

GP 10 – Elisabeth Rasmusson, Secretary General Norwegian Refugee Council  
Opening statement

Your excellencies, High Commissioner, Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ministers, Ambassadors and distinguished guests and colleagues - dedicated to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

I am very pleased to see all of you here in Oslo – and thank all of you for your support to this important issue.

The Norwegian Refugee Council and our Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in partnership with the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons – Walter Kälin, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is honoured to host this event, commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

UNHCR and OCHA have also been close partners in planning this conference.

The Guiding Principles are sometimes referred to as the Deng Principles. Francis Deng was supposed to be with us at this conference. However, practically as he was ready to board the plane yesterday, he was requested to assist with very urgent issues in his home country - Sudan. As the country hosting the largest number of IDPs globally, his commitment to their cause certainly remains unchanged - and deserves our deepest respect.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Much progress has been made during these ten years.

The entire international community, through the UN General Assembly, has confirmed its recognition of the Guiding Principles as an “important international framework for the protection of IDPs”.

International organisations, such as UNHCR and OCHA, have developed protection policies and country level operational strategies on internal displacement – with the Guiding Principles as their key reference.

Several national governments in countries facing internal displacement have developed legal and policy frameworks on the protection of IDPs, based on the Guiding Principles.

During the 1990s, the Norwegian Refugee Council hosted several milestone events in the development of the Guiding Principles here in Oslo, in close co-operation with Francis Deng and his staff, and with the political and financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

NRC gradually took a leading role among international NGOs in expanding our mandate, understanding and field projects beyond refugees – to also cover IDPs.

The driving force for NRC's active role was our then Secretary General, Trygve Nordby – whom we are particularly pleased to have with us today.

The same year the Guiding Principles were presented by Francis Deng to the Human Rights Commission, NRC established its Global IDP Project in Geneva, later renamed the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre - IDMC.

This NRC Centre with its global IDP database is requested by the Inter Agency Standing Committee to provide updated numbers, analysis and documentation of the world's IDPs to the international humanitarian community and other key actors.

We believe this is a prime example of the complementary function of an NGO working alongside intergovernmental agencies and states, but also with a more independent watchdog role.

Yet, having contributed to place IDPs on the international agenda, NRC is concerned that the issue still does not receive the attention and commitment it deserves.

IDPs – as all individuals – are holders of universal human rights, and it is the responsibility of the state where they live to protect and respect their rights. However, when the state's duty to respect and protect human rights falls short - and the rights of IDPs are violated, where can they turn?

Many of the participants at this conference represent states with IDP populations. We warmly welcome states that with an open mind acknowledge that they have a problem of internal displacement - and that seek international support and co-operation in approaching IDP policies in their respective countries, rather than referring to the issue as one of national sovereignty that is inappropriate for the international community to be involved with.

In addition to state institutions, international experts and humanitarian agencies, every country of displacement hosts the capacity of the IDPs themselves to improve their situation when given the opportunity. Additionally, an increasing numbers of human rights institutions and civil society groups are dedicated to the rights and needs of IDPs.

Colleagues,

NRC remains primarily a field organisation. When we started working with conflict induced internal displacement in our field programmes, there were major IDP problems in countries such as Mozambique, Armenia and Sierra Leone. Today, practically all these IDPs have found durable solutions. It seems countries where internal displacement ends and durable solutions are found, all have experienced a combination of domestic political will and international support and involvement.

However, we still have a lot to learn and a long way to go. More IDPs than ever depend on our joint efforts in moving forward.

I sincerely hope this conference will be a significant step in reaffirming the relevance and value of the Guiding Principles – and our commitment to use them. Hopefully we can meet in another ten years and conclude that we have more “best practices” - and fewer IDPs.