

Agenda Item 2 (d)

69th Meeting of the Standing Committee, 28-30 June 2017 Update on machine-readable travel documents

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The paper before you focusses on the **need for travel documents for refugees and stateless persons to be issued in machine-readable format**, in line with changes to the international standards for travel documents which were adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation in 2015.

Refugees and stateless persons have a right to a Convention travel document, issued by their country of lawful stay, pursuant to Article 28 of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and of the 1954 Convention relating to the status of stateless persons respectively. In addition, many non-States parties to these Conventions in practice issue documents to refugees and stateless persons which allow them to travel. This paper acknowledges the positive practices of the many States which issue such documents, and in particular recognises the progress made by many in the transition to machine-readable format.

The paper underlines that machine-readability, already an established standard for national passports, entails important benefits for States as well as refugee and stateless persons who hold them. These include enhanced security features which reduce the risk of document fraud and counterfeit; global uniformity and inter-operability with existing systems that contribute to effective and secure border controls and travel, and reciprocal recognition of travel documents among States.

It further recalls that travel documents can be central to the exercise of a number of human rights, such as free movement, [as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] as well as the right to work, the right to an education and the principle of family unity. Travel documents can also facilitate the achievement of solutions for refugees and stateless persons, and permit their safe and regular movement, in ways that reduce the risk of irregular movement which can expose them to danger, exploitation, abuse and violence, including at the hands of smugglers and traffickers.

In addition to describing the application of the relevant international standards, the paper summarises UNHCR's global efforts on machine-readable travel documents, focussing on three main areas: (1) supporting the transition to machine-readable formats; (2) engaging with non-states parties in regard to the issue of machine-readable travel documents; and catalysing international cooperation and support.

Concerning **(1) support to the transition to machine-readable Convention Travel Documents**, UNHCR in February 2017, together with the International Civil Aviation Organisation, has issued an updated joint Guide for issuing machine-readable Convention travel documents for refugees and stateless persons". UNHCR in some contexts also provides technical, practical and/or legal advice during the transition and may, when appropriate, facilitate material support. In 2016 UNHCR supported the drafting of model legislation on machine-readable travel documents in some parts of the world. It also assists with advice on guidelines, streamlined processes and integrating refugees into existing national systems for issuing machine-readable passports to nationals.

In the area of **(2) cooperation with non-states parties**, UNHCR promotes inclusive and sustainable approaches to the issuance of travel documents, building on and in recognition of a number of good State practices that have already been identified, such as the issuance of machine-readable “certificates of identity”, or “alien’s passports”. We encourage the sharing of such practices with other states, where relevant and useful.

Finally, UNHCR seeks to **(3) catalyse greater international cooperation** and support. When responding to large-scale or protracted displacement, States may require support to strengthen and adjust their national systems, including to address gaps in administrative and legal frameworks, financial and material resources, or technical expertise, so as to issue machine-readable travel documents to refugees and stateless persons. In order to address these challenges, more predictable, comprehensive and complementary support from the international community is required. Cooperation between States, whether multilateral or bilateral, can bring together technical expertise and capacity from different countries and, in particular, assist States during their transition to machine-readable travel documents, in cooperation with UNHCR. The issuance of such documents can support efforts to achieve greater responsibility-sharing by enhancing opportunities to access durable solutions and complementary pathways, bringing benefits not only to refugees, but also to host societies, receiving countries and in some cases to their countries of origin if conditions become conducive to return.

The progress made to date towards the issuance of travel documents to refugees and stateless persons in machine-readable form is sincerely welcomed by UNHCR. This paper highlights some of the significant advances which have been made, while recalling important further work that needs to be done. It also seeks to underline the benefits, borne out by experience worldwide, that travel documents in the appropriate form can bring to refugees, stateless persons and States alike.

Thank you.