World's leading experts condemn UN refugee plan

Not since World War II has the Western world seen a refugee crisis of the current magnitude. The UN Secretary-General has convened a high-level meeting of states for Sept. 19 to consider adoption of a "global compact" on sharing responsibility for refugees—in theory, an effort to ensure that refugees are not forced to risk their lives to access protection, and to fairly distribute the refugee burden across states.

But a group of international experts on refugee protection found the plan long on rhetoric and depressingly short on specifics about how to make the shift from the current ad hoc approach and toward a global, managed protection system. They have issued a Call to Action intended to change the course of the current discussions.

Convened jointly by the University of Michigan's Program in Refugee and Asylum Law and the Allard School of Law at the University of British Columbia, the experts meeting in Vancouver last week agreed that "the current global protection system is broken: responsibility is not shared and the vast majority of refugees are not meaningfully protected."

The group called on governments to reject the UN's current proposal. In their final statement, the experts agreed that a serious global compact requires: 1) substantial innovation in institutional capacity; 2) incentives for rights-respecting conduct by states and other key actors; 3) clear roles not just for states proximate to refugee flows, but also for states outside the region; and 4) hard limits on the amount of time that a refugee can be expected to wait for a durable solution.

Co-convener James Hathaway, professor at the University of Michigan Law School, praised the expert group for its courage.

"For far too long, academic and other experts have deferred to the UN refugee agency, assuming that it would seize opportunities that advance refugee rights in a manner that treats host states fairly," he said. "Yet here we are at a moment of unprecedented global determination to address the breakdown in the protection system, and all we're offered are pious pronouncements. If we do not take decisive action now, the world will
continue to suffer the consequences — refugees risking their lives to reach safety, and states punished when they keep their doors open to desperate people."

Call to Action: http://myumi.ch/J9jD1