

EXPERT STATEMENT ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

June 28, 2016

We, a group of experts, met at Georgetown University on June 9, 2016 to discuss progress since August 2015, when we last met, in improving responses to the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs).^{*} We gathered as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre disclosed its latest data on the number of IDPs worldwide. These data show that 2015 was a significant year for internal displacement: there were 19.2 million new cases of internal displacement from natural hazards and over 8 million new cases due to conflict. 127 countries were affected. At the end of 2015, the cumulative number of people internally displaced by conflict was 40.8 million (the highest number of internal displacement ever recorded). Most new displacement happened in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq; 85% of disaster displacement occurred in East and South Asia, with the worst instances in India, China, Nepal, and the Philippines.

These figures underscore the need to increase the protection of IDPs in two principal regards: gaining access to IDPs in acute crises, such as Syria, in order to provide effective protection; and finding solutions for IDPs in the many protracted situations of displacement that have already lasted for decades. We are pleased that the World Humanitarian Summit considered the plight of IDPs and made concrete recommendations to reduce internal displacement, increase the self-reliance of IDPs, and improve protection.

We strongly support a prominent focus on those displaced by conflict who remain within the borders of their own countries at the High Level Meeting to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants. We recommend that the Declaration to be adopted at the Meeting include IDPs in a meaningful way, not only because failure to do so may increase cross border movements, but most importantly because the safety and security of millions of IDPs rests with the strong commitment of the international community to work with governments to ensure adequate protection, assistance and solutions.

We call on the High Level Meeting to urge regional bodies to adopt declarations and conventions on IDPs, citing the Kampala Convention as a model, and promote implementation of these instruments. The Declaration should also urge governments to adopt national laws and frameworks based on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and develop country strategies -- together with donor governments, international humanitarian and development organizations, civil society and IDPs themselves -- to implement the agreed goals and work toward resolving displacement situations. The High Level Meeting should further call upon the Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons to ensure, in collaboration with relevant actors, adequate attention to protection of IDPs and to work with governments to find sustainable solutions for them.

In order to ensure that these recommendations are implemented, we also call for the General Assembly to organize a high-level dialogue where IDP issues will receive the attention they deserve.

SIGNED BY (institutional affiliations for identification purposes only)

Kate Phillips-Barrasso, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee

Alexandra Bilak, Interim Director, IDMC

Joel R. Charny, Director, Norwegian Refugee Council USA

Roberta Cohen, Co-Founder (with Francis M. Deng) of Brookings Project on Internal Displacement, and Senior Fellow, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University

Kari Diener, Deputy Director, Policy and Advocacy, Mercy Corps

Bill Frelick, Director, Refugee Rights Program, Human Rights Watch

Michel Gabaudan, President, Refugees International

Mark Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS

Walter Kaelin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (2004 – 2010)

Andrea Lari, Integritas International Advisors

Susan Martin, Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University

Patricia McIlreavy, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction

Erin Mooney, Senior Protection Adviser, ProCap

Bernice G Romero, Senior Director for Public Policy and Advocacy, Save the Children USA

Simon Russell, Coordinator, Global Protection Cluster, UNHCR

Gimena Sanchez, Senior Associate, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

Eric P. Schwartz, Dean, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and former US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration

Jeevan Thiagarajah, Chairman, Centre for Humanitarian Affairs, Sri Lanka

Joan Timoney, Senior Director of Advocacy and External Relations, Women's Refugee Commission

Ann Vaughan, Director, Policy and Advocacy, Mercy Corps

Laurie S. Wiseberg, Senior Protection Officer, ProCap

* Some of the signatories were not at the meeting but fully endorse the findings and recommendations in this statement.