

DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL 'S STATEMENT TO THE UN HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON ADDRESSING LARGE MOVEMENTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

19 September 2016

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) welcomes the attention that world leaders will dedicate to addressing large movements of refugees and migrants at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly. The multifaceted and increasingly complex nature of displacement and migration presents Member States with an ever wider set of challenges to address and opportunities to harness. The world's refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fundamental human rights and are in need of concrete commitments from States which uphold these rights. We see the UN High-Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants as an important opportunity for States to reaffirm the key principles of protection and assistance for refugees and migrants. The meeting represents a significant step in ensuring that all existing conventions, rights and principles pertaining to individuals on the move are upheld.

The need for action has never been greater. Common to the complex displacement and migration challenges facing the world today and the multivariate solutions they require is the need for political commitment. DRC is of the hope that the Summit will mark a new era of collaboration, solidarity and responsibility sharing at the highest political level to uphold the rights of refugees and migrants. However, it will require strong, brave and visionary political leadership at the national level to fulfil these commitments. DRC will be following the implementation of the New York Declaration intently moving forward to make sure that commitments are turned into action and tangible improvements in the protection and lives of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The development of the two global compacts on refugees and migrants will be a significant step in this regard.



DRC'S KEY REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW YORK DECLARATION FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Positive narrative

DRC is of the firm opinion that population movements need to be perceived and addressed as manageable. DRC strongly supports the efforts that have been placed in shifting the narrative around refugees and migrants to be more positive in nature. Framing individuals as illegal and movements as overwhelming is destructive and detracts from efforts being directed at addressing the root causes of displacement and forced migration and finding solutions for the displaced. DRC welcomes the New York Declaration for reminding the world of the many economic, social and cultural contributions of both refugees and migrants, and for striving to combat rising levels of xenophobia, racism and discrimination.

Human rights and assistance

First and foremost, individuals on the move are human beings. As an operational actor, DRC witnesses an increasing confluence of the vulnerabilities faced by those on the move. While the reasons for departure may be different, refugees and migrants often face identical threats and have to take similar risks during their journeys. DRC argues for the application of human rights instruments to all people on the move, irrespective of their status. It is therefore encouraging that the New York Declaration puts the protection of human beings at the centre of its focus. In DRC's view, vulnerability and the need for protection are the key determinants for humanitarian assistance for people on the move.

Refugees and migrants

Refugees and migrants have both distinct and overlapping protection concerns, needs and vulnerabilities and these similarities and differences must be accounted for in policy, programming and the application of legal frameworks. The particular protection concerns and vulnerabilities faced by refugees must be recognised by upholding and applying the Refugee Convention. In the face of closing borders and deterrence policies, the right to seek asylum must be safeguarded.

Data and analysis

DRC endorses greater efforts and resources being placed in understanding the nature of refugee and migrant flows, including the many, overlapping motivations for moving. In order to overcome the systemic challenge of ascribing labels and placing individuals in rigid categories, and predicating our response accordingly, we need joined-up efforts dedicated to generating and coordinating data and analysis on refugee and migrant movements. Not simply in terms of figures and numbers, but in terms of qualitative analysis of the drivers. Data and analysis on the heterogeneity of those on the move must be at the centre of our focus; it is essential for an effective response.

Solutions

DRC advocates for thinking about and planning for transitional and durable solutions for displaced persons from the onset of displacement. We stress that all individuals have the right to return to their country of origin in a safe and dignified manner with respect for human rights. For refugees, migrants and rejected asylum seekers, DRC always advocates for the primacy of voluntary return. For refugees, the fundamental principle of non-refoulement must be upheld and DRC is pleased to see this reflected in the Declaration.

Looking ahead, DRC would welcome broader reference to the full spectrum of durable solutions for refugees and IDPs as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is developed into the Global Compact for Refugees. Additional concretization around global responsibility sharing and concrete modalities for how this is envisaged is also needed. DRC remains committed to engaging in this process at a principled and operational level. A long term, holistic approach which draws on States, UN and civil society is imperative to ensuring an effective response advantageous to both refugees and migrants.

About DRC

As an operational non-governmental organisation with a displacement mandate present in countries of origin, transit and destination, the Danish Refugee Council has responded to the protection concerns of those on the move for six decades. It is against this particular background that DRC looks to the Summit as an historical opportunity for States, UN and civil society to join forces and engage constructively in responding to refugees and migrants.