

Reference Paper for the 70th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

Internal Displacement, UNHCR and the International Community

Samuel Cheung, Chief, Internal Displacement Section, Division of International Protection, UNHCR

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Abstract:

This paper provides a historical overview of protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, beginning from its early practice and normative development, in which UNHCR played a central role, to the modern context with its international response architecture and multiple stakeholders spanning the fields of humanitarian, development and peace. Over time, the drivers of displacement have evolved considerably, as has our collective understanding of the needs of displacement-affected populations and the requirements to effectively meet those needs. These factors, combined with the challenges particular to responding to situations of internal displacement, have often prompted a reckoning by the international community, resulting in normative and structural shifts that have had implications on notions of sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, the meaning of protection, as well as humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. Efforts by the international community since the 1990s to strengthen and enhance protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, are useful in providing lessons to be learned regarding gaps in humanitarian assistance, and the fundamental questions of committing institutional resources and accountability. Looking to the future, this paper considers the gains that have been achieved in the norms and practices of providing protection and assistance to IDPs, including on protection and solutions, as well as future directions for international responses.

Introduction

While less recognized, the phenomenon of people being displaced internally is as old as that of refugees fleeing persecution to seek asylum elsewhere – and perhaps older, given that internal displacement represents part, albeit often earlier and less obvious, of a continuum for people forced to flee their homes due to the consequences of war and persecution.

On the other hand, the practice and norm of international actors extending protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) is a much more recent phenomenon that does not enjoy as ancient roots as does the concept of asylum. Until the 1990s, the term ‘internal displacement’ barely merited mention in its own right. The term was first used around the time of negotiating the 1951 Refugee Convention – employed then not to include, but rather to exclude the internally displaced as persons who presented ‘separate problems’ from refugees and should not be assisted on the same terms. Later, and more positively, the term would be used by the United Nations General Assembly and Secretary-General, when they began to request that the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) extend its assistance further, over and above what it was doing for refugees. In this way, the history behind the international community’s response to internal displacement is inextricably linked to that of refugees, as well as how, and to what extent, certain institutions, especially UNHCR in the early years, would decide to engage in such situations.

As a term, ‘internally displaced person’ brings together the concept of persons who flee for many reasons similar to refugees,¹ with the fact that they have not crossed an international boundary, and therefore principles of state sovereignty still apply. As a term, it is not pretty. It has been described as clumsy, clinical, bureaucratic and obfuscating the actual problem with the need for (and limitations of) international responses.² Not surprisingly, internal displacement as a global phenomenon has also not been systematically tracked until recently, with no consistent figures until the 1970s, and even those often limited to the numbers assisted by certain institutions, as opposed to a comprehensive picture. This is despite the fact that the number of IDPs globally has typically been twice the number of refugees since modern recording began.

Despite these challenges, the issue of internal displacement has today become widely recognized as a global challenge, involving an international response architecture and multiple stakeholders who span the fields of humanitarian, development and peace. And as it has not always the case, providing protection and assistance for IDPs has also now become affirmed as a globally accepted practice and norm for the international community, and institutions such as UNHCR have played a central role in establishing this norm, although not without institutional hesitation. Growing from somewhat clumsy, conceptual roots as a poorer sister to refugees, the phenomenon of internal displacement has, over time, helped prompt serious reckonings by the international community, resulting in normative and structural shifts with respect to notions of sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, the meaning of protection and solutions, and not least on humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

Looking forward, while the concept of internal displacement may always be a bitter reminder of the limits of international action to fully address challenges to peace and security, efforts to strengthen and enhance collective responses to internal displacement can still do well to learn lessons from the past, including how such norms have emerged and institutional structures shifted, understandings of protection and solutions evolved, and move forward in addressing lingering questions of political commitment and institutional will, resources and accountability.

Early involvement and the emerging practice

¹ While modeled from the refugee concept, the definition of internally displaced persons eventually articulated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement includes some important and broader differences, described further below.

² Orchard P. (2019) *Protecting the Internally Displaced: Rhetoric and Reality*, Routledge.

From its very beginning, the emergence of internal displacement as a concept and how the international community would eventually respond has been inextricably linked to early developments related to refugee protection. In its first uses, the term ‘internal displacement’ itself was meant to distinguish a category separate from those refugees receiving assistance following World War II and, later as argued by France and the United States, for example, to set the limits for those who should be included in the 1951 Refugee Convention and who should not (internally displaced persons) -- as “no question of protection of the persons concerned was involved.”³

As became apparent within years of the signing of the 1951 Convention, however, other displaced populations beyond refugees in Europe, were equally calling for international responses. Early on, UNHCR was among the first to recognize the necessity to address people displaced within their own countries in order to resolve refugee problems. With the Algerian crisis in 1957, UNHCR representatives visited millions who were internally displaced and living in camps in Algeria, after which then-High Commissioner Felix Schnyder explained to the Secretary-General his extending the agency’s support beyond purely refugees: “the fate of the repatriated ex-refugees can no longer be dissociated from that of the Algerian population as a whole without seriously endangering the country’s social stability.”⁴

In the decade that followed, international responses to displacement, as seen primarily in the work of UNHCR, underwent a progressive enlargement, which reflected, in the words of then-High Commissioner Schnyder, UNHCR’s need “to gear its activities to the changing world.”⁵ This enlargement started from the fact that the 1951 Convention, the only international framework addressing displacement at the time, applied only to World War II refugees in Europe, and therefore entailed expanding activities to Africa and Asia, among others, and then also toward the internally displaced. This progressive expansion, however, was and continues to be contoured by the fact that UNHCR’s governing statute predicated its capacity to take on additional activities to those “determined by the General Assembly within the limits of available resources.”⁶ With that, based on its good offices and requests of states, the Secretary-General and the United Nations General Assembly, UNHCR began gradually expanding from strictly European refugees, to protection and assistance for refugees outside Europe,⁷ formalized through adoption of the 1967 Protocol, and then eventually to IDPs.

For UNHCR, the question of whether to assist IDPs was less about their needs and more about authorization, particularly from the General Assembly, in order to find assurance both that UNHCR was statutorily mandated to act, and that such intervention would be an acceptable, non-political act, particularly as Cold War dynamics were building. For example, in 1966, High Commissioner Sadruddin Agha Khan was approached by the United States regarding potential assistance for the internally displaced in a deeply divided conflict in Vietnam. The High Commissioner declined the request, citing need for General Assembly authorization that such involvement would be non-political.⁸ Other humanitarian organizations, while not focused on displacement specifically, faced similar dynamics in the provision of relief assistance. Notably, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in its role as guardian of international humanitarian law, faced increasing challenges in providing

³ UN GAOR, 4th Sess., Plenary (1949), in Phuong C. (2004), *International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, Cambridge University Press, 23.

⁴ Letter from F. Schnyder to U Thant, 3 Oct. 1962, 13/1/31 ALG, F/HCR 11.1, in UNHCR (2000), *The State of the World’s Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, Chapter 2

⁵ Statement by Mr. Felix Schnyder, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, Seventh Session, Geneva, 14 May 1962

⁶ GA Res. 428(V), Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (14 December 1950)

⁷ See GA Res. 1167 (XII), Chinese refugees in Hong Kong (26 November 1957); 1388 (XIV), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (20 November 1959); 1499 (XV), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (5 December 1960), Addendum to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, A/4771/Rev.1 (1 January 1962);

⁸ Loescher G. (2001) *UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path*, Oxford, p. 144

humanitarian assistance during civil conflict in the context of colonial wars of liberation and Cold War proxies.

Only a few years later, the authorization UNHCR sought would come. At the onset of the Bangladesh War in 1971, UNHCR was formally requested by the General Assembly to provide assistance not only to refugees, but the people of East Pakistan, and was requested again at the end of the First Sudanese Civil War in 1972, to assist refugees and people uprooted within Southern Sudan following a request from the President of Sudan subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly.⁹ These represented the continuation of a consistent trend by the General Assembly in requesting UNHCR to extend its activities, and this time to IDPs.

Throughout the 1970s, these requests from the General Assembly to UNHCR became more common, and began to establish the common understanding, confirmed by international practice, that internally displaced populations needed assistance, and most frequently involving UNHCR for its “particular expertise and experience.”¹⁰ At the request of or subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly, Secretary-General and governments, UNHCR went on to engage in several other situations of internal displacement, including in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique in 1974, Vietnam and Laos in Southeast Asia in 1975 and Ethiopia and Uganda in Eastern and the Horn of Africa in 1979.¹¹ In certain cases, such as Cyprus in 1974, UNHCR was designated to coordinate all United Nations relief assistance to the affected population, including IDPs.¹² In other cases, such relief was envisioned for natural disasters, as outlined in a 1978 memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO). In recognition of the growing importance of internal displacement, beginning in 1975 the Economic and Social Council and General Assembly both began referencing displaced persons along with refugees in resolutions regarding UNHCR.¹³ Then-High Commissioner Sadruddin Aga Khan remarked:

“[T]his is yet another example of the widening of UNHCR’s terms of reference... It shows that when facing the problem of displaced persons who clearly are not refugees in the legal sense of the word ... it is to UNHCR that the Secretary-General and governments tend to turn for assistance.”¹⁴

By 1979, displaced persons had become prominent enough that the General Assembly requested that UNHCR promote “durable and speedy solutions for refugees *and displaced persons* (emphasis added) wherever they occur.”¹⁵

Following a decade of being the General Assembly’s almost exclusive go-to on internal displacement, however, UNHCR began to step back in the 1980s. Conflict dynamics were shifting toward internal armed conflict, government refugee policies more frequently preferred containment, and forced displacement overall began to increase. Engagement with IDPs was also becoming increasingly more complex than pure relief assistance, such as in Nicaragua and Sri Lanka in the late 1980s, where it

⁹ See GA Res. 2790 (XXVI) United Nations assistance to East Pakistan refugees through the United Nations focal point and United Nations humanitarian assistance in East Pakistan (6 December 1971); ECOSOC Res. 1705 [LIII], Assistance to southern Sudanese refugees returning from abroad (27 July 1972); See also ECOSOC Res. 1655 [LII], Assistance in the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Sudanese refugees (1 June 1972)

¹⁰ GA Res. 2956 (XXVII), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (12 Dec 1972)

¹¹ See GA Res. 3271 (XXIX), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (10 December 1974); GA Res. 3455 (XXX), Humanitarian assistance to the Indo-Chinese displaced persons (9 December 1975); GA Res. 26 (XXXIII), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (29 November 1978).

¹² See SC Res. 361 (1974); GA Res. 3212 (XXIX), 1 November 1974.

¹³ GA Res. 3454 (XXX), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (9 December 1975). GA Res. 60 (XXXIV), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (29 November 1979); ECOSOC Res. 2011 (LXI), Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (2 Aug. 1976)

¹⁴ Statement by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to UNHCR headquarters staff, 30 January 1975

¹⁵ GA Res. 60 (XXXIV)

involved monitoring security following peace agreements and protection following outbreaks in fighting. While still assisting IDPs in Ethiopia, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Chad¹⁶ and providing emergency relief for those uprooted in Lebanon in 1982, for UNHCR there were more situations where it decided not to engage. In light of limited resources available and increasingly complex challenges, then-High Commissioner Poul Hoertling voiced his concerns over the international community “empirically and progressively assign[ing] new tasks to UNHCR in successive resolutions” and communicated his position to decline UNHCR’s involvement in certain situations of internal displacement, especially in countries where it had no refugee program, and even more so regarding natural disasters.¹⁷

After having led the charge in recognizing the need to provide protection and assistance for IDPs and helping establish this practice as an international norm through responsive action,¹⁸ the General Assembly’s broad directives for UNHCR to find solutions for all displaced persons were an increasingly tall order, and rather than accept responsibility that it should shoulder this alone, UNHCR instead joined calls that others help fill the gaps. ICRC was among those recognizing the response gaps for the internally displaced, when it committed in 1981 to intervene for protected persons under international humanitarian law, “especially when they cannot, in fact, benefit from any other protection or assistance, as in some cases of IDPs.”¹⁹ With the international response more and more falling short, an independent report in 1986 by the now former High Commissioner Sadraddin Aga Khan and Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan, highlighted the need for clarity over responsibility and coordination, pointing out that no single United Nations agency was mandated to protect IDPs.²⁰ Similarly, non-governmental organizations such as Friends World Committee for Consultation, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Refugee Policy Group, began concerted advocacy, as did regional organizations in Africa and the Americas,²¹ to raise awareness of gaps in protection and assistance for internally displaced populations.

Building an international response framework in the 1990s

By the 1990s, the number of IDPs globally had reached more than 20 million, and the early part of the decade became a watershed period, later triggering the much-needed development of a human rights-based framework and institutional response mechanisms for addressing internal displacement. During this time, post-Cold War dynamics, numerous complex emergencies and the emergence of humanitarian intervention were redefining how international actors responded to displacement. Perhaps most importantly, the concept of humanitarian intervention emerged as a major counterweight to national sovereignty, notably in northern Iraq when the situation there, including the protection and assistance needs of IDPs, were deemed to threaten international peace and security such as to justify military and non-military action under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.²² Then-Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s Agenda for Peace, shared in 1992, also brought forward protection of civilians, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as key international issues for the time.

Operationally, the former Yugoslavia became one of the largest relief initiatives ever undertaken and helped set the precedent for international organizations to increasingly provide assistance directly to

¹⁶ Report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the Work of Its Thirty-Second Session, U.N. Document A/AC.96/601 (1981)

¹⁷ Addendum to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” A/36/12/Add.

¹⁸ Orchard, *Protecting the Internally Displaced*, 3.

¹⁹ Resolution XXI, adopted at the 24th International Conference of the Red Cross, Manila 1981, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Red Cross aid to refugees, 1981.

²⁰ Aga Khan S. and Bin Talal H. (1986) *Refugees: The Dynamics of Displacement: A Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues*

²¹ See plans of action following the Organization of African Unity (OAU) International Conference on the plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa (SARRED) in 1988 and the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) in 1989, both of which highlighted the gaps for internally displaced persons.

²² SC Res. 688 (5 April 1991)

people in the midst of and affected by active conflicts, including for IDPs. As the number of peacekeeping missions increased significantly, this new type of humanitarian engagement also required closer involvement with political and peacekeeping mandates, which also at times covered IDPs, such as in Afghanistan and Somalia. Humanitarian issues frequently reached the Security Council agenda, including through resolutions on humanitarian access and protection of civilians, for example in East Timor, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Against this background of bolder humanitarian interventions and greater awareness of the gaps for IDPs, the General Assembly began in 1991 issuing regular resolutions on internal displacement, human rights and mass exodus.²³ This signaled a shift from making specific requests to respond to certain situations of internal displacement, mostly directed to UNHCR, to a broader call directed to all United Nations organs, governments, intergovernmental and humanitarian organizations.

At the same time, in response to continued calls for better mechanisms to respond to the needs of IDPs, the Secretary-General in 1992 appointed a Special Representative on IDPs.²⁴ At the outset, the Special Representative was to analyze the issue and recommend institutional responses, which included consideration of proposals by some member states and agencies “for the United Nations either to explicitly mandate UNHCR [to include IDPs] or set up an equivalent body to cater more specifically to the needs of IDPs.”²⁵ Whereas UNHCR was typically deemed “the institution best equipped legally and operationally to deal with the internally displaced,” then-High Commissioner Sadako Ogata pointed out that “the magnitude of the problem far exceeds the capacity and resources of UNHCR or any other single agency – [the needs] span the entire range of United Nations agencies - from emergency assistance to human rights protection to development aid.”²⁶ Without the resources to establish or fund a single agency on displacement, the Special Representative recommended to designate a focal point within the United Nations system on IDPs, with a view toward incremental progress monitored through annual reports to the Commission on Human Rights.²⁷

While unable to muster a consensus at the time for major institutional reform to address internal displacement, the Special Representative’s work developing the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement²⁸ did establish an important foundation for how organizations and states engage with internal displacement today. Developed through broad-based consultations led by the Special Representative and finalized in 1998, the Guiding Principles are drawn from international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as international refugee law by analogy, including UNHCR Executive Committee Decisions which were drawn from for inspiration.²⁹ As such, in addition to providing the first definition of IDPs, they outline the standard of rights and guarantees applicable in protecting people from forced displacement, protection and assistance during internal displacement and achieving durable solutions.³⁰ While not a binding legal instrument, they were affirmed by the General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as regional bodies and states, and have since been widely

²³ See GA Res. 127 (XLVI), Human rights and mass exoduses (17 December 1991); GA Res. 135 (XLVIII), Internally displaced persons (18 February 1994).

²⁴ ECOSOC Dec. 1992/243 (20 July 1992)

²⁵ Commission on Human Rights, “Comprehensive Study on the Human Rights Issues Related to Internally Displaced Persons,” E/CN.4/1993/35, 21 Jan. 1993, 33. There were also some suggestions that the ICRC’s mandate be extended to include internally displaced persons, whether due to internal strife and not armed conflict.

²⁶ UNHCR (1996) ‘Interview: Dr. Francis M. Deng, advocate for the uprooted’, *Refugees Magazine Issue 103*

²⁷ Commission on Human Rights, “Comprehensive Study on the Human Rights Issues Related to Internally Displaced Persons,” E/CN.4/1993/35, 21 Jan. 1993, 33

²⁸ Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39, Addendum: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 11 February 1998

²⁹ See Principle 10 prohibiting attacks against settlements or camps of internally displaced person and UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 48 or Principle 17 on family unity and UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion 107(LVIII), among other examples

³⁰ Kalin W. (2008) *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: Annotations*, American Society of Internal Law and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

promoted, disseminated and applied through legislation and policies on internal displacement, regionally and nationally.

While the Special Representative was looking at the issue of internal displacement, other parts of the United Nations had also resolved to strengthen humanitarian emergency assistance in general. In 1992, in addition to restating guiding principles on the importance of humanitarian assistance as a matter of international concern while still respecting sovereignty, the United Nations attempted to go further than it had before (such as with UNDRO) in enhancing coordination, cooperation and leadership in humanitarian emergencies. In doing so, it established new structures and positions, including the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as well as funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Relief Fund.³¹ This architecture for humanitarian emergencies, which itself underwent frequent reform in the following years, would become a major forum for efforts of the Special Representative on IDPs, as a member of the IASC, as well as for policies and procedures to clarify responsibilities among IASC members and comprehensive responses to internal displacement at global and field levels.

Institutional commitments and the case of UNHCR

In the span of a few decades, UNHCR had gone from being a key actor who helped establish that protecting and assisting IDPs is a globally accepted practice and norm -- even if not articulated in a binding international convention such as for refugees -- to staking a position, despite some saying it was the agency most legally and operationally equipped, that the problem was beyond the capacity of any single agency and required a multi-stakeholder response. How UNHCR arrived at this position regarding its institutional commitment, and how it maintained that position following internal self-reflection, is a useful case study, particularly as suggestions continue to emerge periodically recommending that a single agency be mandated for internal displacement.

Unlike refugee situations, where UNHCR's mandate requires that it provide international protection and seek permanent solutions worldwide, UNHCR's work on internal displacement is undertaken on the basis of paragraph 9 of its Statute, which foresees UNHCR engaging in "additional activities... as the General Assembly may determine, within the limits of available resources." As such, its internal decision-making has typically reflected a tension between two questions: first, to what degree has the General Assembly determined that UNHCR should engage in internal displacement; and second, in view of limited resources, what type of institutional commitment would be required?

From the 1970s until the end of the 1980s, UNHCR's decisions whether to engage in internal displacement were based on a consistent, if ad hoc, approach of responding to specific requests from the General Assembly, Secretary-General and governments themselves. Through the 1970s, these requests continued to the extent that displaced persons were frequently mentioned alongside refugees in resolutions regarding UNHCR. However, they provided no specifics regarding how much institutional (and financial) commitment was required. Internal discussions on this matter at UNHCR began in 1989³² with a consideration of its mandate and then in 1991-92, which concluded:

"The evolution of UNHCR's role ... has demonstrated that the mandate is resilient enough to allow, or indeed require, adaptation by UNHCR to new, unprecedented challenges through new approaches, including in the areas-of prevention and in-country protection. The Office should continue to seek specific endorsement from the Secretary-General or General Assembly where these activities involve a significant commitment of human, financial and material resources...

³¹ General Assembly Resolution 46/182, Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations (19 December 1991)

³² Report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection to the Forty Second Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, EC/SCP/64 (12 August 1991), established in 1989 and tasked to examine protection and solutions in a coherent and comprehensive manner, bearing in mind the mandate of the High Commissioner.

[I]t is clear, with protection at the core of UNHCR's mandate, displacement, coupled with the need for protection, is the basis of UNHCR's competence for these groups... In this context, UNHCR should indicate its willingness to extend its humanitarian expertise to IDPs, on a case-by-case basis, in response to requests from the Secretary-General or General Assembly.”³³

The key question was, in light of (or despite) the General Assembly’s having given a broad directive for UNHCR to assist displaced persons ‘wherever they occur,’ to what degree should it make a “significant commitment of human, financial and material resources” for IDPs in comparison to refugees? On this, the working group advised UNHCR to seek specific endorsement from the Secretary-General or General Assembly.

At the end of 1992, the General Assembly acknowledged, for the first time, IDPs as part of UNHCR’s activities in its annual resolution on the work of the office of UNHCR, known as the omnibus resolution, as well as in its resolution on continuation of the office.³⁴ The text of the resolution is encouraging, broad and open, “welcom[ing] UNHCR’s efforts on the basis of specific requests from the Secretary-General or competent United Nations organs with the consent of the state, to undertake activities in favour of IDPs, taking into account the complementarities of mandates and expertise of other relevant organizations.”³⁵ It does not address the issue of committing institutional resources. In the following year, the UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 71 reiterated language from the 1992 omnibus resolution, but added for emphasis, “in consideration of the availability of sufficient resources.”

Sufficiency of resources has continued to guide almost all subsequent internal policies at UNHCR on whether to engage in situations of internal displacement. Under its first policy in 1993, decisions to engage were based on a case-by-case evaluation of the ‘links’ with refugee operations. UNHCR would give favorable consideration to assuming primary responsibility for international action on behalf of IDPs where there was a link between internal displacement and refugees, including in terms of geographic areas, in the present or in future return areas, where the needs of refugees and IDPs were similar in countries of asylum, or where there are cross-border components, either in terms of present or future population movements or operational advantages.³⁶

Subsequent internal policy formulations in 1997 and 2000 continued a case-by-case approach, while adding more criteria for consideration. The result is a near exhaustive list: state consent, access, staff security, adequate resources and capacity, relevance of UNHCR’s expertise, respect for humanitarian principles, clear lines of responsibility and accountability, ability to intervene directly on protection, and requests from the Secretary-General or competent principal United Nations organ, among others.³⁷ In 2000, the refugee-link criteria was done away with, recognizing that “UNHCR’s interest in the internally displaced is provoked, not only by the risk or reality of a refugee outflow, but also by the ‘refugee-like’ nature of internal displacement calling for the Office’s particular expertise in protection and solutions.”

During this period, internal displacement for UNHCR was classified along with reintegration as a non-core activity. Under budgetary guidelines, donors were requested to consider funding secondarily to their contributions to refugee activities. However, in light of international attention on the issue, budgetary explanations were almost apologetic: “while of lesser priority, [non-core activities under

³³ In 1991, a Working Group on International Protection was set up by the Division of International Protection at the request of then-High Commissioner Sadaka Ogata to examine pressing protection issues and propose a broad policy framework. Note on International Protection, A/AC.96/799 (25 August 1992)

³⁴ GA Res. 105 (XLVII), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (16 December 1992); GA Res. 104 (XLVII), Continuation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (16 December 1992)

³⁵ GA Res. 105 (XLVII)

³⁶ See IOM/FOM/33/93, April 1993; Internally Displaced Persons: UNHCR’s Perspective (23 October 1995)

³⁷ IOM/87/97-FOM/91/97, 2 December 1997; Internally Displaced Persons: The Role of UNHCR (6 March 2000)

special operations and programs] may have particular importance, especially when there is a question of the forced internal displacement of persons.”³⁸

Under these policies, UNHCR’s engagement with situations of internal displacement gradually increased, although was far from comprehensive. Between 4 and 6 million out of more than 20 million estimated IDPs worldwide, benefited from UNHCR’s protection and assistance each year between 1993 and 2005. Major operations in which it was involved included the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Georgia, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sri Lanka for most of the decade, as well as Angola, Burundi, Tajikistan and others.

Humanitarian reform and re-commitment to IDPs

Despite the United Nations having established in the 1990s an architecture for humanitarian emergencies and the Special Representative on IDPs making progress on awareness raising, guidance and standards, the issue of institutional mechanisms to address internal displacement continued to remain unsolved. In his report on United Nations reform in 1997, Secretary-General Kofi Annan observed that “providing protection and assistance to IDPs continues to fall into the gap between the mandates of the various United Nations agencies.”³⁹

Between 1997 and 2006, and in response to serious criticism, the United Nations as a whole and IASC undertook numerous steps at humanitarian reform in order to improve predictability of engagement on both internal displacement and humanitarian emergencies. On internal displacement, these included designating the Emergency Relief Coordinator in 1998 as the focal point for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, establishing a senior network on internal displacement and the IASC tasking the Norwegian Refugee Council to establish an online database through the Global IDP Project.

While some member states and non-governmental organizations continued to advocate that a single agency such as UNHCR take formal responsibility for IDPs,⁴⁰ the United Nations pursued collaborative approaches, clarifying roles and responsibilities at the country level and developing response strategies and action plans as a means of responding to situations of internal displacement.⁴¹ Major gaps and needs for improvement still remained.⁴² Following a broad review of international humanitarian efforts, the IASC agreed in December 2005 to establish the ‘cluster leadership approach’ as an initiative for more effective and accountable humanitarian response through coordination, funding and leadership. In 2006, clusters were initially piloted in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Uganda and Somalia, and have remained one of the main features of humanitarian coordination until today.

UNHCR’s decisions regarding support for the cluster leadership approach came at the same time that the Secretary-General established a High-Level Panel on United Nations System-Wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, in which one of the recommendations was a strong rebuke:

“the role of UNHCR should be reviewed, to establish a clear mandate and to further strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations approach to addressing the needs of IDPs... UNHCR

³⁸ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, Fifty Second Session, UNHCR Annual Programme Budget, 4 September 2001, A/AC.96/950

³⁹ General Assembly, Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform, A/51/950 (14 October 1997), 186

⁴⁰ Report of the Special Representative on Internal Displacement, A/56/168 (2000); “Statement by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to the Security Council”, 13 January 2000; USUN Press Release #6 (00) of 13 January 2000 and; Statement by Dr. Mohammad N. Akhter, President & CEO, InterAction, September 16, 2005, in Kom D and Weizz T (2006) *Internal Displacement: Conceptualization and Its Consequences*, Routledge

⁴¹ Supplementary Guidance to HCs and/or RCs on their Responsibilities in Relation to Internally Displaced Persons (April 2000); Guidance Note on the Collaborative Approach in 2003

⁴² OCHA, IDP Response Matrix, IDP Unit (October 2002)

must reposition itself to provide protection and assistance for displaced people in need, regardless of whether they have crossed an international border.”⁴³

Amidst this imminent humanitarian reform, UNHCR consulted partners and members of its Executive Committee and developed a new internal displacement policy framework and implementation strategy. Under this policy, UNHCR committed to support the cluster approach in all new emergencies and countries with humanitarian coordinators, as well as collaborate in other longstanding situations of internal displacement. The 2007 policy was reinforced through establishment of an IDP Support Team and a temporary coordinator to oversee implementation of the corporate strategy.⁴⁴

With the introduction of the cluster approach, a revised IDP policy and the commitment of then High Commissioner Antonio Guterres to be “entirely committed to [internal displacement],”⁴⁵ the number of IDPs being assisted by UNHCR almost doubled between 2005 and 2006, from 6.6 million to 12.8 million, and climbed to about 15 million in 2010. At the same time, UNHCR’s policy still maintained refugees as first priority, stipulating that its role in situations of internal displacement should not detract from its mandated activities in relation to refugees or the fundamental right to seek asylum, and that it would seek to maximize the synergies and economies of scale that link the two functions. In natural disasters, it also committed to lend immediate support but not seek extensive or prolonged operational involvement. Language in UNHCR’s annual omnibus resolution was also updated, no longer making reference to specific requests from the Secretary-General or United Nations organs, and instead emphasizing inter-agency arrangements and not undermining its refugee mandate:

“Takes note of the current activities of the Office of the High Commissioner related to protection of and assistance to IDPs, including in the context of inter-agency arrangements in this field, emphasizes that such activities should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not undermine the mandate of the Office for refugees and the institution of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his dialogue with States on the role of his Office in this regard.”⁴⁶

While UNHCR engaged more consistently in situations of internal displacement through inter-agency arrangements, its refugee-first positioning and the absence of operational commitments, particularly financially, in its policy meant that there would inevitably be implementation gaps. In 2010, when UNHCR first began reporting its annual budgets by population group, IDPs represented 21.7% of the annual budget, compared to 71% for refugees. Since then, they have never reached the same level in terms of proportion of the annual budget, instead averaging approximately 15% (and 14.9% in 2019). While not directly addressing the issue of operational and financial commitments, the High Commissioner’s 2013 Dialogue on Protection identified ‘implementation gaps,’ and committed to another internal review of policy, as well as pointed to efforts at a review of protection within the IASC system.⁴⁷ Follow-on efforts included the issuance of operational guidelines in February 2016, which reinforced cluster coordination with operational engagement, introducing a programmatic IDP Footprint⁴⁸ and by strengthening country-level leadership with respect to the centrality of protection.⁴⁹

⁴³ General Assembly, Delivering as One, High-Level Panel on United Nations System-Wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment, A/61/583 (20 November 2006)

⁴⁴ UNHCR, Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy: UNHCR’s Role in Support of an Enhanced Humanitarian Response to Situations of Internal Displacement, 9 February 2007; See also, UNHCR, The Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and the Role of UNHCR, 27 February 2007

⁴⁵ Ten years of Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: achievements and future challenges: Keynote address by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Oslo, (16 October 2008)

⁴⁶ GA Res. 137 (LXI), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (25 January 2007)

⁴⁷ High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges: Protecting the Internally Displaced: Persisting Challenges and Fresh Thinking (20 December 2013)

⁴⁸ UNHCR, Operational Guidelines for UNHCR’s Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement (February 2016)

⁴⁹ Internal Note for UNHCR Representatives on Protection Leadership in Complex Emergencies

In 2016, High Commissioner Filippo Grandi commissioned an operational review which resulted in several detailed findings, including that senior managers continue to perceive that refugee programs need to be given priority and to deprioritize IDPs.⁵⁰ In 2019, UNHCR issued an updated IDP policy, replacing the previous one in 2007, and which reaffirms UNHCR's commitment to internal displacement, "as an integral aspect of operations worldwide." The updated policy "requires UNHCR to mobilize and deploy resources and capacities in support of its pledge to work in partnership with others to strengthen protection and secure solutions for IDPs."⁵¹ While marking a major shift in positioning, translating this 2019 policy into concrete operational and financial commitments will continue to be a critical factor for UNHCR to address its implementation gaps.

Contemporary challenges for internal displacement

At the end of 2019, global forced displacement had reached levels unprecedented in the modern era, and IDPs continued to represent the majority of this population.⁵² In recognition of the importance of the global challenge, the Secretary General established in late 2019 a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement to identify concrete recommendations on how to better prevent, respond and achieve solutions to the global internal displacement crisis. In addition to strengthening stakeholder capacities on preventing displacement and ensuring protection and assistance, as well as advancing collaboration across the nexus, the Panel's priorities include advancing participation and inclusion of IDPs, systematizing use of data and evidence, innovative financing and funding, including the private sector.⁵³ Together, many of these contemporary challenges continue to grapple with age old issues of protection and solutions, and highlight emerging challenges and opportunities on the horizon.

Protection

UNHCR, along with ICRC, are among the earliest organizations whose mandates are based on protection, each with regard to refugee law and humanitarian law, respectively. As is evident from conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur and Sri Lanka in the 2000s, to Syria, South Sudan and Yemen in the recent decade, applying these protection mandates in the context of internal displacement has arguably proven to be among the most challenging tasks, for reasons which go to the very definition of protection.

For UNHCR, its mandate has traditionally been defined based on refugees' need for international protection, triggered by the severing of state responsibility of the country of origin, underpinned by the standards outlined in the 1951 Convention, and put into action through a variety of means including advocacy for rights, lobbying states to become party to the 1951 Convention, legal intercessions with governments and local authorities, or providing relief assistance and other services as a means of protection.

While IDPs confront many of the same threats and problems as refugees, for legal and operational reasons, protection can often mean something different. Unlike refugees who cross borders and may benefit from a surrogate form of international protection in an asylum state, IDPs remain reliant on their own governments to uphold their rights, the same governments whose unwillingness or inability to uphold those rights may have led to their displacement. IDPs are also often close in proximity to ongoing conflicts, armed groups and combatants, making the practical provision of protection even more challenging. In many contexts, human rights violations are more widespread in situations of internal displacement. As such, protection for IDPs primarily emphasizes "practical protection interventions that safeguard the rights, security and welfare of the internally displaced."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Review of UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement: Final Report (September 2017)

⁵¹ Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement, UNHCR/HCP/2019/1 (September 2019)

⁵² UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019

⁵³ Terms of Reference, Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

⁵⁴ Feller E. (2006) 'UNHCR's Role in IDP protection: Opportunities and Challenges,' *Forced Migration Review*

Without a legally binding convention and often dependent on actors on the ground, early advocates for IDP protection pointed as early as 1991 to the integral relationship between protection and assistance, including the human rights ramifications of humanitarian assistance, a concept which could later be named protection mainstreaming, as well as calling for humanitarian organizations to shoulder a greater protection role to address human rights abuses and other protection issues, and also outlined measures to be taken by donor governments and the United Nations machinery.⁵⁵ Later in 1999, the IASC would develop a Policy Paper on Protection of IDPs, which reaffirmed protection as essential to effective humanitarian responses and the responsibility of all humanitarian and development agencies.

One of the main challenges to effective protection comes from the fact that it almost always requires collective efforts, as it is incredibly vast in scope. Another challenge comes from the fact that it can be closely wound up in notions of responsibility to protect. For good reasons, the common definition of protection, as spearheaded by ICRC and later adopted by the IASC, comprises “activities that aim to obtain full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.” However, without practical action, those principles will never be translated into effective protection on the ground⁵⁶ Over time, humanitarian protection has been an evolving practice of learning by doing, with early formulations such as protection by presence, learning from the experiences of agencies such as UNHCR and others in the former Yugoslavia.⁵⁷ On the other hand, protection outcomes can be perceived as the domain of the protection of civilians agenda of the Security Council, bringing to light the conceptual differences between different humanitarian and peacekeeping actors, and the challenge of bringing them together.

For these reasons, the sphere of protection continues to be one of the most complex before the international community, unanimously endorsed as a priority, but still creating an imposing puzzle to bringing together mandates, responsibilities and practice. Evaluations in 2004 and 2012 both found serious shortcomings in the United Nations’ response on protection, reinforcing calls that it must be a system-wide response from the outset. The 2004 evaluation found that “ten years after Rwanda, the United Nations had still not adopted the protection of civilians and the prevention of displacement as a core part of its mandate” and recommended integrating protection from high-level political advocacy to programming on the ground and across political, peacekeeping, human rights, humanitarian and development.⁵⁸ The response in Sri Lanka in 2009 also triggered an internal review on advancing accountability, recommending in 2012 a renewed vision of the United Nations’ most fundamental responsibilities, embedding of human rights into strategies and strengthening management of the whole-of-United Nations crisis response.⁵⁹

In response, the United Nations took several efforts to elevate the importance of protection across the system. In 2013, the Secretary-General launched a Human Rights Up Front Initiative aimed at helping the United Nations work more coherently on human rights across pillars, and in the same year the IASC Principals issued a statement committing to place protection at the center of humanitarian action.⁶⁰ Based on this IASC statement, a 2016 implementing policy was issued and collective protection outcomes were also made one of four mandatory terms of reference for all Humanitarian Country Teams.⁶¹ In 2020, the Secretary-General put forward a common agenda, aiming to reinvigorate multilateralism around key current and future challenges, in which many of these issues of protection

⁵⁵ Refugee Policy Group, Human Rights Protection for Internally Displaced Persons, 1991

⁵⁶ IASC, Protection of Internally Displaced Persons – Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper Series, No. 2, 2000.

⁵⁷ Overseas Development Institute (1999) *Protection in Practice: Field-Level Strategies for Protecting Civilians from Deliberate Harm*

⁵⁸ Bagshaw S. and Paul. D. (2004) *Protect or Neglect: Toward a More Effective United Nations Approach to the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

⁵⁹ Report of the Secretary-General’s Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka (November 2012)

⁶⁰ IASC, Statement on the Centrality of Protection (2013)

⁶¹ IASC, Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016); Standard Terms of Reference for Humanitarian Country Teams (February 2017)

for the internally displaced appear as familiar and contemporary challenges, echoing calls from 1991 for the entire humanitarian system to translate protection principles into practical actions for the internally displaced.

Solutions

The concept of durable solutions in internal displacement settings finds its origins in refugee concepts – that is, of restoring or maintaining the relationship between an individual and the state, and typically through voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement draw from these concepts, while acknowledging that it is much harder to determine when internal displacement ends, as compared to when refugees stop being refugees. This is due in part to the fact that being an IDP, while having many implications, does not confer a special international legal status.

In order to achieve such solutions to displacement, efforts have long been made to promote a paradigm shift recognizing displacement as not only a humanitarian concern, but also development and peacebuilding.⁶² Historically, some of the earliest efforts to bridge the gaps between relief and development for IDPs began through their inclusion in the iterations of the refugee aid and development approach, applied in Africa and the Americas throughout the 1980s.⁶³ Later in 1999, in what came to be known as the Brookings Process, UNHCR and the World Bank reviewed gaps between humanitarian assistance and long-term development in post-conflict displacement, which later prompted task forces looking at peace, conflict and security in such situations under the OECD.

Since then, these early partnerships have continued under various frameworks, each time making steps toward bridging differences in terminology, concepts, structures and approaches. These include the 2003 Durable Solutions Framework, under which UNHCR and the World Bank continued their cooperation through models called development assistance for refugees (DAR), repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction (4Rs) and development through local integration (DLI).⁶⁴ A later evolution was the Transitional Solutions Initiative with UNDP and in collaboration with the World Bank, aimed at ending aid dependency and creating sustainable livelihoods. In recent years, IDP profiling and solutions indicators, as recommended by the Expert Group on Refugee and IDPs Statistics, are also examples of partnerships which help bridge the humanitarian-development divide through their inclusion in national development plans.

Yet durable solutions are not as simple as development alone, being “linked to larger struggles for peace, security, territorial control, equal treatment and an equitable distribution of resources.”⁶⁵ As seen in experiences in South Sudan, the Philippines and Kenya, there are strong linkages between internal displacement frameworks, durable solutions and peace-building⁶⁶ and the Special Rapporteur on IDPs has made specific recommendations on the importance of including and mainstreaming internal displacement in peace processes.⁶⁷ In 2011, the Secretary-General endorsed a framework on ending displacement in the aftermath of conflict, establishing priorities and responsibilities to support the

⁶² GA Res. 225 (LXVIII) Protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons (13 July 2013)

⁶³ First and second International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, in 1981 and 1984, and the International Conference on Central American Refugees process, launched in 1989 with the aim of supporting durable solutions for Central American refugees and IDPs, later complemented by the Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America.

⁶⁴ Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern, Core Group on Durable Solutions, UNHCR Geneva (May 2003)

⁶⁵ IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs (April 2010)

⁶⁶ Peace Agreements and the Road to Resolve Internal Displacement: Report of a Global Protection Cluster Roundtable – Kyiv (July 2018)

⁶⁷ Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2007), *Addressing Internal Displacement in Peace Processes, Peace Agreements and Peace-Building*

delivery of durable solutions for IDPs.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) obliges states to endeavor to incorporate the relevant principles of internal displacement into peace negotiations and agreements for purposes of solutions.

In 2010, the IASC endorsed a Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs which recognizes that achieving durable solutions is a complex process. In the absence of legal thresholds and territorial boundaries, internal displacement ends when a durable solution occurs and their situation and conditions on the ground they no longer have specific needs related to displacement.⁶⁹ The Framework identifies the human-rights-based principles underlying solutions, and goes further to set out criteria measuring the extent to which durable solution have been attained, while also providing examples of indicators that can be adapted to local contexts to monitor progress. Complementary to efforts by the national authorities, the IASC Framework also notes that durable solutions must involve stakeholders addressing a host of human rights, humanitarian, development, reconstruction and peacebuilding challenges. Through ten years of application, the framework has been most successful in informing country-level strategies and national laws and policies, particularly for technical experts and ministries, but challenges remain in its wider dissemination⁷⁰ and future success will continue to hinge on whether its rights-based framework serves as a foundation that bridges differences in terminology, concepts, structures and approaches among solutions actors.

Emerging Opportunities and Challenges

Within the span of a few decades, protection for IDPs has emerged into a globally accepted practice and norm, the rights and guarantees of which were consolidated in the Guiding Principles. Dissemination and incorporation of these Guiding Principles represents one of the most important opportunities today. These Guiding Principles, which while non-binding have been affirmed by the General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as regional bodies such as the Council of Europe, Organization of American States and African Union,⁷¹ are a first step toward anchoring internal displacement in the legal and political sphere of states themselves. The enacting of such domestic laws, policies, and decrees can represent “the realization [by states] that internal displacement must be addressed at the national level, both as a matter of legal obligation and national interest.”⁷² In addition to some of the first laws and policies addressing internal displacement in Azerbaijan and Colombia in the early nineties, there have been more than 80 adopted by states since the Guiding Principles. Most notably, in 2006 in Africa, eleven states of the Great Lakes region adopted the Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to IDPs, legally binding them to enact national legislation domesticating the Guiding Principles and to provide a legal framework for their implementation within national legal systems.⁷³ This served as the impetus for the Kampala Convention,⁷⁴ which builds upon the Guiding Principles and now represents the cornerstone for addressing internal displacement in Africa.

Climate change represents another lesson learned and emerging opportunity, as displacement is expected to increase as extreme weather events become more frequent and intense and as the intersectionality between conflict and climate effects continues to be evident. In 2019, of the 50 countries and territories with new internal displacements associated with conflict and violence, 45 also

⁶⁸ Secretary General’s Policy Committee Decision No. 2011/20 – Durable Solutions: Follow up to the Secretary-General’s 2009 report on peacebuilding (4 October 2011)

⁶⁹ Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2007) *When Displacement Ends: A Framework for Durable Solutions*

⁷⁰ GP2.0 Policy Brief: Ten Years since the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions

⁷¹ Organization of American States resolution 2667 of 7 June 2011. See also Council of Europe recommendation Rec(2006)6 of 5 April 2006.

⁷² GA Res. 282 (LXV), Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (11 August 2010), 24

⁷³ International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (November 2006)

⁷⁴ African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), adopted 23 October 2009

recorded new internal displacement associated with climate related natural hazards, and in some situations can involve displacement across borders. In terms of rights and standards, the Guiding Principles apply equally to sudden or slow-onset natural hazards and other effects of climate change, insofar as people are forcibly displaced inside their own country or because their place of origin has become uninhabitable or too dangerous for human habitation. Similarly, the Kampala Convention requires parties to protect and assist those internally displaced by natural or human made disasters, including those triggered by climate change. Following then-High Commissioner Antonio Guterres being among the first to mention environmental degradation and climate change as drivers of displacement,⁷⁵ however, institutional commitments in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate remain uncertain. Significant gains have been made on preparedness and disaster risk reduction, while efforts to step up responses in natural disasters have been met with mixed reviews.⁷⁶ At the same time, future opportunities may emerge, particularly as early engagement in recovery, mitigation and adaptation for IDPs can limit the potential for secondary, potentially cross-border, displacement and as internal displacement and disaster risk reduction frameworks find increasing synergies.

Conclusion

Beginning from its early practice and development to the modern context with its international response architecture and multiple stakeholders, the issue of internal displacement has evolved considerably, as has our collective understanding of the root causes and drivers of internal displacement and our responses to the needs of displacement-affected populations. The particular challenges of responding to internal displacement situations have not only prompted shifts in thinking on issues such as sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, but often reckonings by the international community on the limits of international action and institutional mechanisms to ensure the necessary commitment. This process continues, as is evident in efforts today to strengthen and enhance protection and assistance for internally displaced persons. The forthcoming recommendations of the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement will undoubtedly start a new chapter. In comparison to 1991, when the first Special Representative on IDPs was tasked with analyzing the displacement situation and making recommendations for institutional reform, the Panel's priorities reflect numerous advancements in thinking and the diversity of expertise of its members. These efforts all build on the past experience of the international community, which intensified since the 1990s but began long before, to strengthen and enhance protection and assistance for internally displaced persons. Reflections on history can still provide important lessons to be learned regarding gaps in humanitarian assistance, and the fundamental questions of committing resources and accountability. Challenges remain -- in particular in galvanizing political will and advancing multi-stakeholder action around a variety of issues, including prevention, whole of government and society approaches and accountability. However, experience also tells us that major gains that have been achieved: first and foremost in having improved the lives of millions of IDPs, but as well on pushing the envelope on protection, solutions and other emerging issues of the time for humanitarian, development and peace actors.

⁷⁵ Opening Statement by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the Fifty-eighth Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), Geneva, 1 October 2007

⁷⁶ Goodwin Gill G and McAdam J (2017) Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement