Refugee Council of Australia

July 2017

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: REPORT ON REFUGEE SELF-REPRESENTATION ADVOCACY IN GENEVA 2017

Each year Australian NGOs participate in advocacy at a series of international meetings that take place in Geneva, including the Annual Consultations between NGOs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) works alongside a range of other Australian NGOs and refugee community advocates that participate in these international discussions to strengthen our impact through joint advocacy.[1] In the lead-up to the June 2017 Geneva meetings, refugee community advocates and Australian NGOs worked collaboratively to develop key messages and advocacy objectives on the theme of refugee self-representation. The following report highlights the process undertaken to develop this advocacy, the key messages that were taken to Geneva, and the outcomes of this collective effort.

1. WHY FOCUS ON REFUGEE SELF-REPRESENTATION ADVOCACY IN GENEVA?

Ensuring that the people at the centre of refugee and asylum policies have a strong voice in discussions concerning them is not a new idea. Many organisations have long recognised the importance and value of having those at the centre of refugee policy engaged in decision-making fora. Organisations from countries including Australia and New Zealand have been at the forefront of ensuring refugee community representatives are able to participate in international advocacy. For example, in 2017, at least 27 people who participated in the UNHCR NGO Consultations in Geneva had lived or



Carol Batchelor, Director of UNHCR's Division of International Protection, listens to Najeeba Wazefadost from the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) speak on the 'Refugee Voices in the Global Compact' panel at the UNHCR NGO Consultations.

[1] You can read about RCOA's international advocacy here: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/our-work/international-2/

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were living as refugees. Of these, nine were from Australia and seven were from New Zealand. At the ATCR, despite there being five spaces reserved for refugee community representatives, only Australia nominated a community representative. Although there is undoubtedly work to be done in Australia to strengthen and realise refugee self-representation in policy and practice at a national level, it seems there is even greater work to be done internationally to ensure that refugees are given space in discussions and decision-making fora.

The theme of this year's UNHCR NGO Consultations was "From global responsibility to local action – Implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)".[2] The CRRF was drafted in the lead-up to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, signed on 19 September 2016 by 193 Member States of the United Nations. The New York Declaration sets as its goal the improved protection of those in the process of movement, and aims to do this through a set of commitments signatories will promise to uphold. The CRRF is organised under four main themes (reception and admission, support for immediate and ongoing needs, support for host countries and communities, and durable solutions) and espouses a 'whole of society' approach. The aim is to ensure that responsibility to respond to forced displacement is shared by actors from all sectors of society—international organisations, financial institutions, governments, civil society, media, the private sector, local communities and, vitally, refugees themselves.

While the process of developing a Global Compact on refugees is undoubtedly complex and challenging,[3] it is one that could have significant implications for the international system of refugee protection. It is also a process that UNHCR and other key actors in this space are taking very seriously, supporting the development of a Program of Action alongside the CRRF that is to be presented to the UN General Assembly in 2018. It is important to those involved in international advocacy from Australia to ensure that the concept of refugee self-representation is highlighted in what is presented to the General Assembly, as well as in the formative discussions leading up to the Compact itself. The UNHCR NGO Consultations was considered one such space where there were opportunities to reinforce advocacy messages and try to influence the development of the CRRF and accompanying Program of Action.

2. PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING REFUGEE SELF-REPRESENTATION ADVOCACY

In the lead-up to the 2017 UNHCR NGO Consultations, steps were taken to develop this work on refugee self-representation and create a plan for joint advocacy in Geneva. This included:

Convening a working group

A working group focused on refugee self-representation advocacy came together as part of RCOA's International Policy Network. The working group involved representatives from RCOA, the Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN), Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW), Settlement Services International (SSI) and the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) Australia.[4] This working group was involved in a face-to-face workshop in Sydney, teleconference meetings and email discussion. The purpose of the working group was to develop an advocacy position and strategy on the theme of refugee self-representation. The working group

[2] http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/2017-annual-consultations-with-ngos.html

[3] For an explainer and guide to the Compact, see: www.icvanetwork.org/system/files/versions/Compact_on_refugees_ICVA_BriefingPaper.pdf

[4] Individual members included: Atem Atem (RCAN), Tabitha Chepkwony (ANCORW), Najeeba Wazefadost (ANCORW), Tenneh Kpaka (ANCORW), Arash Bordbar (youth rep), Paul Power (RCOA), Louise Olliff (RCOA), Sahar Okhovat (RCOA), Adam Bujairami (SSI) and Nadine Liddy (MYAN).

developed a set of key messages and questions (see Section 3 following), informed through consultations and policy research.

Planning and supporting refugee community advocates to participate and speak

RCOA worked with other Australian NGOs participating in this international advocacy to ensure that there was participation in these meetings from advocates who could speak from lived experience or represented refugee community-led organisations. To this end, ten Australian NGOs that were sending staff to the UNHCR NGO Consultations contributed to a fund that funded four refugee community representatives.[5] Two NGOs supported staff with lived refugee experience to attend the meetings in their professional capacity, two refugee community advocates were funded by organisations outside of Australia, and one person was self-funded. In total, five women and four men travelled from Australia for the NGO Consultations; this group had lived refugee experience and represented a range of communities from Africa (South Sudan, Eritrea, Kenya, Sierra Leone), the Middle East (Syria) and Asia (Bhutan, Iran, Afghanistan).[6] Australian NGOs also actively reached out to those organising the NGO Consultations to suggest speakers from within this group. In total, four refugee community representatives from Australia spoke at five sessions.

Reaching out to networks in Australia and internationally

As part of the process to develop this advocacy on self-representation, RCOA first reached out to the Geneva-based agencies involved in planning the NGO Consultations—UNHCR and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)—to find out whether they were aware of any other NGOs or networks who were involved in similar advocacy. While there did not seem to be any organisations spearheading refugee self-representation internationally, this process of reaching out did lead to fruitful connections and discussions between Australian NGOs and organisations in other parts of the world, including with Independent Diplomat and Urban Refugees.[7]

Holding consultations

As part of ensuring refugee participation in the development of the CRRF, staff within UNHCR's Division of International Protection in Geneva developed a consultation process in the months leading up to the 2017 UNHCR NGO Consultations. Five countries were involved in piloting these consultations, with RCOA involved in leading this collaborative process along with RCAN and ANCORW in Australia. While there were some limitations in terms of planning pilot consultations using the materials developed by UNHCR within very short timeframes, three consultations were held in Melbourne, Sydney and Wollongong in May 2017, involving 35 participants from a range of refugee backgrounds.

During these sessions, participants were invited to reflect upon their own or their community's experiences of being a refugee and the opportunities they benefited from or wished that they had had. They were asked to put forward recommendations for ways to effect meaningful refugee participation in the future. A key message from these consultations was that refugees wish to be

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[5] Refugee Council of Australia, Settlement Services International, Amnesty International Australia, Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Australian Council For International Development, Act For Peace, Centre for Refugee Research UNSW, Access Community Services Inc, Multicultural Development Australia, Foundation House. An individual contribution was also made by Luke Woodward.

[6] These were: Atem Atem, Apajok Biar, Arash Bordbar, Adam Bujairami, Tabitha Chepkwony, Tenneh Kpaka, Parsuram Sharma-Luital, Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Najeeba Wazefadost.

[7] https://independentdiplomat.org/project/amplifying-refugee-voices/ and http://urban-refugees.org/

seen as key stakeholders and actively engaged in decision-making at different levels, from the local to the international.







Consultations on refugee voices in the Global Compact in Sydney (above left), Wollongong (above right) and Melbourne (left).

Analysing the CRRF draft document

In preparation for the UNHCR NGO Consultations, RCOA undertook an initial analysis of the CRRF draft document.[8] The result of this inquiry was a series of annotated amendments aimed at highlighting the gaps in the CRRF; this included identifying opportunities for increased acknowledgement and support for refugee community-led organisations, as well as recognition of the need to engage refugee communities in both the planning and implementation of responses. The overriding theme of the proposed amendments was that refugee communities must be engaged in decision-making processes for responses to be effective.

Developing key messages and questions

Following the consultations and analysis of the CRRF, the working group developed a set of key messages, questions and background information on refugee self-representation (see Section 3 following). Questions were framed around particular sessions or themes on the agenda at the UNHCR NGO Consultations. This document was shared with all members of the Australian team travelling to Geneva, so that these messages or questions could be drawn upon by anyone who saw a suitable opportunity.

[8] http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/our-work/international-2/

Planning a side event

In the process of developing this advocacy, RCOA saw a valuable opportunity to organise an independent event to complement the discussions at the NGO Consultations. The idea behind this event was to bring NGOs from different parts of the world together to share thoughts and experiences on self-representation, strengthening the possibility of a more collaborative future effort. To this end, RCOA developed a concept note on a side event and shared this this with the organisers of the UNHCR NGO Consultations, who were supportive of the concept. This process of planning a side event—reaching out to potential speakers and refining key objectives—informed the broader advocacy strategy.

3. KEY MESSAGES AND QUESTIONS

Prior to travelling to Geneva, the refugee self-representation advocacy working group led by RCOA developed a briefing paper that included background information and a set of key messages and questions that could be used in discussions. This is included in full below.

Background

What do we mean by 'self-representation'?

There are many ways in which organisations responding to situations of forced displacement involve people who are intended as beneficiaries of their interventions: refugees, people seeking asylum, the internally displaced and stateless. When talking about self-representation, we refer to the ways in which those who are at the centre of forced displacement responses can exert influence—'represent'—themselves, their concerns and ideas in decision-making fora. Self-representation can also be extended to considerations of how groups of people (communities of interest) are able to self-represent.

What does the New York Declaration say about self-representation and the Global Compact/CRRF?

The New York Declaration makes explicit reference to the participation of refugees in the development of the CRRF through "a multi-stakeholder approach, including national and local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, regional coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society partners, including faith-based organisations and academia, the private sector, media and the refugees themselves" (Annex 1, 2.). How refugees will be meaningfully involved in this process is not made clear.

Within the New York Declaration, there are a number of sections that refer to opportunities for self-representation. They include:

> ***Reception and admission***
>
> *5. At the outset of a large movement of refugees, receiving States, bearing in mind their national capacities and international legal obligations, in cooperation, as appropriate, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, international organizations and other partners and with the support of other States as requested, in conformity with international obligations, would:*
>
> *(b) Take account of the rights, specific needs, contributions and voices of women and girl refugees;*
>
> ***Support for immediate and ongoing needs***

7. Host States, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other United Nations entities, financial institutions and other relevant partners, would, as appropriate:

(c) Encourage and empower refugees, at the outset of an emergency phase, to establish supportive systems and networks that involve refugees and host communities and are age- and gender-sensitive, with a particular emphasis on the protection and empowerment of women and children and other persons with specific needs;

Durable solutions

12. To ensure sustainable return and reintegration, States, United Nations organizations and relevant partners would:

(d) Support efforts to foster reconciliation and dialogue, particularly with refugee communities and with the equal participation of women and youth, and to ensure respect for the rule of law at the national and local levels;

(e) Facilitate the participation of refugees, including women, in peace and reconciliation processes, and ensure that the outcomes of such processes duly support their return in safety and dignity;

13. Host States, bearing in mind their capacities and international legal obligations, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, where appropriate, and other United Nations entities, financial institutions and other relevant partners, would:

(c) Take measures to enable refugees, including in particular women and youth, to make the best use of their skills and capacities, recognizing that empowered refugees are better able to contribute to their own and their communities' well-being;

(d) Invest in building human capital, self-reliance and transferable skills as an essential step towards enabling long-term solutions.

What are the challenges?

With over 60 million people forcibly displaced globally, it is often necessitated that self-representation involves collective representation—of selected (or self-selected) representatives speaking on behalf of others—raising important questions of who gets to speak for whom, and how to ensure that a diverse range of experiences, needs and ideas are given space.

While at a local level there may be more opportunity to consider the diversity of experiences, needs and solutions, spaces for refugee self-representation shrink considerably at national and international decision-making levels. Supporting effective self-representation requires an investment in time, resources and sharing knowledge, as well as a commitment to valuing different forms of knowledge and experience. In the context of scarce resources and enormous need, making this investment can be a challenge for even the most well-intentioned organisations.

Key messages

In May 2017, consultations were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Wollongong with refugee community members and representatives. From these consultations, RCOA developed a set of key statements to bring to Geneva. The statements are supported by comments (italicised) from participants in our consultations.

- The creation of spaces for those at the centre of decisions about international responses to forced displacement is likely to lead to better solutions.
    - *Refugees want to be part of addressing root causes – we don't want to be refugees. We want to return to our country. We need others to work with us to achieve this.*
- The implementation of self-representation requires considered approaches that will vary depending on context. However, it is important that all stakeholders involved in intervening in the lives of refugees consider how they meaningfully engage refugees in policies and practice – including or especially at a decision-making level.
    - *"Refugees should have community representatives in any decision-making panels."*
- There are complexities in ensuring models or approaches to self-representation are effective – including who speaks for whom – and much more needs to be done to ensure the diversity of experiences and voices are heard, especially those who face barriers to participation.
    - *We want to collaborate with media to produce stories – to tell our own stories.*
- Refugees do not want to be seen as 'beneficiaries' or as 'a burden'. We need to find better ways to ensure that the skills and capacities of refugees are recognised and that they are able to participate as important stakeholders in the pursuit of solutions.
    - *"We don't want to be surveyed, we want to be decision-makers."*
    - *Community-based organisations can resettle refugees and can engage with local people. We can do more for ourselves if we are given the chance.*
- While opportunities for refugee self-representation tend to be greater at local levels, these spaces shrink at a country or international level.
    - *"We are not commodities. Give us equal ownership; equal employment."*
- All stakeholders – governments, international organisations, UNHCR, but also NGOs – have a long way to go in creating spaces for refugee self-representation. We need better ways of sharing experiences and models that work.
    - *Governments should involve people from diaspora communities in international diplomacy when it concerns their country of origin.*
    - *International NGOs should provide support to enable people from a refugee background to be at international forums (e.g. NGO Consultations) so we can speak for ourselves.*

Key questions

1. Refugees do not want to be seen as beneficiaries or as a burden. While the New York Declaration makes explicit reference to the participation of refugees in the development of the CRRF, it is hard to see how this is happening.

What are the ways that we can create stronger mechanisms for enabling meaningful and effective refugee self-representation at forums such as these, so that people who can speak from lived experience have a say in the development of this Global Compact?

2. In the CRRF, the important role and contributions of local host communities is rightly acknowledged, but there is no acknowledgement of the role and contribution of refugee or refugee diaspora communities. We know that when people first flee, they draw heavily on their own resources and on the support and care of their families and community members, both near and far. In fact, this support is what sustains many refugees in many different situations, even in protracted situations.

   Is there any consideration being given to how the important support structures within refugee communities can both be acknowledged and strengthened in the CRRF?

3. There are many examples around the world where refugees have created their own support structures in the absence of adequate international protection and humanitarian assistance. In Indonesia, for example, the refugee community outside Jakarta has built a number of community learning centres that are led and run by refugees themselves. They have done this by drawing on their own resources and with the support of civil society allies in other countries.

   How can we ensure that community-led initiatives are valued and strengthened in the CRRF?

4. ACTIVITIES

Drawing on the planning work that happened prior to the meetings in Geneva (Section 2) and the key messages and questions that were developed beforehand (Section 3), the following is a summary of the advocacy activities in which Australian NGO and community representatives took part in Geneva.

Demonstrating the value of refugee self-representation

The refugee community advocates who participated in this international advocacy effort demonstrated the value of hearing from those with lived experience and representatives of refugee community-led organisations. The active participation of refugee community advocates from Australia and elsewhere who spoke at almost every session about issues that affected their own lives or that of their communities brought insights, critiques and suggestions for solutions that would not have otherwise been evident in this international discussion.

As well as being actively involved in these formal meetings, refugee community advocates also participated in a range of side meetings with representatives of different UNHCR regional bureaux. These side meetings demonstrated the value of refugee self-representation, as issues were discussed with detailed knowledge by advocates with direct links or experiences to the situations being discussed. During the week of the UNHCR NGO Consultations, for example, RCOA organised a meeting between representatives of an Oromo Australian diaspora organisation and senior legal officers from the UNHCR Africa bureau by Skype which highlighted key misunderstandings about protection processes and potential future collaborations.

Speakers on panels

Four refugee community advocates from Australia spoke on five panels at the UNHCR NGO Consultations, not only sharing their expertise and insights on particular themes, but also providing insights into how to better support refugee participation in the future:

- Najeeba Wazefadost and Arash Bordbar were both panellists at the session on 'Refugee voices in the Global Compact', summarising the findings of pilot consultations (including in Australia) and emphasising the importance of creating spaces for diverse perspectives to be heard within refugees communities. Arash spoke about the need for greater recognition of when to work *for* refugees, when to work *with* them, and when NGOs and other actors should *step aside*.
- Apajok Biar presented in a session on the follow-up to the Global Refugee Youth Consultations in 2016. The session touched on rising tensions between host communities and young refugees, and the challenges posed by xenophobia. What was also discussed, however, was initiatives undertaken by young refugees, and how these contributions can be positively shared, as well as the continued reiteration of the need to support the meaningful and embedded participation of young refugees.
- Tenneh Kpaka spoke at the session 'Making the Global Compact Work for All Refugee Women and Girls.' The main points of discussion encompassed the particular vulnerability of women and girls, the need for access to sexual and reproductive health services and recognition of the contribution of women in the community. Translating this into the context of the CRRF, the session placed emphasis on collaborating with women and bringing a gendered understanding to decision-making.
- Najeeba Wazefadost also spoke as a panellist at the Asia regional session as a representative of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN).



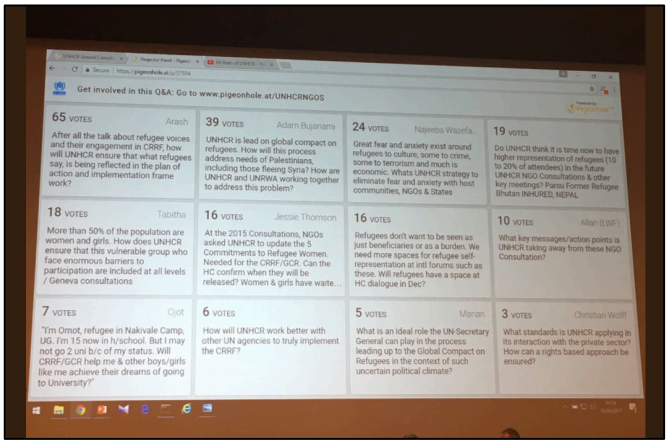
In addition to these speakers at the UNHCR NGO Consultations, RCOA was also involved in the preceding week in a side meeting held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva during the 35th Human Rights Council (HRC) meeting. This side event coincided with a report being given at the HRC by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Professor François Crépeau, on his visit to Australia and Nauru. For this event, RCOA facilitated the participation of a speaker who is currently held on Manus Island—the Kurdish Iranian journalist and advocate Behrouz Bouchani—who was able to speak at the event by pre-recorded video.[9]

Kurdish Iranian journalist and advocate Behrouz Bouchani at the Human Rights Council Event presented his response to Australia's current offshore policy.

[9] A full report and links to Behrouz's presentation can be found here: http://bit.ly/2tOOlLx

Questions raised

In many of the plenaries and parallel sessions at the UNHCR NGO Consultations, questions were asked that concerned refugee self-representation and the participation and role of refugee community-led organisations in the Global Compact and CRRF. These questions were asked by refugee community advocates from Australia and other countries using questions drafted by the Australian working group. In addition, the Australian team were active in voting for questions that focused on refugee community organisations or refugee self-representation in any of the sessions where the online Pigeonhole application was available to prioritise questions for discussion. This resulted in the top prioritisation of a number of questions relating to self-representation in different sessions.



Closing plenary Pigeonhole questions – with the most votes going to a question asked by Arash Bordbar from Australia.

Some of the questions asked over the three days included:

- *In the CRRF, the important role and contributions of local host communities is rightly acknowledged, but there is no acknowledgement of the role and contribution of refugee or refugee diaspora communities. We know that when people first flee, they draw heavily on their own resources and on the support and care of their families and community members, both near and far. In fact, this support is what sustains many refugees in many different situations, even in protracted situations. Is there any consideration being given to how the important support structures within refugee communities can both be acknowledged and strengthened in the CRRF?* (Asked by Asifa Siddiqa, refugee youth representative from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) in opening plenary with Assistant High Commissioner for Protection)
- *Refugee-led organisations play key roles in responses and need to be both recognised as key stakeholders and supported. How will this be reflected in the Global Compact?* (Pigeonhole question asked by Urban Refugees and voted by Australian team, session with Deputy High Commissioner)
- *Refugee community-led organisations are vital stakeholders but face challenges in terms of being given space, resources and voice. What are good models that strengthen refugee CBOs as local partners?* (Pigeonhole question asked by RCOA, session on harnessing the breadth of local partnerships)
- *After all the talk about refugee voices and their engagement in CRRF, how will UNHCR ensure that what refugees say is being reflected in the plan of action and implementation framework?* (Arash Bordbar, Closing Plenary with the High Commissioner)
- *Do UNHCR think it is time now to have higher representation of refugees (10 to 20% of attendees) in the future UNHCR NGO Consultations & other key meetings?* (Parsu Sharma-Luital, INHURED International, Closing Plenary)

‘Refugee voices in the Global Compact’

Australian NGO and refugee community representatives contributed to the session on ‘Refugee voices in the Global Compact’ that was held during the UNHCR NGO Consultations in several key ways. In the months prior, RCOA made contact with the UNHCR Geneva-based organisers of this session, who shared their session plan and invited Najeeba and Arash to speak as panellists. During these discussions, RCOA agreed to facilitate pilot consultations in Australia with people from refugee backgrounds using the consultation plan developed by UNHCR. Three reports based on these consultations were provided to UNHCR using templates provided. The outcomes of these consultations in Australia and other pilot countries informed the presentations made at this session. Several Australian NGO and community representatives also asked questions or made comments during this session.

‘Nothing About Us Without Us’ side event

On 16 June 2017, RCOA co-hosted an event at the Graduate Institute Geneva with Independent Diplomat entitled “Nothing About Us Without Us: Getting Serious About Refugee Self-Representation.”[10]



The event, which was held during the lunch break on the final day of the UNHCR NGO Consultations, included a panel discussion with Arash Bordbar, Sonia Ben Ali (Urban Refugees), Mulki Ali Abdalla (Somali Refugee Committee, Malaysia), Shaza Al Rihawi (Refugees from Syria Group, EU), Atem Atem (Refugee Communities Advocacy Network), Professor Yiombi Thona (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network) and Tabitha Chapkwony (Australian National Committee on Refugee Women). 41 people from 10 different countries and 30 organisations, including several representatives of UNHCR, attended this event.

The event provided an opportunity for speakers from a range of countries, communities and perspectives to discuss models, benefits and challenges of self-representation. Speakers emphasised the importance of creating and supporting leadership spaces for people from refugee communities, and the positive impact of actively engaging refugees in the creation of solutions and empowerment. In the discussion, participants voiced the need for more to be done to ensure that opportunities for refugee community organisations and leadership are strengthened, with funding as a key component of this support and currently a significant barrier to a more inclusive international stage for advocacy. There was also discussion about the need to create an international refugee advocacy network that is refugee-led and could work towards amplifying the voices of those who speak from experience in international fora.

[10] You can read the full event report here: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/publications/reports/international-reports/spotlight-human-rights-council







The RCOA-Independent Diplomat side event took place in front of a full house at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. Panellists from left: Najeeba Wazefadost, Tabitha Chepkwony, Yiombi Thona, Arash Bordbar and Atem Atem.

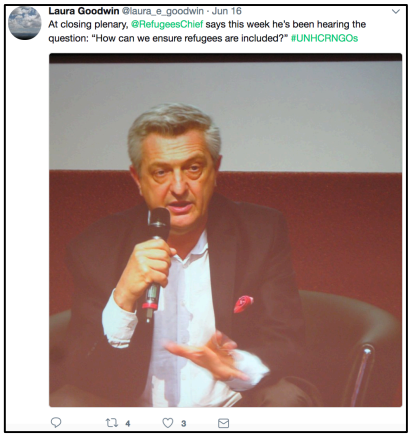
Shaza Al Rihawi (far right) from Refugees from Syria Group, EU, describes her work with UNCHR in Syria before taking flight herself to Germany.

Social media presence

Both within the meetings and outside of Geneva, RCOA and other Australian NGOs encouraged conversation about refugee self-representation via social media. Under the hashtag #refugeevoices, commentators spoke out about the lack of refugee representatives in international advocacy, and the need to involve refugees in processes and decisions that affect them. In the context of the Global Compact, it was constantly restated that refugees should be systematically included in discussions and their ideas reflected in the final commitments.

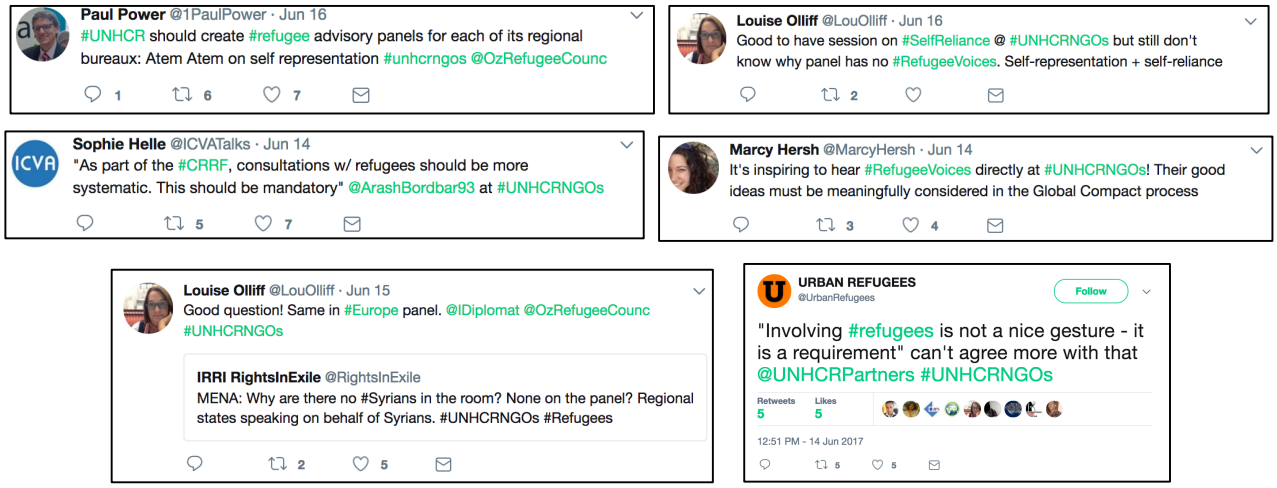
These online conversations were reflected in the storify twitter report that UNHCR compiled from the UNHCR Consultations.[11] Some examples of tweets are included below:







[11] The storify twitter report can be found here: https://storify.com/UNHCRPartners



Informal discussions and the development of networks

Throughout the week in Geneva, a number of Australian team members reported having informal conversations with NGO colleagues from many different countries about how to better support and enable refugee self-representation. Australian representatives shared with others our model for coordinating advocacy, garnering support and funding for community representatives, and ideas for developing a stronger international network of refugee-led organisations and advocates.

5. OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW-UP

Although it is hard to definitively measure the outcomes of this kind of advocacy effort, the following were noteworthy indications of the impact of this joint advocacy effort:

High Commissioner acknowledges importance of including refugees in international dialogue

In the Closing Plenary of the UNHCR NGO Consultations, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said:

> "*A[n]…area in which I think we can work together, we must work together, is of course one that you, I understand, have raised very strongly in the last few days, which is how can we, in this broadening of the approach, ensure that refugees also are included, not just as 'beneficiaries', this terrible word, but as real actors? We've discussed also this thing how many times, I've done this work for more than thirty years and I've heard this matter being discussed so many times, more or less in depth. Perhaps this is yet another opportunity to get this right. Because if we talk about broadening, we must ensure that refugees have a role.*
>
> *I understand that we've started some high-level consultations and activities on this in a number of countries: in Australia, in Ethiopia, in Lebanon, in Germany, and this was presented I think at this conference. I think that we need to build on this, and since the CRRF and the Global Compact preparation as you know had a series of milestones, thematic discussion, that will all flow into the High Commissioner's dialogue in December, maybe we need to make sure that at that dialogue session there is a window that looks specifically at lessons learned in this area."*

The High Commissioner also tweeted a similar sentiment immediately following the close of the NGO Consultations: "How to ensure that refugees & youth have their say in building new aid models+responses to refugee crises: important debate at #UNHCRNGOs".

Global NGO Reflection Paper

In the weeks following the UNHCR NGO Consultations, ICVA released its NGO Reflection Paper on the Global Compact on Refugees[12], with the following text included (italics added):

> To be successful, efficient and relevant, the GCR should be based on and underpinned by a set of standards and principles. As such the introductory paragraphs to be added to the CRRF, as well as the PoA, should highlight the following:
>
> The GCR should be practical, relevant to the primary stakeholders – the refugees themselves – as well as host communities and those who work closely with them. Alongside other civil society actors, refugees and their organizations should be essential components of the Global Compact process. *Drawing on their experience and expertise, and giving them a role in charting a different path forward was an important recommendation from the Annual Consultations.* It should particularly lead to defining protection strategies, planning and assessments in partnership with refugees, inclusive of all types of displacement affected populations, without exception.

Emergence of an international network of refugee advocates



Finally, the discussion at the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' side event, about the potential for an international refugee-led advocacy network that could bring together advocates and refugee-led organisations to lobby on refugee policies at an international level, has continued to gather momentum. During the final hours of the NGO Consultations, members of the Australian team reached out to other refugee community representatives from different parts of the world who were also in Geneva to ascertain interest, all of whom expressed support for the idea. This initial network of people who have participated in international advocacy will be drawn on in further discussions about the development of a network and to plan for next year's NGO Consultations and other advocacy opportunities.

Self-representation on the agenda

Looking ahead to next year, a number of international NGOs made (informal) commitments to include refugee advocates in their future delegations. While time will tell whether these commitments are honoured, perhaps the most important outcome of this year's joint advocacy was that refugee self-representation was undeniably put on the agenda, and the stage has been set for refugee self-advocacy in future UNHCR NGO Consultations.

[12] https://www.icvanetwork.org/resources/ngo-reflection-paper-global-compact-refugees-gcr