOs, ensures that no returnees are subject to abuse or persecution and that any prosecution of individual returnees for suspected crimes committed before they fled Rwanda, must be tried in accordance with international fair trial standards.

Finally, NGOs urge States hosting Rwandan refugees and other States to seek durable solutions for Rwandan refugees unable to return to Rwanda. In line with UNHCR's position, as expressed to NGOs in advocacy meetings, this should include continued protection for those at risk of persecution in Rwanda, integration in host countries (including, where appropriate, through an application of the residence and establishment rights of East African Community citizens, which includes Rwandans) and resettlement.

e) South Africa

NGOs have documented cases in which South African immigration officials on the South Africa-Zimbabwe border have prevented Zimbabwean asylum-seekers from entering the country, or have even forcibly returned Zimbabwean asylum-seekers to Zimbabwe, because they do not possess “travel documents.” Under international refugee law, asylum-seekers are not required to produce documentation to enter a country and seek asylum there and may not be deported while their asylum claim is pending. NGOs, therefore, call on South Africa to instruct its immigration officials to end this practice, which, in the case of returning Zimbabwean asylum-seekers, constitutes *refoulement*.

South Africa has also failed to open a new refugee reception office in Johannesburg since it closed the Crown Mines Office on 31 May this year. As noted in a NGOs' June 2011 statement submitted to UNHCR's Standing Committee, the closing of that office will make it even harder for tens of thousands of Johannesburg-based asylum-seekers to lodge claims in the country's chronically overburdened asylum system which, according to numerous NGO reports, has long failed to guarantee asylum-seekers access to its services, including registration and permit renewal. The decision, therefore, increases asylum-seekers' risk of being deported because, without a permit, asylum-seekers are technically illegally in South Africa.

NGOs also note with concern statements by South African officials that they are considering plans to close down the country's five remaining urban refugee reception offices, to process all cases in existing and new refugee reception offices near South Africa's borders with Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and to detain all asylum-seekers while their cases are considered. With over 250,000 cases pending in the country's asylum system, NGOs believe such a move will bring chaos and possibly a humanitarian crisis to the South Africa-Zimbabwe border area in particular, place massive pressure on refugee reception offices near borders, and will result in a sharp deterioration of already poor decision-making, which will in turn lead to *refoulement* of genuine refugees.

NGOs reiterate their call on South Africa to open a new refugee reception office in Johannesburg and to abandon plans to close down the remaining five offices in urban centres to move asylum processing to the border.

f) Sudan

Since 5 June, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have continuously and indiscriminately bombed civilian areas in Southern Kordofan, displacing at least 200,000 civilians in opposition-held areas who have also been bombed. In government-held areas, UN agencies and other aid groups say they have been prevented from reaching many affected people because of the security situation and severe government restrictions. The Sudanese authorities have prevented the same agencies from accessing and delivering relief to civilians in opposition-held areas by refusing to authorise relief flights. Air strikes have also targeted airstrips that could be used for aid delivery.

IDPs live in harsh conditions and lack sufficient food, medication, sanitation and shelter. Communities have been unable to plant crops due to widespread fear of aerial bombardment. Food shortages are likely to worsen.

The laws of war require Sudan to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, conducted without any adverse distinction. Although the Sudanese authorities have a right to control the delivery of aid, they cannot arbitrarily deny access to humanitarian organisations and must allow access to humanitarian organisations which provide relief on an impartial and non-discriminatory basis if the survival of the population is threatened.

NGOs call on Sudan to end its indiscriminate bombardment of civilians, including of IDPs, and to give humanitarian aid agencies unrestricted access to help IDPs in urgent need of food, shelter, and other aid.

Sudan continues to flagrantly violate international law's prohibition of *refoulement* by deporting Eritrean asylum-seekers back to their country, which remains one of the most repressive places on earth. On 26 July, UNHCR condemned Sudan's deportation of six Eritrean asylum-seekers the previous day, after they had been denied access to asylum procedures. UNHCR said two of the six asylum-seekers jumped off a truck carrying them to the Eritrean border with Eritrea. One was killed and the other seriously injured. UNHCR said that "at least" a further 24 asylum-seekers had been deported in previous weeks (since May), stressing that such deportations violate both international and Sudanese law and that the deportees were likely to face persecution in Eritrea.

Since then, Sudan has continued to deport Eritrean asylum-seekers, including four on 15 September whose request for asylum was ignored by the court ordering their deportation from Sudan. On 18 September, Sudan deported six Eritreans after charging them with illegally entering Sudan. It is unclear whether the six tried to seek asylum or not.

NGOs join UNHCR in calling on the Sudanese authorities to end such deportations and to provide all asylum-seekers in Sudan, including those in detention, with access to asylum procedures.

2. Asia

a) *Chinese pressure on Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand to unlawfully deport Uighurs to China*

Following months of Chinese pressure, in August Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand deported 17 Chinese citizens of Uighur ethnicity - including women and children blindfolded and handcuffed by the Pakistani authorities – back to China where they face grave risk of torture. All three countries failed to respect the Uighurs' due process rights, including the right to seek asylum.

The deportations are part of a pattern that includes Kazakhstan's deportation of a Uighur in May this year and Cambodia's forced return of 20 Uighurs in December 2009, despite having been issued UNHCR "Persons of Concern" letters which should have protected them from forced return.

In recent months China has mounted a concerted pressure campaign on countries to *refoule* Uighurs to China, which breaches its – and those countries' – obligations under the 1951 *Refugee Convention* and customary law. UNHCR's limited presence and influence in China means neither the UN nor NGOs have any way of knowing what happened to any of the Uighurs deported since December 2009.

NGOs condemn the violation by Malaysia, Pakistan, and Thailand of their customary international law obligation prohibiting *refoulement* call on these and other countries to resist China's pressure to violate their obligations and call on them to respect Uighurs' right to seek asylum. NGOs also call on China to end its unlawful pressure campaign and to promptly allow international organisations access to the returned Uighurs, wherever they may be.

b) *Afghanistan*

Since September 2009, over 300,000 Afghans have been internally displaced, with twice as many displaced in the past year compared to the year before. Trends indicate that IDPs are now displaced for extended periods of time and require shelter and livelihood assistance. The Afghan authorities are weak and have no political will to address the issue, leaving UNHCR to take the lead. However, UNHCR's budget has recently declined due to a decrease in the number of returning refugees, and it has only limited resources to assist IDPs. NGOs, therefore, call on UNHCR to increase its budget and partnerships with Afghan NGOs to assist the most vulnerable IDPs.

c) *Bangladesh*

Unlike 28,000 registered Rohingya refugees in two UNHCR-supported refugee camps, Bangladesh denies assistance and protection to 200,000 or more unregistered Rohingyas in Bangladesh – including 30,000 in Kutupalong makeshift camp – who are vulnerable to arrest, detention, extortion, and deportation to Myanmar. Hundreds of unregistered Rohingyas are detained in Cox's Bazar jail with no access to UNHCR protection.

We call on Bangladesh to register the 200,000 or more Rohingya stateless people in the Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts, to allow them to lodge asylum claims, to permit those who register the right to reside, work, and access basic services in Bangladesh, and to grant UNHCR access to them.

d) *Thailand*

Thailand continues to require refugees to live in closed camps, violating their right to freedom of movement, and to subject asylum-seekers and migrants to long periods of detention in immigration detention centres. Government officials continue to say they intend to close border refugee camps and

imply that refugees currently in the camps will be expected to repatriate. In the meantime, about 40% of the camp population is unregistered as refugee screening remains suspended. This creates anxiety among the refugees and heightens their vulnerability.

In November 2010, as elections were taking place in Myanmar, clashes near the Thai border caused an estimated 20,000 civilians to flee into Thailand - the largest single influx of Burmese refugees into Thailand over the past 25 years. The Thai authorities forced thousands of Burmese nationals to return to Myanmar within hours or days of arriving in Thailand. Thai authorities justified these returns in a number of ways, notably by saying that when artillery fire could no longer be heard it was safe to return and that Burmese army commanders had said it was safe for refugees to return to Myanmar.

The Thai government should account for 91 ethnic Rohingyas who appear to have been forced back to sea after their boat, which first landed in Trang province on January 22, 2011, was set adrift from Thailand. The Rohingyas subsequently washed up in India's Andaman and Nicobar islands, more than 700 kilometres away, in a boat that the BBC reported did not have a motor.

NGOs call on UNHCR to be more vigilant and engaged in Thailand by encouraging and facilitating proper refugee screening according to international standards, to seek alternatives to detention and closed camps, and to prevent the occurrence of *refoulement*.

e) Sri Lanka

On 20 September, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence announced a plan to close the Menik Farm IDP camp once almost 7,400 IDPs there are moved to a site known as Kombovil in Mullativu District. Kombovil is near the original homes of these IDPs who come from Maritimpeattu and Puthukudiyiruppu (PTK) which saw some of the fiercest fighting during the closing stages of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009. A further 32,000 IDPs from these areas live in host families.

Despite a meeting on 25 August in Menik Farm between IDPs and civilian and military authorities from Mullaitivu and a visit by some of the IDPs to Kombovil on 12 September, government statements and records are either contradictory or ambiguous regarding whether the move to Kombovil is supposed to be temporary – pending return to their original home areas – or permanent. Some say return will never be possible for national security reasons or because it is “too dangerous.” Others say return is not possible at present because the home areas have not been demined, but fail to explain why humanitarian demining agencies have been given no access to the area since 2009 or say when return will be possible. The authorities' have also said IDPs moving to Kombovil will receive “permanent” housing there in 2012, suggesting the government's intention is to permanently resettle them in Kombovil.

NGOs remind the Sri Lankan government that IDPs have the right to return to their homes and land and that under Sri Lankan and international law any decision to confiscate or acquire their land requires them to follow strict due process requirements, including appeal rights and the right to compensation. The authorities are also bound to explain to IDPs why the move from Menik Farm to any other location such as Kombovil is necessary and whether the purpose is to temporarily relocate or permanently resettle them there so that IDPs can make an informed decision on whether to move or not. NGOs also call on UNHCR to publicly state its understanding of the purpose and intention behind the proposed move to Kombovil.

3. Europe

a) European Union (EU) in general

Despite several years of discussion about the establishment of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme, EU Member States continue to demonstrate a lack of solidarity in the use of resettlement as a tool of protection and as a durable solution. Out of 108,086 refugees resettled worldwide in 2010, only 4,707 – 4.4% of the total – were admitted by the 27 EU Member States. The following EU Member States did not admit for resettlement a single refugee in 2010: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia,

and Spain. While cautioning that refugee resettlement should never be used or seen as a substitute for States' obligations to examine asylum claims of asylum-seekers, NGOs call on the European Commission and all EU Member States – and, in particular, on the 17 Member States mentioned above – to respond positively to UNHCR referrals of refugees in need of protection and durable solutions for whom resettlement is the appropriate response. We understand that UNHCR believes 172,300 refugees are in need of resettlement in 2011.

NGOs remain concerned that the EU still has a long way to go to establish a common European asylum system with harmonised standards and equitable responsibility sharing. NGOs are especially concerned by continuing efforts to “outsource” migration management to neighbouring States outside the EU with less capacity to examine asylum claims and to receive and integrate refugees than EU Member States. We are also concerned that most of the EU's migration-related assistance to neighbouring States has been to enhance migration controls and to build detention facilities rather than to build their capacity to effectively and fairly examine asylum claims. NGOs call upon EU Member States to develop and implement a common European asylum system that respects the rights of asylum-seekers and treats Member States equitably. The problems countries such as Malta, Italy, and Greece face with respect to irregular migration and asylum underscore the importance of reforming the Dublin II regulation, which places a disproportionate burden on Member States at the external frontiers of the EU.

b) Intergovernmental Cooperation in Europe

NGOs welcome the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, formalising their relationship. The work will focus on strengthening response to, and reporting of, hate crimes and bias-motivated violence, as the two bodies agreed, among other things, to share information for annual reporting, provide joint technical advice to States, train staff, issue joint communications, and prepare pilot projects. Such collaborative strategies are needed to further encourage States to improve protection for refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

c) Greece

While NGOs note some significant improvement in Greece's asylum adjudications and in the way it is tackling its asylum backlog, we remain concerned that many asylum-seekers are discouraged from lodging asylum claims in some parts of the country (for example, by Greek detention officials in the Evros region telling detainees that their detention will be prolonged if they file asylum applications) and because Greece arbitrarily restricts the number of asylum applications that can be lodged at any one time. Conditions of detention, particularly in the northeastern Evros region bordering Turkey, remain inhuman and degrading, as indicated in the European Court of Human Rights' ruling in *MSS versus Belgium and Greece*.

d) Italy

While recognising and applauding Italy for fulfilling its obligations during the Arab Spring crisis by rescuing and transporting around 48,000 boat migrants to Italy in the first seven months of 2011, NGOs were appalled that the Italian government concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Libyan National Transition Council on 17 June 2011 for the return to Libya of irregular third-country migrants at a time of active armed conflict in Libya. The MoU was signed shortly after UNHCR's April 2011 appeal to all ship captains in the Mediterranean to ensure that “any overcrowded boat leaving Libya these days should be considered in distress.” Italian government officials' alarmist rhetoric regarding ‘human tsunamis’ and ‘biblical exodus,’ predicting hundreds of thousands of migrants would try to reach Italy by boat, also unhelpfully exaggerated the situation, potentially stoking prejudice and fears among Italians.

e) Malta

Malta has closed some of its older detention centres in which conditions were exceptionally poor. However, in newer facilities, such as the Ta'Kandja facility, detainees are kept in closed dormitory rooms for months at a time; living space has no common areas to sit or to move around in and opens

onto a completely closed courtyard where the surrounding walls are so high that detainees cannot see the outside world.

Detention in Malta is automatic and mandatory for all foreigners who are refused admission or against whom a removal order has been issued, regardless of asylum claims. Members of vulnerable groups are, in principle, eligible for fast track release, but in practice often spend extended periods of time in detention. Contrary to refugee norms, which require that detention only be used as a last resort, it appears that Malta is using detention as a deterrent strategy.

4. Middle East and North Africa

a) Egypt

NGOs note that, twelve months after it took over the Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee, Egypt continues to shoot dead irregular border crossers and otherwise abysmally fails to protect migrant and asylum-seekers in Egypt.

Since January 2011, Egyptian border police – part of Egypt's Central Security Forces responsible for shooting hundreds of unarmed protesters in Cairo and other cities in January 2011 – have shot and killed 22 African migrants attempting to cross into Israel, despite assurances by the authorities to UNHCR in Cairo that this policy would be discontinued. These incidents bring the total number of African migrants shot and killed in Sinai since mid-June 2007 to 107.

According to NGOs and other sources, since January this year Egypt's military police have arrested hundreds of irregular migrants – mainly Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Sudanese – in Sinai and Aswan and have detained them in police stations and prisons in Sinai, Suez, Luxor, and Aswan. Government officials in Cairo continue to refuse to give UNHCR access to the detainees, which means detainees wishing to lodge asylum claims cannot do so.

Migrant traffickers in Sinai continue to detain migrants and demand thousands of dollars in ransom, with those unable to pay continuing to report that traffickers attack and rape those refusing to pay. The Egyptian authorities have failed to investigate trafficking networks operating in Sinai and have made no arrests. In September, NGOs and other sources reported that traffickers detained 120 Eritreans, demanded a US\$3000 ransom per person to complete the journey to Israel, and beat those unable to pay.

NGOs call on Egypt to use the occasion of the end of its term as Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee to announce an immediate end to its shooting of migrants and asylum-seekers attempting to cross the Sinai border into Israel, to guarantee UNHCR access to all detained migrants and asylum-seekers, and to tackle trafficking in Sinai and prosecute all traffickers found responsible of abuse of migrants and asylum-seekers.

b) Iraq

NGOs are concerned about UNHCR's plans to close al-Waleed camp by November 2011 and relocate the camp's 500 residents within Iraq rather than resettling them. The camp is primarily made up of Palestinians, Iranian Kurds, and Iranian Ahwazis, who have been in the country for around 30 years. None have the prospect of locally integrating or of acquiring Iraqi citizenship. NGOs have recently highlighted that there is evidence that keeping these groups in Iraq may put them at risk of violence and other human rights abuses. NGOs, therefore, believe that the best protection available after al-Waleed closes and best durable solution to resolve their plight is to resettle them to third countries. NGOs urge UNHCR to reverse its decision and to facilitate resettlement for this group.

Thank you Mr. Chair.