

**Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement
in the 21st Century**
Oslo, 6-7 June 2011

Nothing great and good can be furthered in the world without cooperation

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The Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement in the 21st Century convened by the Norwegian Government on 6 and 7 June 2011, in Oslo, gathered together academic experts, representatives of governments, international agencies and civil society, with the objective of arriving at a set of recommendations for action. Topics for discussion included the vulnerability, resilience and capacity for adaptation of communities in areas that are prone to disasters and environmental changes due to climate change; the protection of displaced people; and the promotion of action to help prevent or manage displacement.

Climate change is by its nature an inter-generational issue. Therefore, a parallel youth conference was organised and resulted in a statement. One important message was that children and youth must be ensured real influence in identifying solutions to climate change issues.

Chairperson's Summary*

1. The outcome of the conference is expected to feed into relevant development fora and international and regional policy processes, such as the UNHCR ministerial-level conference in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness to be held in December this year, the United Nations General Assembly resolution on IDPs at its upcoming 66th session, COP17 in Durban and Rio + 20 in 2012.
2. The world is now on its way to change the climate beyond its natural variability. Without concerted, decisive action, and stronger international cooperation, we face a high risk of environmental, economic, and social disruption that would fundamentally change living conditions for large parts of the globe. The implications for human welfare and security, and for our strategies for adaptation, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian aid and protection of displaced people, could be far-reaching. While long-term responses to climate change need to be developmental at their core, an immediate focus should be the elaboration of mechanisms and strategies to manage disaster risk.
3. Science tells us that deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions are required to avoid dramatic impacts. Under the UNFCCC, there is consensus that urgent action should be taken to hold the global average temperature increase below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels. The world is not yet on a pathway to ensure that this

* Chairperson for the Nansen Conference was Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. Vice-Chair was Harald Dovland, former chief climate negotiator for Norway.

goal is met. To attain it, strong political efforts are needed, first of all in industrialized countries, to continue to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and develop a green economy in order to build low-carbon societies. Given the present situation in international climate change negotiations, it would be wise to prepare for a significantly larger temperature increase than 2 degrees.

4. In the short term, it is not necessarily the temperature increase itself that poses the largest challenge in terms of human mobility, but the associated changes in, and combined effects of, precipitation patterns (drought and flooding), storms, and sea level rise; loss of biodiversity, and ecosystem services; and resulting health risk, food and livelihood insecurity.
5. While the precise scale, location and timing of population movements are uncertain, there is growing evidence that they will be substantial and will increase in the years to come. Climate change acts as an impact multiplier and accelerator to other drivers of human mobility. Most displacement is likely to be internal, but there will also be external displacement. From a protection perspective, there is no compelling reason to distinguish between displacement due to climate-related and other disasters.
6. The complexity of drawing a sharp distinction between ‘voluntary’ and ‘forced’ migration (displacement) spurred by environmental and development factors must be borne in mind. Motivation is a continuum, with ‘voluntary’ at one end of the spectrum, in a gradual transition to ‘forced’ at the other.
7. The displacement dimension is most evident today in the context of sudden-onset disasters. There is, however, a need to further explore the range of issues that could arise as a result of slow-onset disasters and longer-term climate change impacts, such as planned relocation and migration management.
8. The conference highlighted the need to generate further knowledge and clearer thinking about climate change and its implications for ecological and human welfare. The complex interlinkages between climate change and other drivers of population movements and the need to be cognizant of local contexts were emphasised. There was a strong call for further research on topics such as the impact of slow- versus rapid-onset disasters; vulnerability to displacement; adaptation, planned relocation and migration responses; and the scale and impact of migration and displacement.
9. The conference contributed to and urged making knowledge and information available across disciplines, as well as among practitioners and policy-makers at all levels. This requires continuous dialogue between all relevant stakeholders and general awareness-raising.
10. Paragraph 14(f) of the Cancun Agreements is an important global affirmation of the need for measures related to migration, displacement and planned relocation and its implementation should be explored through appropriate fora.

Action to help prevent and manage displacement

11. There is growing certainty that developing nations, and the most vulnerable communities and populations within them, will be the worst affected by climate

change. Development interventions to support resilience are therefore essential. Disaster risk reduction and adaptation measures can limit the scale and negative impact of climate change. Such measures should be guided by a comprehensive climate risk management approach. Without effective climate change mitigation measures, however, adaptation may no longer be feasible.

12. The most vulnerable will be less able or likely to migrate, or even to move at all. The State's duty to protect people entails an obligation to help people move from zones where they face a danger. More guidance is needed on rights-based planned relocation. Involuntary relocation rarely leads to improvements in the quality of life of those who have been relocated, so moving communities in anticipation of climate-related hazards may precipitate vulnerability rather than avoiding it, and should only be considered when adequate alternatives that enable people to rebuild their lives are available.
13. Building sustainable and human rights-based resilience to climate change is a prerequisite for preventing displacement from being among the consequences of climate change. Preventive measures contribute to reducing vulnerability if they include measures to secure rights as well as to restore them in the aftermath of disasters. Furthermore, studies have shown that prevention is cost-effective.
14. The consequences of climate change will vary across the globe and the impacts will be felt at the local level. Every region will need unique, specific solutions. Due to accelerating urbanization, city-dwellers, in particular, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate change risk. It is crucial to involve and empower local communities and authorities in reducing the risk of climate-induced disasters, planning integrated multi-hazard approaches to disasters, and reducing the need for displacement. For this empowerment to be effective, due sensitivity is required to variations in resourcefulness and vulnerability linked to age, gender and other aspects of diversity.
15. Migration – whether within a country or across national borders – may be a natural and rational adaptation response. States – if need be, supported by the international community – should proactively anticipate and plan for migration as part of their adaptation strategies and development plans. Existing regional and sub-regional arrangements, including mechanisms already enabling free movement, could apply to climate-related migration.

Protection and assistance of displaced people

16. Participants highlighted a broad array of difficulties that directly affect the protection and well-being of people displaced within their own country. These included the safety and security of affected communities, particularly indigenous groups and pastoralists, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities; access to emergency treatment and other health services; replacement of identity documentation; access to shelter; and access to services, programmes and resources for rehabilitation and reconstruction.
17. The international humanitarian system and its actors need to adapt to changing circumstances and new challenges resulting from climate change. Traditional

- barriers between the humanitarian and development fields – be they institutional, funding-related or conceptual – should not be allowed to stifle the action, innovation and change needed to alleviate suffering and strengthen resilience.
18. Making global climate services and data universally available was highlighted as a key step to ensure adequate early warning systems and informed decision making. Partnership and cooperation with users of this information at all levels was considered crucial to ensure effective utilisation of the information. In this context, partnerships with the private sector and use of modern technology, such as mobile telecommunications, were recognised as strong enablers.
 19. Both the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the African Union’s 2009 Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa cover internal displacement resulting from natural disasters, including those linked to climate change.
 20. There is a range of international and regional instruments that may provide responses to various forms of cross-border displacement related to climate change, such as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. However, their coverage is limited. They could, inter alia, apply in cases where disaster-struck population groups are denied essential assistance and protection.
 21. The terms ‘climate refugees’ and ‘environmental refugee’ should be avoided, as they are legally inaccurate and misleading. There is however a need to clarify the terminology for displacement related to climate change and other natural hazards. One suggestion was to refer to ‘environmentally displaced persons’.
 22. Human rights principles, including *non-refoulement*, may be construed to provide protection for those falling outside the international refugee protection framework. Some countries have the practice of granting temporary protection or a form of complementary protection or humanitarian status to people who have fled – or cannot return – due to a natural disaster. In some cases, State practice is guided by human rights considerations, while in others practice explicitly refers to natural disasters.
 23. There is, however, a normative gap with respect to external displacement resulting from disasters, which needs to be addressed. It was suggested that States, in conjunction with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, could develop a guiding framework or instrument for the protection of people displaced externally due to sudden-onset natural disasters, including those related to climate change.

Nansen Principles

Building upon Nansen's legacy, the following principles were recommended to guide responses to some of the urgent and complex challenges raised by displacement in the context of climate change and other environmental hazards.

- I. Responses to climate and environmentally-related displacement need to be informed by adequate knowledge and guided by the fundamental principles of humanity, human dignity, human rights and international cooperation.
- II. States have a primary duty to protect their populations and give particular attention to the special needs of the people most vulnerable to and most affected by climate change and other environmental hazards, including the displaced, hosting communities and those at risk of displacement. The development of legislation, policies and institutions as well as the investment of adequate resources are key in this regard.
- III. The leadership and engagement of local governments and communities, civil society, and the private sector, are needed to address effectively the challenges posed by climate change, including those linked to human mobility.
- IV. When national capacity is limited, regional frameworks and international cooperation should support action at national level and contribute to building national capacity, underpinning development plans, preventing displacement, assisting and protecting people and communities affected by such displacement, and finding durable solutions.
- V. Prevention and resilience need to be further strengthened at all levels, particularly through adequate resources. International, regional, and local actors have a shared responsibility to implement the principles enshrined in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster.
- VI. Building local and national capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters is fundamental. At the same time, the international disaster response system needs to be reinforced. The development of multi-hazard early warning systems linking local and global levels is critical.
- VII. The existing norms of international law should be fully utilized, and normative gaps addressed.
- VIII. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide a sound legal framework to address protection concerns arising from climate- and other environmentally-related internal displacement. States are encouraged to ensure the adequate implementation and operationalization of these principles through national legislation, policies and institutions.
- IX. A more coherent and consistent approach at the international level is needed to meet the protection needs of people displaced externally owing to sudden-onset disasters. States, working in conjunction with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, could develop a guiding framework or instrument in this regard.
- X. National and international policies and responses, including planned relocation, need to be implemented on the basis of non-discrimination, consent, empowerment, participation and partnerships with those directly affected, with due sensitivity to age, gender and diversity aspects. The voices of the displaced or those threatened with displacement, loss of home or livelihood must be heard and taken into account, without neglecting those who may choose to remain.