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Submission to the UN Secretary -General's High -Level Panel on
Internal Displacement on Internal Displacement in the context of
Disasters and Climate Change

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1 Introduction

We thank the Panel for the opportunity to provide input into its future work. Our short submission concerns internal displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, highlighting selected areas where we believe the Panel could make an important contribution.

We have had the opportunity to read the submission prepared on behalf of the Platform on Disaster Displacement and endorse it in full.¹ In particular, we echo its key messages that we must 'be better prepared, invest more in prevention, and work early on towards solutions, including with much more attention on restoring livelihoods'. The driving imperatives should be to reduce climate change-related hazards,² to assist at-risk populations to stay in their homes where they so desire, to help them move out of harm's way where remaining in place is not possible, and to protect people who are displaced. In all cases, respect for human dignity and agency should be front and centre.

Our submission addresses the following matters:

- x Key issues to be prioritized
- x Catalyzing and supporting effective solutions
- x

(a) Slow-onset hazards

The IDMC has noted that it is difficult to monitor movement away from slow-onset processes because 'it encapsulates a wide range of phenomena, drivers, triggers, impacts and movement types' and can be hard to distinguish from internal migration.¹¹ However, this lack of data means that existing estimates are 'very conservative',¹² and there could be far more disaster displaced people on the move than is realized.

When it comes to protection, there could be a whole segment of the population whose rights and needs are not being met because they are either not recognized at all, or because they are assumed to be 'voluntary migrants'. Some drought-related movement, and seasonal or circular movement to access natural resources or alternative livelihoods, may not be recognized as forms of displacement because they reflect historical patterns of internal migration. However, increasing variability in rainfall and other climate change impacts are changing the frequency and patterns of such movement, disrupting the sustainability of pastoralist livelihoods, as well as increasing the vulnerability of populations on the move.¹³

In the context of slow-onset hazards, the already blurry distinction between forced and necrefi6.6(y)

comes to responding to those displaced in the context of disasters and climate change. It is therefore worth re-examining the assumptions that underpin these traditional solutions in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose.¹⁸

Climate change necessarily affects what solutions are viable in a given context. For instance, evacuating people from a disaster-affected area – which is meant to be an immediate and short-term measure – may become protracted displacement if return is not possible.

As highlighted by the PDD's submission, one commonly held but problematic assumption is that IDPs will return to their homes shortly after the disaster has passed. Return is privileged as the optimal solution – correcting the 'wrong' of displacement as quickly as possible and enabling people to restore the status quo of prior conditions. However, the evidence shows that this is not always possible. As of 31 December 2019, at least 5.1 million people were still displaced on account of disasters in 95 countries and territories.¹⁹ While around 90 per cent had been displaced during 2019,²⁰ some had been displaced for much longer, suggesting that they might be in need of alternative durable solutions.²¹ Moreover, as noted above, data challenges in the context of disasters and climate change mean that these figures are 'an underestimate, because little data is collected on how long people are displaced for following disasters'.²² The number of people living in protracted internal displacement following a disaster, or experiencing repeated displacement in this context, is likely to be much higher. As the IDMC has observed, hundreds of thousands of people remained in protracted displacement for years after the Haitian earthquake of 2010, and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.²³

There are multiple reasons why return may not be possible: a volcanic eruption may have irrevocably altered land, making physical return impossible; saline intrusion may have destroyed agricultural livelihoods; the government may have declared land a 'danger' or 'no build' zone; or discriminatory policies may prevent return. For example, after the Philippines

solutions, relying on 'translocal' or at times 'transnational' connections.²⁷ The majority of a family, for instance, may remain in a relocation site while a breadwinner goes 'home' during the week in order to better access livelihoods. Five years after the 'triple disaster' in Fukushima, Japan, displaced persons pursued 'dual residency' and other dynamic makeshift arrangements to find workable solutions to their situations.²⁸ As disaster risk management and

- x Providing additional support and capacity-building for monitoring and enforcement mechanisms established (or envisaged) under normative frameworks, including technical guidance for human rights monitoring and peer-review mechanisms.

More specifically, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the African Union's Kampala Convention set out core rights and obligations that should guide States' national policies and programmes relating to internal displacement. These frameworks address the specific needs of IDPs, including those displaced as a result of, or in order to avoid, 'natural or human-made disasters',⁴¹ and deal with all phases of displacement (prevention, protection and lasting solutions).

6 Conclusion

³⁰ See eg Republic of Fiji, 'Planned Relocation Guidelines: A Framework to Undertake Climate Change Related Relocation' (2018).

³¹ Protection Agenda (n 16) 38. See also decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), especially Decision 1/CP.21, Adoption of the Paris Agreement in Report of the Conference of the Parties on its Twenty-First Session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015, UN doc FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1 (29 January 2016); Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, UNGA res 69/283 (23 June 2015), and its 'Words into Action' guidelines <https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-guidelines-frontline-disaster-risk-reduction-and-resilience-children-and>.

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