

**UNHCR ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
27 – 29 JUNE 2018**

International Conference Center Geneva

DISCUSSION PAPER

Session title: **Rights and Resilience: Protecting people displaced in the context of climate change and disaster**

Date: Friday 29 June

Time/Room: 12h30 – 14h00 – Room 4

Background

- Disasters and the adverse effects of climate change are contemporary drivers of internal and cross-border displacement. Each year over 24.5 million people are forced to move in the context of sudden onset disasters, the additional number for slow onset disasters is still unknown. Scientists agree that the increased intensity and frequency of climate-related natural hazards, in combination with other factors, will increase displacement in the future.
- Disasters and climate change impacts can also act as a threat multiplier – the binary between disaster and conflict displacement is not congruent with reality – many situations where conflict and disaster are mixed. In some circumstances, people displaced across borders in these contexts may fall within the definition of a 'refugee' under international or regional instruments.¹ Moreover, many people who have already been displaced by conflict and violence can be forced to move again in times of disaster or in search of habitable living areas, and refugees and internally displaced people are often amongst those most vulnerable to disasters and climate change. Displaced people's ability to return in a sustainable way to places of origin may also be limited by climate change impacts.

¹ There may be circumstances where people displaced across a border in the context of climate change/disaster may fall within the definition of a 'refugee' in the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees or within regional refugee definitions (such that in the 1969 OAU Convention or the 1984 Cartagena Declaration) where people are compelled to seek refuge as a result of events seriously disturbing public order in part or whole of their countries of origin. In April 2017, UNHCR issued "Legal considerations on refugee protection for people fleeing conflict and famine affected countries", which reaffirms the relevance and analyses the applicability of refugee definitions under international and regional instruments.

- Certain regions of the world are disproportionately exposed to climate change impacts, and when combined with other social, economic and political conditions, are already hotspots for displacement in the context of disasters.
- High mountainous regions, such as the Hindu-Kush Himalayas, experience climate change impacts greater than those observed in the adjacent lowlands. Actual and potential changes in climatic parameters can have strong impacts resulting in a change in the snowline, duration of snow cover, an increase in cryogenic hazards such as avalanches and glacier recession. These include direct effects of the changes on water resources and hydropower generation, which in turn greatly impact the well-being and livelihoods of mountain human habitation, in some cases leading to displacement and other forms of human mobility.
- Coastal areas are also particularly vulnerable, such as in southern Bangladesh. In these areas, sea level rise, and related hazards of saline intrusion and coastal erosion, can render land uninhabitable or unfertile for crop production. In the absence of a sustainable source of livelihoods or safe place to reside, many people are forced to flee their homes, including those who have already fled for other reasons such as Rohingya Refugees. For those living in coastal areas, every centimeter of sea level rise can make a huge difference. Finally, the Horn of Africa is another hotspot for the interactions between slow onset impacts of climate change such as drought and desertification with human mobility. Circumstances are particularly dire for communities simultaneously experiencing drought, severe food insecurity, and conflict, which together can interact as root causes for internal and cross border displacement.
- With UNHCR's and NGO's commitments to the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) in the follow up to Nansen Initiative, to the Task Force on Displacement of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and to the implementation of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, UNHCR and partners continue to address the protection dimensions of climate change and disaster challenges – from dual normative and operational perspectives.
- In follow up to the food for thought session on Climate Change and Displacement at 2017 NGO Consultations, this 2018 session will focus on the theme of "Putting People First" in all measures to avert or to address protection needs of people displaced by disasters and climate change impacts, including those already displaced for other reasons. This involves ensuring that people displaced by disasters and climate change "find protection from harm; live peacefully; learn, work and flourish as contributing members of the communities where they live; and find longer term solutions that enable them to build a secure future".

- Disaster and climate change impacts do not affect populations in homogeneous ways. Behind each statistic of persons are displaced in disaster contexts, are individuals – women, children, older people, people with disabilities, indigenous people, members of marginalized groups. Putting people first equally involves recognizing this diversity. This ‘food for thought’ event will showcase how specific members of populations displaced by effects of disasters and climate change have disproportionate vulnerabilities, but equally capabilities as agents of change.
- Measures to avert and address displacement in the context of climate change and disaster also links to the theme of ‘new ways of working’, as it requires the international community to think on time horizons beyond the short term humanitarian crisis approach, and also requires agencies like UNHCR to partner with new types of organizations and across thematic silos, including with artists.
- The panel will be moderated by Mr. Atle Solberg of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. Introductory remarks will be given by Ms. Madeline Garlick of UNHCR. Speakers will include: Ms. Nina M Birkeland of NRC, Mr. Reza Chowdhary of COAST BD, Ms. Kristen Hite of Oxfam, and Mr. Gopal Krishna Siwakoti of INHURED. Ms. Chirine El Labane of the Platform on Disaster Displacement will be invited to provide short remarks as a special commentator.

Objectives of the session:

- This session first aims to raise awareness about displacement in the context of climate change and disasters in diverse regional contexts, and emphasize the importance of mainstreaming this issue with coherent messaging across many parallel arenas of policy and practice.
- The session provides an opportunity to share experiences of concrete ways that UNCHR and partners can better integrate considerations of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into their ongoing responses to displaced persons and in the future.
- It will help to understand how communities may be better taken into account and contribute to resilience in climate change and disaster contexts through exchange on good practices.
- The session further aims to highlight protection considerations and international/regional instruments applicable to people displaced internally and across borders in the context of climate change/disaster.

Desired outcomes of the session:

- This session will aim to identify and aggregate 'good practices' of ways that UNCHR and partners can concretely integrate considerations about climate change and disasters into their responses in the future. This includes exploring how protection of the environment is integral to the protection of people, and how resilience is an integral concept to both.
- This session will further underscore the need for 'new ways of working' on climate change and disaster displacement issues for UNHCR and partners, including recognition of the important role of diverse members of local communities, and role of creative and artistic responses.

Methodology:

- The session will take the form of a panel of speakers for 45-50 minutes, with 8 minutes allocated for each of the four presentations, and 5 minutes each for the moderator, introductory remarks, and the special commentator on the art project.
- This will be followed by a question and answer session for 30 minutes, to foster lively discussion and direct exchange with participants.
- Finally, there will be 10 minutes allotted for final interventions from speakers and final remarks from the moderator.

Throughout the session, short video works from *HOLOSCENES* (created by Early Morning Opera, conceived and directed by Lars Jan, and produced by Mapp International Productions) will be screened as part of the collaborative art project, *DISPLACEMENT: Uncertain Journeys*. *DISPLACEMENT* aims to amplify and contribute to the work of the Platform on Disaster Displacement through a cultural programme that gathers and cultivates creative and artistic responses to the millions of people displaced each year around the world by the impacts of disasters and climate change. To learn more, visit www.displacementjourneys.org/about/the-project/