



**Statement of Lavinia Limón, President and CEO,
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Informal Multi-stakeholder Hearing for the UN General Assembly High-level
Meeting to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants
UN Headquarters
July 18, 2016**

Thank you. In 2004, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) published our annual World Refugee Survey and we focused on the warehousing of refugees, a word that people felt very uncomfortable with and subsequently the whole concept was renamed "protracted refugee situations," which seemed a little more palatable. In 2004, the average stay in refugee camps was 17 years. As of 2015, we are now looking at 26 years.

We may have changed the language, but there is no progress, where refugees are in camps in protracted situations deprived of their rights. We focused in the Survey on the rights guaranteed by the 1951 Convention and other documents and we were told at the time that this was inappropriate, to talk about refugee rights would alarm host countries and that we would be contributing to refoulement. We're very pleased to see that in 12 years the language has changed, that all the dialogue and statements acknowledge that refugees have rights and that they have changed from burden sharing to responsibility sharing. *We would like to propose that perhaps people think about opportunity sharing instead of responsibility sharing.*

However, the reality of refugees has actually not changed. They are still drowning at sea, they are refused entry and safety, decades in camps, and vilified and blamed for many of societal problems. Now with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, I think that nation states must admit that they are either unwilling or unable to provide adequate resources to sustain refugees in humane situations outside the mainstream. We also know that conflict and persecution that creates refugees will not end in the foreseeable future.

It is clear to USCRI what we need to do is empower refugees. We need to recognize their *human rights*, not just their refugee rights. We need to let them work and not be kept on international assistance. We need to let them move as they see fit. We need to provide aid which enables them to make their own decisions. They have survived more than most of us can imagine. They know how to survive and thrive if given the opportunity. We must recognize that refugees are not different species. *They speak and act and we need to speak and act as if we were looking in a mirror or a family photo.* Thank you.