

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS
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Background Paper
Side meeting: Strengthening national RSD systems

Wednesday 29 June 2011, 13:00 - 14:00, Room 4

Speakers:

Janice Marshall, Deputy Director for Policy and Law, UNHCR, Department of International Protection Services

Karina Sarmiento, Country Director, Asylum Access – Ecuador

Yonatan Berman, Counsel, Hotline for Migrant Workers – Israel

Moderator:

Fatima Khan, University of Cape Town

Refugee status determination (RSD) is essential to effective refugee protection, especially in cases of mixed migration. It is in principle a state responsibility, but setting up an effective RSD system is complicated, demanding attention to fairness, efficiency, training, and the unique vulnerabilities of asylum-seekers. This panel will discuss what UNHCR and civil society can do to strengthen national RSD systems, with particular focus on the challenges involved in newly established RSD systems.

This session was proposed with the intent to foster an in-depth discussion of good practices, common pitfalls, and the challenges of emerging RSD systems carried out by States. The panelists will share lessons learned in dealing with national RSD systems, as well as the benefits seen by the refugee community when there is a clear national RSD system in place. Emerging RSD systems encounter many complex challenges. Because of these difficulties, this panel will address the issue from the perspective of both civil society and UNHCR, as a way of fostering multiple perspectives and finding effective ways for UNHCR and NGOs to work together.

The panel will cover:

Understanding the similarities and differences in the roles of UNHCR and NGOs in emerging national RSD systems,

The need for clear fairness standards and common pitfalls seen by practitioners,

The importance of legal aid and information for asylum-seekers,

Strategies for persuading executive branches of government and for engaging the judiciary,

The benefit added by initiatives to train government officials, lawyers, judiciaries, and other parties on proper RSD implementation.