

Ten Years of Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement – Achievements  
and Future Challenges  
16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> October, Oslo

**Session: The relevance of the Guiding Principles when addressing  
internal displacement caused by natural disasters and climate change**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here today and to take part in this event hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Norwegian Refugee Council/IDMC and the Representative on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons/Brookings Institution, Professor Kalin. I consider this session particularly timely given the continuing discussion on climate change, environmental degradation and migration. It gives us an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the relevance of the Guiding Principles when assisting and protecting those vulnerable groups displaced by natural disasters and more gradual climate change processes.

The International Organization for Migration, IOM, has been assisting and protecting internal displaced persons over the course of the last three decades. In 1998, in fact the same year that the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement were presented, Hurricane Mitch devastated Central America and IOM had to focus even more on displacement caused by climate change and natural disasters. During the last ten years and up to the most recent disasters in Nepal and Haiti, we have seen the Guiding Principles evolve from an “abstract” legal document to a key operational tool that is used daily in our humanitarian operations.

While the discussion about the complex linkages between climate change and migration continues, the humanitarian community will continue to respond to the assistance needs of vulnerable populations taking into account protection issues. This is exactly why the Guiding Principles have become a relevant document to all operational actors over the last ten years. It places human beings at the core of our response. It is the human dignity of the displaced persons that IOM is committed to uphold.

When preparing for this session through speaking with many colleagues about our responses over the past decade I noticed there has been a transformation in the way we respond. We have moved to a truly holistic approach, not only to address the immediate assistance needs, but also to protect the rights of the displaced and to find durable solutions as soon as the time allows.

But let me get back to natural disasters. They remain one of the greatest challenges we face today as humanitarians. In 2007, 14 out of 15 UN Flash Appeals were related to such extreme events. According to the IFRC's World Disaster Report 2008, in 2007, just over 200 million people were affected by natural disasters. As indicated by the successive reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), including its most recent Fourth Assessment Report,<sup>1</sup> it can be expected that the scale of flows, both internal and cross-border, will rise significantly over the next decades as a result of climate change. As humanitarians, we are already preparing including using the Guiding Principles as an instrument to ensure those affected by climate change have their rights upheld and needs met.

As the session looks at both natural disasters and gradual changes it is helpful for our purposes to make a basic distinction. On the one hand, natural disasters are extreme events such as hurricanes like the ones in Haiti and as earthquakes as in Pakistan. These force people to move immediately, thus often creating internal displacement. IOM is acutely aware of the need to provide immediate assistance and to protect the rights of those affected as well as to support national governments in countries where infrastructure has been weakened. As our responses to natural disasters become more sophisticated through contingency planning and mechanisms such as the cluster approach, the relevance of the Guiding Principles also increased.

Climate change, on the other hand, also leads to gradual environmental degradation changes, often not immediately obvious, especially in the initial

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<sup>1</sup> IPCC, 2007: *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK,

stages. Such processes also provoke population movements, and it is precisely this kind of migration which is likely to involve much larger numbers of people migrating on a more permanent basis. The appropriate response mechanisms are as not clear cut in these cases; we are at a crossroads between humanitarian intervention, adaptation strategies and development aid. However, this type of migration will increasingly demand our considered attention and concerted action. In such contexts, the Guiding Principles likely have to be considered and/or adapted to slow on-set migration.

Based on our operational experience, I will focus largely on natural disasters to illustrate tangibly the relevance of the Guiding Principles. The introduction of the Guiding Principles clearly illustrates that they also apply to situations of displacement caused by natural disaster. As stated in the introduction “for the purposes of these Principles, internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” In most natural disaster responses national governments take the lead and the international community works with them in a coordinated manner.

We use the Guiding Principles somewhat differently under natural disasters scenarios than in conflict situations. I would like to share with you four specific and complementary ways to assist and protect displaced populations in natural disasters.

**First**, the Guiding Principles provide a framework for developing assistance and protection response strategies. They have become a practical tool identifying the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection and assistance of the IDPs in all phases of displacement regardless of the cause. In this regard, IOM was pleased to support the IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters as it provides a complimentary tool to assist in meeting the needs of the displaced populations. In natural disasters,

the emergency phase is often much shorter than in conflicts. Durable solutions and livelihood options are immediately sought. In developing a response to displacement caused by natural disasters or climate change, durable solution considerations should be included from the outset

Food, health and shelter are often the first assistance delivered in a crisis but IDPs also require additional support that protects their rights. The Guiding Principles assist us in developing a comprehensive plan where we can engage humanitarian actors, national authorities and communities to ensure that humanitarian goals are met. It allows all actors involved in the response to define their roles and responsibilities. These can be easily overlooked at the on-set of an emergency and the Guiding Principles may be used as a checklist to develop a response strategy to ensure that all proper planning and response are carried out. In Bolivia, for example, we found that by using the Guiding Principles when discussing the technical aspects of camp management and shelter with the government we were able to raise issues such as safety and security in the camps, as well as appropriate health services for men and women. From there, together with the government, we developed a comprehensive camp management and shelter strategy for a response at national level.

**Second**, the Guiding Principles may be used as an education and empowerment tool. Often the discussion on empowerment refers to the displaced population themselves; however in cases related to natural disasters IOM has noted that empowerment can apply equally to the displaced populations, civil society and authorities. We have often provided humanitarian assistance to people in need in states where a disaster had either weakened the existing infrastructure or stretched its limits. The national actors' ability to cope with natural disasters must be enhanced and strengthened in developing countries, and more specifically in the Least Developed Countries. As outlined in NRC's recent contribution "Refugees and Climate Change", national disasters can trigger conflict when state infrastructure is weakened or exposed and the humanitarian community has to respond quickly. Otherwise, it will only exacerbate the displaced

populations' situation further. Thus by using the Guiding Principles we aim to give the authority and responsibility back to the government by setting out clearly their roles.

In Ethiopia, through the Camp Coordination and Shelter Cluster, we engaged in capacity building, notably through a three day training with local authorities where the Guiding Principles were included. The training modules looked at a variety of technical issues and explained the obligations and duties of all actors to provide assistance to the affected population.

Additionally, when displaced persons understand their rights properly they can improve their own plight. For example, in Nepal, the CCCM cluster is working with displaced population to engage them in the process of decision making by ensuring that information is disseminated. As a result, they are able to take informed decisions which directly affect their daily life.

**Third**, the Guiding Principles can practically be put to use as a monitoring tool to help IOM and other humanitarian partners identify displaced populations, measure assistance responses to displacement, guide protection responses both to prevent displacement and during displacement and lastly ensure that durable solutions are found for displaced populations. They act as a monitoring tool when used as a checklist to ensure activities are in line with internationally recognized standards. For example, in Myanmar through regular assessments, our medical teams we are able to monitor the situation of the displaced and to track over time whether their needs have been met or if adjustments are needed.

**Fourth**, the Guiding Principles serves as an advocacy tool. Primary duty and responsibility for displaced persons lie with the national authorities, who, as stated earlier, most often take the lead in natural disaster situations. What we have seen is that in some situations natural disasters have occurred in regions where there is limited access. In such cases, the Guiding Principles can be used to advocate for access like in Pakistan where the humanitarian community was able to access to remote areas of the country.

Additionally when sensitive issues such as land and property arise the Guiding Principles may be a useful tool for the international community to encourage governments to fulfill their commitments. For example in Aceh, the Guiding Principles are an appropriate tool that could be used to advocate for an agreeable resolution in case of conflicting interests, in order to ensure that international standards are reached. Together we must work with national governments to ensure displaced populations rights are protected and needs are met and by using the Guiding Principles to advocate we can ideally find mutually accepted solutions.

As humanitarians, we will continue to respond to sudden on-set disasters. Climate change as such poses new challenges that require further discussion on how to respond to gradual environment degradation. There are a variety of ways to manage migration and the debates will continue on identifying current strategies or possibly new frameworks that are required to fill any policy and operational gaps. The Guiding Principles have a role to play in this discussion. We must work with national governments and civil societies to build capacity and an understanding of their roles and responsibilities toward those who need to relocate temporarily or more permanently because of climate change and environmental degradation. We must also work with communities to prevent displacement looking at adaptation strategies or find a mutually accepted result for voluntary relocation to areas in lower risk regions.

The Guiding Principles over the past ten years have evolved into a relevant and operational tool that brings together both humanitarian assistance and protection actors from governments, the international community and civil society together for a holistic response. The Guiding Principles have gained such recognition to also bring together authorities and displaced communities to empower them to find mutually accepted durable solutions. Assisting and protecting displaced populations is a process where all actors have no choice but to work together: the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement is the most obvious and legitimate basis to do so.

