

Berlin Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation
Consolidated NGO messages
28 October 2014

Humanitarian actors in the region appreciate the show of solidarity demonstrated by the Berlin Conference and urge participants to take concrete and tangible actions. Neighboring countries have shown great generosity towards refugees from Syria. The situation is worsening for both those fleeing the conflict and vulnerable populations in hosting countries, with diminishing resources to assist the growing number in need. Decision-makers must act now to address the suffering that humanitarian actors witness daily. But above all, the international community and influential states must prioritize forging a negotiated political solution to end the conflict in Syria.

Nowhere To Go

Host countries in the region have shown immense generosity to provide a safe haven for refugees fleeing Syria. But their capacity to cope with the scale of the crisis is **under immense strain and close to the breaking point.**

We call on the international community to support host governments to abide by their obligations to provide protection, safety and assistance for those seeking refuge from harm without discrimination, and to ensure respect for their legal rights in line with the principle of *non-refoulement*.

With continuing constraints on humanitarian access within Syria and significant restrictions at the borders into neighboring countries, most civilians attempting to flee the conflict, and especially the most vulnerable among them, have nowhere to go to be safe and to access humanitarian assistance.

Due to violence, insecurity and the denial of access, at least 4.7 million people residing in areas within Syria are currently unable to reliably receive humanitarian aid. Humanitarian assistance inside Syria has not significantly increased with the implementation of UNSC Resolutions 2139 and 2165, and with humanitarian workers increasingly at risk in certain areas, some organizations have been forced to temporarily curtail or suspend operations. Safe havens inside Syria don't remain safe and most refugees have been displaced multiple times before attempting to cross an international border.

Crossing a border is often the only means to survive. But options to seek international protection are being cut off. The flow of Syrian refugees crossing the Jordanian border has slowed dramatically due to the Jordanian government's tighter management of borders and increasingly restrictive registration process. Iraq is no longer a feasible option for safety, with its own internal displacement crisis and ISIL controlling large amounts of territory, including the border with Syria. In Lebanon, the borders are no longer open to those fleeing Syria. Turkey continues to receive refugees from Syria, but for many civilians, trying to access Turkey involves having to cross through active conflict zones. More than half of Palestine Refugees from Syria have been displaced internally and face the most constraints leaving Syria and accessing services in neighboring countries. They are officially unable to enter Jordan and confront virtual prohibition on entry into Egypt and, more recently, Lebanon.

For the millions residing in neighboring countries, we call on the host governments to develop comprehensive refugee policies grounded in refugee rights, including the right to access humanitarian aid and basic services, the right to livelihoods and the freedom of movement. These refugee communities must be recognized as stakeholders. The Syrian people are willing and able to take responsibility for their future. Host governments must allow them to formally register their humanitarian organizations so that they may also contribute to the improvement of their situation and that of the host communities.

Responsibility Sharing:

Even though it is not a pledging event, countries participating in the Berlin Conference must at least double their support to fully fund the humanitarian response to ensure assistance is given to the most vulnerable and host countries are supported to offer services.

Despite the increasing needs of refugees, funding is inadequate even today. The 2014 response plans for Syria and neighboring countries is only 47% funded. This is having stark consequences. For example the World Food Program is dramatically cutting its rations and reducing the number of people it assists.

Given the increase in tensions in the region, we are deeply concerned about the reduction in funding levels. Failing to invest now in the capacity of host communities is having catastrophic consequences for the population of the whole region. There is an additional strain on resources, services and employment opportunities, contributing to a rise in tensions between host and refugee communities. We welcome therefore the stated intention of this conference to address these urgent needs.

Funding recommendations:

- **Fully fund the humanitarian response.** More than this, we call on the donor community to provide funds on a long-term basis. Humanitarian actors must be able to decide flexibly on the implementation of these funds, according to the evolving needs of the affected populations.
- Make greater efforts to better connect humanitarian and development funding instruments, to allow for efficient linkages from relief to development, and to maximize impact.
- Make funding instruments more easily accessible for national NGOs to enhance ownership and strengthen local capacity.
- Increased development funds should be used to improve infrastructure and basic services which must be accessible to both host communities and refugees.
- Public services and assistance programs need to be better tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups, with consideration for questions of age, gender and disability. **With predictable and reliable funding, NGOs would be able to prioritize much-needed investments in livelihoods, social cohesion and psychosocial support.**

Funding alone, however, is not enough. **It is essential to uphold the right of all civilians fleeing the conflict to seek international protection, and the governments of countries neighboring Syria cannot be expected to shoulder this responsibility on their own.** Other countries must move quickly to offer a life-line to some of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria through resettlement and humanitarian admissions programs. Only then will the commitment to share responsibility with the host countries be credible and meaningful.

Resettlement recommendations:

- We welcome the example of the German Government in resettling tens of thousands of Syrian refugees and encourage other countries outside the region to espouse similar policies.
- Given the scale of the crisis, with over 3 million registered refugees residing in countries across the region, we call on countries outside of the immediate region to commit to **resettle at least 180,000 vulnerable refugees from Syria by 2016 (5% of the total projected refugee population).**

We are committed to continue providing assistance and protecting the rights of populations affected by the Syrian crisis, and **will remain engaged as active partners in following up with the conclusions of the Berlin Conference.**

This statement has been prepared on behalf of over 50 national and international NGOs working to assist those affected by the Syria crisis, and following NGO consultations at national, regional and international levels facilitated by the Association of German Development NGOs (VENRO) and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).