

CALL TO ACTION on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

Statement issued by the partners of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies on the occasion of the “Ending Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Crises” Conference, to be held in Oslo, Norway, 23-24 May 2019:

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action) is a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2013 to fundamentally transform the way gender-based violence (GBV) is addressed in humanitarian emergencies. The aim is to drive change and foster accountability so that every humanitarian effort, from the earliest stage of a crisis, includes the policies, systems and mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV, especially violence against women and girls.

The Call to Action commends the Kingdom of Norway for calling this conference and appreciates the leadership of the Republic of Iraq, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the United Arab Emirates, UN OCHA, UNFPA, ICRC and Norwegian Church Aid as co-hosts. We concur with their assessment that, despite increased attention to GBV and improvement in recent years, much remains to be done. GBV is a pervasive and life-threatening power, health, human rights, and protection issue. Deeply rooted in gender inequality and norms that disempower and discriminate, GBV is a reality in every society that disproportionately affects women and girls and is exacerbated in humanitarian emergencies where vulnerability and risks are high and many protections have broken down. Still, despite its prevalence, prevention of and response to GBV are rarely undertaken from the earliest stages of emergencies or get the level of attention of other humanitarian issues, leading to a lack of appropriate resources to effectively respond to the needs of affected populations. Moreover, even when strong commitments are made, the accountability mechanisms for ensuring meaningful action in policy, funding, systems, and implementation are a major gap.

The Call to Action calls on the conference participants to consider the following as they prepare to engage in the Oslo Conference:

1. *GBV takes multiple forms, all of which must be addressed*

GBV can take many forms. Physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms of GBV all increase during times of conflict and crisis due to the collapse of social structures and lawlessness combined with pre-existing gender inequality, which is a root cause of GBV. Conflict-related sexual violence cannot be tolerated in any form. Conference participants must further ensure a broad perspective on GBV as women and girls are particularly susceptible to intimate partner violence, rape, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, infanticide, and human trafficking, and recognize that in many armed conflicts, men and boys are also the targets of sexual violence and recruitment as child soldiers. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) at the hands of humanitarians, security forces and other officials must also be prioritized. These acts of violence and abuses of power, in violation of human rights law and international humanitarian law, are often deadly, and if the victims survive, the physical and psychological after-effects prevent them from accessing essential and immediate assistance and, along with their communities, from being able to heal in the long term.

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Given this, the Call to Action partnership recommends a focus on all forms of GBV during the Oslo Conference, and a comprehensive approach to addressing them.

Beyond rhetoric, discussions should center on appropriate responses and include commitments to the prevention, mitigation and response to *all* forms of violence against women and girls through expert analysis of the violence experienced and through appropriate resourcing. The zero tolerance for SEA called for across the humanitarian system must continue to be reiterated and practical commitments made to ensure perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, including through inter-agency cooperation, and that prevention of SEA is a priority throughout the system. It is necessary to take prevention measures and support survivors, including by providing psycho-social, medical and legal assistance.

2. Important role of local and women-led organizations

The efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway and Norwegian Church Aid to ensure that local and women-led organizations that focus on GBV are able to attend the Conference are laudable. Ensuring that funding is available for participation of a critical mass of local and women's organizations should be commended by all. This engagement with local and women-led organizations should be continued by participants both at the Conference, through the inclusion of the voices of local and women-led organizations during the high-level Ministerial meeting of May 24, and after. Women and girls are powerful agents of change in their communities and the benefits of localizing humanitarian response are well known - local organizations are often best place to understand context-specific responses, have trust and standing in communities, know where the humanitarian corridors are and negotiate access, and remain in the context during the long process of response and recovery. Local and women's organizations play an important role in raising social awareness and mobilizing communities to change laws, attitudes, social norms and practices, and offer experience and expertise that must be respected. In the prevention of and response to GBV in particular, these roles cannot be overlooked.

Commitments to engaging local and women-led organizations must not just be an empty promise. The inputs and expertise of local actors must be considered and taken into account at the Conference and going forward. Localization of humanitarian response is a priority of the Call to Action partnership, as evidenced by the creation of [country-specific Roadmaps](#) and efforts to ensure local actors are engaged in the Call to Action at the global level. Pledges on policies that make engagement with local actors easier and financial commitments to increased funding of local actors should be considered by all.

3. GBV as everyone's responsibility

While the GBV sub-cluster and protection cluster have the expertise to lead GBV prevention and response, the duty to prioritize standalone GBV programming and ensure GBV risks are mitigated across other sectors cannot lie with GBV experts alone. Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams, International Organizations, donor and host states, cluster leads, and operational NGOs must ensure that GBV standalone programs are prioritized at the earliest stages of any response, and that GBV

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risk reduction is recognized and reinforced as the responsibility of *all* actors, with a particular focus on the impact that GBV has on women and girls in any emergency. The expertise of other sectors and clusters, including education, WASH and health, specifically sexual and reproductive health, should be brought to bear on preventing and responding to GBV comprehensively. Meeting the needs of all people at risk of GBV, including those at heightened risk such as those living with disabilities or who identify as LGBTIAQ, and women and girls who are displaced or separated from their families and communities, requires a whole-of-system response that utilizes best practices, such as the [IASC GBV Guidelines](#).

The [GBV Accountability Framework](#), created by the Real Time Accountability Partnership and adopted in 2018 by the Call to Action as a way to operationalize the Call to Action Roadmap, is a useful tool in identifying priority actions and responsibilities of actors involved in a humanitarian response, at all stages of a response, including and beyond GBV experts. Commitments should be made to utilizing the GBV Accountability Framework, funding activities that achieve Accountability Framework actions, and advocating for decision-makers in the humanitarian space to prioritize GBV response.

4. *Complementarity to the Call to Action and use of the Call to Action Roadmap*

It is the hope of Call to Action partners that pledges made at the Conference complement and reinforce the commitments and key actions identified by the Call to Action Roadmap and strengthen the achievement of these actions. For Call to Action members, the Oslo Conference is a welcome opportunity to reaffirm, enhance and build upon previously made commitments to the initiative and the Call to Action Road Map. Call to Action members should also draw on the lessons from the Call to Action Road Map pilot initiatives in Northeast Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo to strengthen GBV prevention and response in other settings, and to strengthen partnership with local organizations.

For other participants, the Conference represents an opportunity to use the Call to Action Roadmap as a guide for commitments, helping to ensure that actions taken after the conference complement those of the Call to Action Roadmap, thereby contributing to the collective change and prioritization of GBV prevention and response sought by the Call to Action.

5. *Pledging flexibility – Including and beyond funding*

It is clear that funding for GBV prevention and response is not yet robust enough to meet the needs of women and girls. The Oslo Conference, therefore, is an opportunity for governments, International Organizations, and NGOs to strengthen, where possible, their commitments to funding that is directed towards standalone GBV programming and to holding other sectors accountable to GBV risk reduction approaches.

Increasing funding alone will not achieve the goal of preventing, mitigating and responding to GBV at the scale necessary. GBV must be prioritized in response planning or integrated into the health, particularly sexual and reproductive health,

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response. The more direct the funding is for local and women-led organizations, the more benefits are reaped from their expertise.

Therefore, in addition to financial pledges, flexibility to pledge to create or update GBV policies and fund programmes based on best practices must also be prioritized, and participants should consider making both funding and policy pledges that complement and strengthen each other.

The Call to Action once again commends the Conference co-hosts for their efforts to bring attention to GBV in humanitarian settings. The Call to Action members stand ready to partner with and support all those endeavouring to end GBV and achieve gender equality, and look forward to a productive Conference.

Background on the Call to Action

Now with over 80 partners, the Call to Action was founded on the principle that policies and programmes that prevent and respond GBV in humanitarian contexts are lifesaving, not optional. Based on a human rights-based approach and the power of collective action and commitment, the Call to Action was developed to: establish specialized GBV prevention and response services and programs; integrate efforts to prevent, reduce and mitigate GBV risk across all sectors from the very earliest stages of emergency and throughout the programme cycle; and promote and prioritize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout humanitarian action.¹ Members of the Call to Action represent many of the most active and expert actors in the fight against GBV in emergencies. The Call to Action's governing document is the 2016-2020 Roadmap, a time-bound, measurable five-year plan that provides guidance on necessary actions and commitments to prevent, respond and mitigate GBV in humanitarian contexts, and includes joint accountability mechanisms. It represents the actions - identified by a comprehensive and evidence-driven theory of change and through consultation with experts over multiple years - that need to be taken and further resourced if the international community is truly going to prevent and appropriately respond to the epidemic of GBV in emergencies.

¹To learn more about the Call to Action, including the roll-out pilots in DRC and Northeast Nigeria, or access progress reports, please visit: <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>