

## **Contribution of UNHCR to Part 1 of the United Nations Secretary-General’s report on “Oceans and the Law of the Sea” with specific focus on the topic entitled “The Effects of Climate Change on Oceans”**

### *Effects of Climate Change:*

The warming of the earth’s oceans will have an impact on human mobility in a number of ways, including through extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and indirectly through effects on marine ecosystems and marine species. For instance, an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly internally displaced by weather-related sudden onset hazards – such as floods, storms, wildfires, extreme temperature – each year since 2008.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of others flee their homes in the context of slow-onset hazards, such sea level rise and coastal erosion. Since many coastal communities depend on marine ecosystems and species for their livelihoods, the effects of climate change on these resources also play an indirect role in shaping patterns of human mobility. There is high agreement among scientists of the IPCC that climate change, in combination with other drivers, is projected to increase displacement of people in the future.<sup>2</sup>

### *Action to Address the Effects of Climate Change:*

Supporting the resilience of communities vulnerable to the effects of climate change is key to reduce the risk of displacement.

In some cases, the impacts of climate change may make life unsustainable and particular areas more permanently uninhabitable, as a result of high exposure to extreme events or sea level rise, or severely limited livelihoods options. Planned relocation, if implemented in consultation with and with respect for the rights of the people and communities involved, can protect vulnerable populations from climate risks and impacts through settling them in safer, more secure locations. Planned relocation is already occurring in some parts of the world. In some cases, affected populations are pressing authorities to assist them to relocate. Where planned relocation related to climate change cannot be avoided, its scale should be minimized and the process should always involve affected communities, fully protect their rights, and support them to fully restore their standard of living. UNHCR, alongside Brookings Institution and Georgetown University, has helped to developed Guidance for states regarding how to plan for relocation in a manner that fully respects the dignity and human rights of the affected and receiving populations.<sup>3</sup>

When displacement is inevitable or already occurring, protection of displaced persons is essential.

The vast majority of people displaced in disaster and climate change contexts are displaced within their countries. States have the primary duty and responsibility to protect and assist IDPs in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law as well as, where applicable, international humanitarian law. It is important that domestic legislation or policies on internal displacement include IDPs displaced in disaster contexts in line with the UN Guiding

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/2016/2016-global-report-internal-displacement-IDMC.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5\\_SYR\\_FINAL\\_SPM.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/environment/562f798d9/planned-relocation-guidance-october-2015.html>

Principles on Internal Displacement and relevant (sub-)regional instruments. Under inter-agency arrangements for Internally Displaced Persons, UNHCR is the Global Cluster Lead for Protection and thus has certain responsibilities for the protection of those affected by disasters, not least of all obligations arising from the principle of “provider of last resort.”

In some cases, persons displaced may cross borders. In this situation, they are not normally considered refugees under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. In order to address this legal protection gap, the State-led Nansen Initiative (2012-2015) led to the endorsement of the Protection Agenda by a 109 States delegations in October 2015. The Platform on Disaster Displacement, a follow up to the Nansen Initiative, chaired by the Government of Germany, main objective is to implement the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda.