



PRESS RELEASE

Refugees Call on World Leaders to Pass the Mic at the Two-year Review of the Global Compact on Refugees

Geneva, December 15, 2021: 130 refugees, joined by their allies, called on the international community to not leave refugees behind during a historic pandemic, while undertaking the first two-year review of the Global Compact on Refugees. During the virtual evaluation of the multilateral mechanism that aims to support and protect the world's refugees, representatives from around the world reinforced the pandemic's disproportionate impact on the 79.5 million forcibly displaced people. The pandemic and limited refugee-focused support is exacerbating the health, livelihood, and education risks faced by refugees. As countries implement stringent measures to contain the historic pandemic, the right to asylum has been undermined. Nearly 170 countries fully or partially closed their borders at the peak of the outbreak, including 100 that halted asylum processing. Although many hoped the pandemic would ease international tensions and lead to ceasefires, conflicts continued to rage, including in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan.

"Today, the global picture is mixed—the countries with the fewest resources continue to bear the most responsibility, but, importantly, we have seen an expansion of the support base, with states, development actors, the private sector, and civil society also stepping up. We need to recognize those contributions and accelerate progress," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Refugees themselves have stepped up to address these challenges. Refugee-led Organizations (RLOs) provided life-saving services to their community in the face of the global pandemic, supported refugees in danger, and provided direct funding to support their community's vital work. Despite the refugee community's leadership, they remain an underrepresented voice in policy discussions at all levels, including a ceiling of 2% in international policy discussions.

At the High Level Officials Meeting convened UNHCR and Switzerland, RLOs, Member States, and other stakeholders advocated for the international community to better engage, fund, and partner with refugees. "I would like to remind everyone of *why* we are discussing refugee participation—why does it matter? We refugees organized to do this work because current policies are not working and we need to do better. And in 2021, for refugees, this is a matter of life and death," added Najeeba Wazefadost, Asia-Pacific Representative to the GRN Steering Committee.

The Global Refugee-led Network (GRN), which is proudly by and for refugees, worked in the lead-up, and during this year's HLOM to ensure refugee voices were centerstage in the policy debate. GRN's pre-HLOM refugee stocktaking event brought together over 100 refugee leaders to put forward a refugee-first agenda. The collaborative and inclusive refugee agenda includes:

- 25% refugee participation at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum;
- Refugee representation on UNHCR's Executive Committee by 2023;
- Increased direct, flexible funding for RLOs;
- Enhanced refugee access to equal, quality health treatment.

The GRN welcomes the inclusion of these priorities in the official HLOM outcome document prepared by UNHCR. The GRN's new report, *Power & The Margins: The State of Refugee Participation*, strongly supports this agenda. The report offers a comprehensive review of the progress made since the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, evaluates the current state of refugee policy-making, and charts a clear path forward.

"Meaningful refugee participation requires a capable, networked, and well-resourced refugee civil society. The GRN works to support refugee-led organizations around the world to ensure they can meaningfully engage in policy processes," said Shaza Alrihawi, European Representative of the GRN Steering Committee, during her intervention at the GRN-led Meaningful Participation Side Event on Monday, 13 December.

There is significant momentum for greater refugee inclusion in decisions about their lives. GRN, along with Australia, Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands, the Open Society Foundation, IKEA Foundation, the International Federation of the Red Cross, Oxfam, and Independent Diplomat significantly contributed by launching the Refugee Participation Pledge. The Pledge, which was drafted by refugees in 2019, is designed to ensure that refugees will be in the room and meaningfully engaged for policy debates. It also requires signatories to monitor and report on the progress they have made to include refugees, at upcoming high-level meetings and fora.

The United States, CARE Global, and Save the Children are among the latest to officially back the Meaningful Participation Pledge. In a strong show of support for meaningful refugee participation, both the United States and Germany included a refugee in their official delegation for the first time, at the recently concluded HLOM. This follows Canada's leadership in 2019 when its delegation to the Global Refugee Forum was advised by and included a refugee.

"We are honored to have Dauda Sesay as our first-ever refugee advisor at this year's UNHCR High-Level Officials Meeting on implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees," said Nancy Izzo Jackson, Senior Bureau Official, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. "Mr. Sesay is a community advocate and founding member and president of the Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants, assisting other refugees and immigrants with integration into the United States. Mr. Sesay's experience, actions, and commitment to community, and those of countless other refugees, mobilize and inspire us to improve our collective efforts to support refugee inclusion. We value refugees' active participation and commit ourselves to including their critical voices on refugee issues in future delegations."

These achievements will further entrench the growing movement to increase refugee participation in policymaking discussions about them. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done. "The refugee community is powerful – we are human rights activists, innovators, first-responders, and entrepreneurs. It is time for the international community to pass the mic to the refugee community. We want to partner with you to be part of the solution," advised Eliasib Amet Herrera, Latin America Representative to the GRN Steering Committee.

To learn more about the GRN's engagement at the HLOM, including interview requests, please contact hallbeecher@gmail.com, follow @GRNRefugees and use @RefugeeVoices to see live reactions from those that matter most in refugee conversations and actions.

Notes to editors

The Refugee Participation Pledge:

[In accordance with the commitments established under goal 6 of the Grand Bargain to support a "Participation Revolution"]; we pledge to support the meaningful participation of refugees and host communities in decisions that affect their lives. Participation should take into account the diversity within communities, including age, gender, and disability. This pledge will support the agency of those we seek to assist while improving the relevance, quality, transparency and accountability of that assistance. We furthermore commit to share experiences on the implementation of this pledge at subsequent Global Refugee Forums and/or high-level officials' meetings.