

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to all of you. I'm happy to see so many dedicated, enthusiastic, focused and well qualified people assembled here today. This is a timely conference on an important topic, which is a key political and humanitarian priority. Last week I was in Afghanistan and was able to see for myself the enormous challenges there. I met politicians, NGOs and individuals. We need to mobilise to give them support. We need to keep up the focus on the situation there.

There are some long, historical lines I would like to draw here: 60 years ago the member states of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - our main anchor. The Declaration provided a platform for the development of human rights law.

Three years later the Refugee Convention was adopted, addressing the dire situation of the millions of people who crossed an international border during and after the Second World War. The Convention gave refugees specific rights and international protection. Both are still key instruments today.

But a group of people whose situation in many ways paralleled that of refugees was not included in this legal framework - the internally displaced.

A person forced to leave her home is a person at risk. She loses not only her physical security and shelter, but her income, friends and sometimes even her family, health services and education. In many ways, she is even more vulnerable and unprotected than those who cross a border. So are of course her children. I saw women in her situation in Afghanistan last week.

Still, she and her family do not enjoy the same international protection as refugees.

The need to establish a legal framework for internally displaced persons was based on such realities on the ground.

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As Elisabeth (Rasmusson) just reminded us, ten years ago, IDPs already outnumbered refugees - the result of the conflicts of the 1990s, civil wars, failing states, the break-up of federal states, ethnic cleansing and discrimination of minorities. And even though the number of conflicts is falling, the number of IDPs is rising.

The human suffering was enormous, as we witnessed in the Balkans and the Great Lakes region.

Yet, existing tools were unclear and insufficient to protect the internally displaced.

The plight of the internally displaced compelled us to take action.

Following an extensive effort to compile, analyse, reaffirm and elaborate existing norms in human rights and humanitarian law, and how they apply to internally displaced, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were presented to the UN Human Rights Commission 10 years ago. It was a major step forward.

Since then, the number of internally displaced has increased even more. Today it is estimated that there are 26 million who are internally

displaced due to conflict and human rights violations alone. Iraq has 2.5 million internally displaced, and the security situation makes it extremely difficult to reach many of the vulnerable groups.

It is because of these 26 million human beings that we are here today.

Not to commemorate - and not to celebrate past achievements - but to make use of the Guiding Principles as a tool for protection, as a tool to take stock, as a tool to look at new challenges. To update them, and keep the focus on them.

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Our message is clear. We call on all stakeholders to promote the Guiding Principles and to mobilise the necessary political will to secure their implementation.

The duty to secure the human rights of the internally displaced remains the responsibility of each sovereign state. An important fact that is not reiterated often enough. We have to be clear about this.

However, the UN General Assembly World Summit in 2005 also recognised the role of the international community in encouraging and helping states to fulfil this responsibility.

We need to work together for improved regional and domestic legislation - we need to find better policies and more efficient practices.

We should build on the positive lessons - and they exist - learned by states that have used the Guiding Principles actively. So we are looking forward to the presentations by representatives from Uganda, Turkey, Mozambique, Georgia, the Maldives and Colombia. And there could have been many more.

We also welcome the increasing commitment of UN agencies - in particular UNHCR - to IDPs.

As part of humanitarian reform and "the UN delivering as one" initiative - which are strongly supported by the Norwegian Prime Minister, among others - UNHCR has a responsibility to protect and assist conflict-induced IDPs in humanitarian crises.

We are pleased to see that the cluster approach has improved division of labour, filled gaps and strengthened the protection of IDPs in many emergencies. This process has to continue. We need to give the UNHCR the capacity to deliver.

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I take it as a sign of strong support for continued humanitarian reform that both High Commissioner Antonio Guterres and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes are present here today, alongside key non-UN humanitarian actors such as Angelo Gnaedinger, Secretary General of the ICRC - whom I have also had the pleasure to work with. I want to thank you all for coming and wish you a hearty welcome.

The Norwegian Government would like to see an even stronger commitment on the part of UNHCR and other international organisations to IDPs, including those who are forced to flee from natural disasters. This is a new trend, and we know it will continue.

How this can be addressed in a concerted way, while respecting different mandates, is an issue that deserves further consideration and coordination.

I also call on civil society - they have a key role to play - to speak out on behalf of IDPs and promote their agenda. I am told that there will be audiovisual testimonies from IDPs later today, and I see this as a sign that they will eventually be given a voice of their own, and become much more involved in solving their own problems and shaping their own future.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference confirms Norway's continued commitment to the plight of the internally displaced - a commitment reaffirmed in the Government's newly launched Humanitarian Policy. You'll find copies of this policy document in English at the back of the room.

This policy addresses the drivers of forced displacement, such as conflict, climate change and the increasing frequency of disasters caused by extreme weather.

The new policy document also discusses some of the challenges involved in dealing with the situation of IDPs, such as the need to protect humanitarian space and the need to improve preparedness, response capacity and early recovery according to the realities in the field.

It emphasises a strong gender perspective. We need to recognise the different needs of women, men, girls and boys in order to maximise the impact of humanitarian efforts.

And not least, the policy underlines the importance of enabling individuals and local communities to take control of their own daily lives - and to prepare for what may come.

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This conference has been organised by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Professor Walter Kälin.

Ten years ago Norway helped to mobilise international support for the Guiding Principles. We provided political and financial support to Francis Deng, who was the SRSG on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons at the time. Professor Deng should have been here today - but at the last minute, he had to go to Sudan. At any rate, I wish to take this opportunity to thank him for his efforts.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for attending this conference. A special thanks to the other organisers, particularly the Norwegian Refugee Council and its Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in Geneva, and to Dr Walter Kälin and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement.

So, to all of you, let us keep the focus, keep up and renew the political attention, and support each other in this very important work.