

11 May 2020

Dear Secretariat of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement,

Thank you for your call for written submissions to inform your deliberations. We appreciate your broad and deep engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders to date, including civil society. We are encouraged by your establishment and mandate and are keen to support your endeavours.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) comprises over 400 members, mostly non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, across 30 countries in the region. Originally established with the mission of advancing the rights of refugees, we have, over the last seven years, broadened our scope of work with the adoption of a Vision for Regional Protection that includes internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other categories of displaced persons, as well as stateless persons in situ. Internal displacement is a major concern in our region – as the 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement highlighted, the Asia-Pacific region accounts for over 75% of global disaster-related displacement, in addition to conflict-related displacement.

Due to COVID-19-related disruptions, we have been unable to garner the member inputs required to inform development of a substantive individual submission. We have, however, joined the *Leaving No One Behind: Ensuring an Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Inclusive Approach to Internal Displacement* submission and we endorse the submission made by the Platform on Disaster Displacement and letter from the Climate, Migration, and Displacement Platform. Further, we would like to flag the following points.

Meaningful participation of affected communities is essential

There are compelling ethical and instrumental reasons for ensuring the meaningful participation of affected communities in all decisions affecting their lives, including the formulation and review of policies and the design, delivery and evaluation of projects and services. Meaningful participation returns voice and agency to marginalised groups and respects their dignity and right to self-determination. Further, members of affected groups possess insights that others do not. We hold that, in order to be meaningful, affected communities' participation must be safe, inclusive, sustainable and impactful. If done properly, meaningful participation can address underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities. By involving affected communities in decision-making and service provision, we can improve programming by more effectively identifying and addressing diverse needs, thus reducing inefficiencies and injustices. Moreover, ensuring meaningful participation can improve access to and relationships with affected groups, including women, youth, elders, LGBTQI+ people, people with disability, ethnic and religious minorities, and others in vulnerable situations.

However, more than words are needed. As explained in CHS Alliance's 2018 Humanitarian Accountability Report, "[t]he many frameworks, processes, mechanisms, guidelines and initiatives [on enabling direct and meaningful participation by affected people in decision-making structures] have not dealt with changing the power dynamics and governance structures in the humanitarian system

to truly enable affected people to have a real voice and choice.”¹ We are heartened that the High-Level Panel’s report to the UN Secretary-General shall include “[a]dvancing the participation and inclusion of IDPs and displacement-affected communities in the realization of the 2030 Agenda” (Terms of Reference, High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement) and that the methodology includes consultations with, *inter alia*, IDPs and wider displacement-affected communities. We hope that the report encourages a broad move on the part of all actors from consultation with towards genuine *collaboration* with affected communities.

The Global Compacts provide insights on rights and approach

Although references to IDPs in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants did not result in the overt inclusion of IDPs in the ensuing Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), their underlying human rights framework applies to all internally displaced persons and many specific provisions in both Compacts are relevant to them. And notably, the whole-of-society and the AGD mainstreaming approaches outlined in the Global Compacts would be instrumental in responding effectively to internal displacement, with the meaningful participation of affected communities at their core.

As one APRRN member has flagged, displaced women and children in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, have been severely impacted by their displacement. This includes AGD dimensions to the adoption of negative coping strategies, acute susceptibility to SGBV, exploitation and abuse, and chronically inadequate access to essential services, such as safe perinatal care, leading to high infant and maternal mortality rates.

We encourage the High-Level Panel to draw upon the core underpinnings and specific provisions of the Global Compacts in its report.

COVID-19 already is exacerbating vulnerabilities and leading to internal displacement

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing an alarming escalation, in multiple contexts, of *refoulement* and premature returns of refugees, denial of access to territory of asylum seekers, and expulsion and prevention of re-entry of migrant workers. We are concerned that this will inevitably exacerbate the scale and complexity of internal displacement. On 7 May 2020, for example, Reuters reported that 45 Afghan migrant workers who were trying to cross back into Iran were killed by Iranian border guards who, at gunpoint, forced the migrant workers into a raging mountain torrent.² On 22 April, the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard reportedly prevented two boats carrying an estimated 500 Rohingya refugees from disembarking and seeking asylum in Bangladesh. This followed a similar move by Malaysian authorities on 16 April, when a fishing trawler carrying approximately 200 Rohingya refugees was prevented from entering Malaysian territory. These actions

¹ CHS Alliance (2018) *How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector: Humanitarian Accountability Report Edition 2018*. CHS Alliance Report. Geneva: CHS Alliance, p. 29. Available at [https://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Humanitarian Accountability Report 2018.pdf](https://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/Humanitarian%20Accountability%20Report%202018.pdf)

² Sediqi, Abdul Qadir and Storay Karimi, *Exclusive: Afghan lawmakers say 45 migrants drowned after Iranian guards forced them into river*. Reuters (7 May 2020). Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-iran-migrants-exclusive/exclusive-afghan-lawmakers-say-45-migrants-drowned-after-iranian-guards-forced-them-into-river-idUSKBN22J26U>

marked a reversal of recent commendable actions by both governments, which had until recently rescued refugee boats and provided humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees. Adequately responding to such challenges will require comprehensive regional approaches with sustained and robust support from the international community.

Again, we are enthusiastic about the High-Level Panel's mandate and potential to refocus the global community on the challenges of internal displacement. As one APRRN member noted, while the roughly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are the most visible face of the Rohingya crisis, since 2011 over 400,000 persons in Myanmar have been internally displaced due to conflict and genocide in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States. In Central Rakhine, 128,000 Rohingya IDPs have remained confined and segregated in camps since 2012. In most locations in Rakhine, the humanitarian community, including local civil society groups, also have limited access to assist the internally displaced. As stated in the HLP Terms of Reference, "more attention needs to be put on addressing internal displacement". APRRN remains eager to participate in the regional consultation processes still envisaged, including virtual consultations.

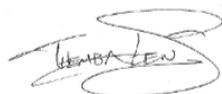
Kind regards,



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