

Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration - Second Informal Thematic Session

Panel 3: Adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters as drivers of migration

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Statement of the UN Environment

- Ambassadors, Excellencies, Delegates and Colleagues, it is my honour to present our statements at the second Informal Thematic Session on behalf of UN Environment.

- We recognize **environmental change and degradation** – such as desertification, deforestation, land degradation, climate change and water scarcity – are fundamentally redrawing the map of our world. Environmental degradation affects where and how people are able to live. It drives human displacement and forced migration by threatening lives over the short term and making people’s livelihoods untenable over the long term, particularly the poor and the most vulnerable. The most recent “2017 Global Report on Internal Displacement”¹ revealed that among 31.1 million new cases of internal displacement last year, more than 77% of those were due to disasters triggered by sudden onset hazard events. This indicates that such disasters will continue to bring about the highest numbers of new displacements each year.

- Other interlacing **trends** – for instance population growth and unsustainable consumption patterns – also accelerate the displacement of greater numbers of people **in the future**. This is particularly likely if these trends occur in the context of inadequate responses from governments and the international community to foresee and build the resilience of countries and communities to face these changes. The most commonly cited figure is that there could be as many as 200 million people displaced for environmental reasons by 2050.

- Ultimately displacement is not just a political challenge. We need to think of it as a development challenge and, critically, an environmental management challenge. The scale of possible future displacement under even moderate climate change scenarios means that environment, humanitarian and displacement-focused actors **must plan and work together** to build people’s resilience in a changing world.

- We believe the next few years will be critical for the development of a more effective, compassionate and rights-based approach to human displacement and migration. We, the **UN Environment**, have increased our engagement on the nexus between environmental management, migration and displacement, and we are fully committed to the development of the 2018 Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, ensuring that environmental issues are fully considered and reflected in the development of this emerging agreement. We believe this Global Compact is an opportunity to work together to build people’s resilience in a changing world and to ensure that well-managed global migration continues to offer benefits to societies and the planet. We recognize the critical role of Member States to take the compact seriously and work hand in hand to make it ambitious.

- Hence, we wish to thank you all for this opportunity today.

¹ GRID (2017): *Global Report on Internal Displacement*: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/2017/20170522-GRID.pdf>

Background notes

Introduction

- Recognizing the adverse effects of environmental degradation, climate change and disasters as amplifiers of forced migration, it is interesting to hear today's discussions on how to minimize such adverse effects and ensure appropriate and effective response mechanisms. Also, it is profoundly important to identify the linkages between international migration and climate change, to further investigate the relationship, and to review humanitarian and development policy frameworks to ensure complementarity and coherence.

- Currently more than sixty-five million people have been forced from their homes by war, disaster and persecution. This number is unprecedented in the lifetime of the United Nations, and with its growing relevance within our daily lives, states, society and the media have increasing occasion to debate the perceived benefits and negative consequences of increased human mobility. - At the same time we live in an era of unprecedented environmental change. Human activity has shaped our planet so profoundly that scientists now suggest that we have entered a new geological epoch, labeling as "the Anthropocene".

- Environmental change and environmental degradation – such as desertification, deforestation, land degradation, climate change and water scarcity – are fundamentally redrawing the map of our world. Environmental degradation affects where and how people are able to live. It drives human displacement and forced migration by threatening lives over the short term and making people's livelihoods untenable over the long term, particularly the poor and most vulnerable. The most recent "2017 Global Report on Internal Displacement"² revealed that among 31.1 million new cases of internal displacement in 2016, more than 77% of these new displacements were due to disasters triggered by sudden onset hazard events, which continue to bring about the highest numbers of new displacements each year. A majority of these occur in low and lower-middle income countries and as a result of large-scale weather events, and predominantly in South and East Asia.

Development-induced displacement

- Development-induced displacement is a phenomenon documented throughout history to have far-reaching consequences for affected populations and the natural environment. The impact results not only from the development activity's alteration of the use of the physical landscape, but also both from population redistribution and resulting interaction between humans and the environment. The issue is particularly visible in developing countries where large-scale infrastructure projects for water supply (dams, reservoirs, irrigation), urban infrastructure, transportation (roads, highways, canals), energy (mining, power plants, oil exploration and extraction, pipelines), and agricultural expansion³ are fueled by capital intensive investment supported by states and global corporations.

² GRID (2017): *Global Report on Internal Displacement*: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/2017/20170522-GRID.pdf>

³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: <http://idp-key-resources.org/documents/0000/d04384/000.pdf>

Natural resource management and conflicts

- Environmental degradation and conflicts over the access to, and use of, natural resources can, indirectly, lead to further internal displacement and refugee flows.⁴ The most vulnerable groups are frequently ‘trapped in place’ or move within their own country where governments may be unwilling to adequately safeguard their rights. Displacement itself can have environmental impacts, causing environmental degradation (e.g. rapid urbanization or poorly managed refugee camps, pressure on scarce water, energy and food resources, uncontrolled waste disposal). This can bring in-coming refugees/ migrants into direct competition, and occasion violent conflict, with local communities.

Urbanization

- Global population growth has amplified human-environmental interaction, precipitating a shift in human settlement patterns. In parallel to the expansion of urban frontiers, populations are increasingly moving towards and concentrated in urban areas. The world's urban population is on a trajectory to triple in the next few years, with the result that one third of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050.⁵ Earth's natural systems and the interactions between populations and their environments will continue to evolve, and while increased urbanization will present myriad challenges, it must be recognized that migration can also act as a ‘release valve’ by reducing environmental pressure in a fragile ecosystem.

- The interlacing trends of climate change, population growth, rising consumption, and environmental degradation may lead to greater numbers of people displaced in future. This is particularly likely if these trends occur in the context of inadequate responses from governments and the international community to build the resilience of countries and communities to these changes. Research shows that since 2008, disasters have displaced an average of 26.4 million people each year – the equivalent to one person per second.⁶ These staggering statistics attest to the truly global scale of a challenge faced by developing and developed countries alike. The most commonly cited figure is that there could be as many as 200 million people displaced for environmental reasons by 2050. That would mean that, in a world of nine billion people, one in 45 would have been forced from home for environmental reasons, and entire low-lying island territories may have been abandoned. Clearly, addressing and averting such displacement could prove to be a defining environmental management challenge of the twenty-first century.

UN Environment's engagement

- We have increased our engagement on the nexus between environmental management, migration and displacement. To align our work with other actors and to influence emerging policy in this area, we are participating in three relevant coordination mechanisms. First, we joined the working group of the Partnership for Disaster Displacement (formerly the Nansen Initiative) and situated our work in their workplan. Second, last December we joined the Global Migration Group (the UN interagency coordination group on the issue of migration). Last but not least, UN Environment has been committed to the development of the 2018 Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, ensuring that environmental issues are

⁴ At the recent UNHCR Dialogue on root causes of displacement, it was clearly recognized that natural disasters and slow-onset disasters as well as competition over natural resources are important factors of forced displacement and conflict.

⁵ UNDESA World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 Revision

⁶ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – 2016 World Disasters Report

fully considered and reflected in the development of this emerging agreement, which holds the promise of being a watershed agreement in the global management of migration and displacement.

- Across all of our sub-programmes and initiatives, UN Environment endeavours to draw out and highlight the interplay between humans and their environment. As the interlinkages become more evident in our work and daily lives, we are committed to building awareness for and understanding of the environmental issues that have the potential to influence global migration and displacement trends.

- We believe the next few years will be critical for the development of a more effective, compassionate and rights-based approach to human displacement and migration. We need to work more proactively to reduce risks and avoid merely reactive responses. We need, in other words, to do more fire prevention and less firefighting. With this in mind, we look forward to the further consultations and negotiations, and wish to thank you to all.