

Report of an Expert Workshop on
Understanding Refugee Law as Shared Responsibility
(‘The Vancouver Principles’)

Convened by the University of British Columbia in collaboration with the
University of Michigan’s Program in Refugee and Asylum Law
Vancouver, Canada
July 20-22, 2016

The Workshop proceeded on the basis of the following shared understandings:

- The current global system for refugee protection is broken: responsibility is not shared and the vast majority of refugees are not meaningfully protected. There is a moral and practical imperative for change.
- There is no need to renegotiate the Refugee Convention as, properly interpreted, it offers a robust roadmap for protection and solutions. It is the core from which to build.
- Refugee responsibility sharing must be stable in its elements and flexible enough to respond to particular crises.
- Allocating refugee protection burdens and responsibilities based upon accidents of geography is neither sustainable nor ethical.
- Refugee protection must be equally attentive to the needs of all refugees in all places.
- Access to refugee protection must ensure the dignity of refugees.
- The renewal of refugee protection must be conceived in a way that values both refugee autonomy and the legitimate interests of the communities that receive them.

We Agreed:

1. The current draft proposal for a Global Compact on Responsibility Sharing requires clear principles and mechanisms for a meaningful global system of shared responsibility.
2. A new approach should move towards a generalized and comprehensive model of global shared responsibility, rather than an approach that is simply episodic and ad hoc.
3. Apart from the common duty of all states to enable refugees to have access to international protection, different states may assume different roles in providing protection and solutions.
4. Both the allocation of roles between states and the distribution of refugees as among states might usefully benefit from preference matching systems.
5. Protection which enables refugee self-reliance and respects socio-economic rights is dignified for refugees and holds the promise of reinvigorating durable solutions.
6. A meaningful system of global responsibility sharing will require 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.

7. Responsibility sharing must be accompanied by a system of fiscal burden sharing sufficient to make the granting of asylum by poorer countries viable, and to foster initiatives that link refugees to their host communities.

We recommend the establishment of a working group to develop and refine these principles as part of the follow-up to the September 19th High-Level Meeting, convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations.

These conclusions reflect the consensus of the participants, each of whom was present in their personal capacity.

The participants included: Alexander Betts (Refugees Studies Centre, University of Oxford); Sarita Bhatla (Refugees Affairs Branch, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada); Jennifer Bond (Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa); Catherine Dauvergne (Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia); Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Lund University); James C Hathaway (University of Michigan Law School); Will Jones (Refugees Studies Centre, University of Oxford); Audrey Macklin (Faculty of Law, University of Toronto); David Petrasek (Centre for International Policy Studies, University of Ottawa); Hillel Rapoport (Paris School of Economics, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne); Peter Showler (former Chairperson, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada)

Reported by:



Catherine Dauvergne
Dean, Allard School of Law
University of British Columbia



James C Hathaway
Director, Program in Refugee and Asylum Law
University of Michigan

This workshop was generously supported by:



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Allard Prize
FOR INTERNATIONAL INTEGRITY