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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges 2018:  
"Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities"**

18 & 19 December 2018

**Thematic Session 2: Urban conflict and violence**

**Summary**

Global urbanization trends benefit populations but can create additional pressure, resulting in urban environments marked by tensions and a prevalence of violence. Particular attention needs to be given to urban responses to displacement, not least given that more than half of the world's refugee population lives in cities today. Challenges faced in urban environments today are qualitatively different to those seen previously; the urbanization of both conflict and displacement can further increase existing challenges. The different approaches that seek to address urban displacement and urban conflict respectively need to be combined in order to effectively address what are often overlapping issues. All participants highlighted the importance of recognizing individual needs and responding to them and adjusting strategies to local contexts.

Participants also highlighted the importance of considering urban displacement not simply as a burden, but as an asset. In this sense, inclusive mid- to long-term planning could facilitate the ability of displaced persons to contribute to the socio-economic growth and participate in the development of urban environments. Such approaches are often more efficient for local administrations as well.

**1. Data and evidence are key to ensuring effective programming in urban areas**

Evidence-based analysis of conflict in urban areas is key to ensuring that humanitarian and development responses adequately address the needs of the displaced and host communities. Such analysis should be based on a comprehensive analysis of the various factors contributing to urban conflict and violence, as well as potential vulnerabilities that may be experienced by displaced individuals in urban contexts. Gender and sexual identity was highlighted by participants in the context of working with internally displaced women in Honduras, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI) asylum-seekers in Costa Rica.

**2. Partnerships and meaningful exchanges of experience are important**

Examples from Central and South America, as well as the Middle East, highlighted that partnerships, and the meaningful engagement with networks of relevant actors can be important in ensuring that comprehensive support for refugees, displaced and/or stateless persons is initiated. Such engagement can connect sub-national actors to global movements, enabling them to share, grow and learn through exchanges of experience and good practices.

Participants highlighted the importance of engaging directly with the displaced and the host communities themselves in shaping responses to conflict and violence in urban environments. In addition, the role of community leaders in leading local stabilization and peacebuilding efforts and building trust with local communities was highlighted.

**3. Respect for IHL and the establishment of legal frameworks assist local and municipal actors in their response**

Respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law is particularly important in the context of urban conflict and violence. The use of explosive weapons of war in populated areas and explosive remnants of war, personal mines and booby traps can have a devastating effect on civilian populations. Examples from eastern Ghouta in Syria and Mosul in Iraq were highlighted during the discussions.



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Participants also highlighted separately that legal frameworks provide local, municipal and national actors with a framework for engagement, noting in particular the need for national legislation for internally displaced persons in Nigeria. The absence of such frameworks was perceived as detrimental to ensuring coordinated and rights-based responses to displacement in urban areas.