

Humanitarians protecting people in the climate change emergency

Joint statement by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and the Global Protection Cluster Coordinator on World Humanitarian Day 2021

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Time is running out for millions of the world's most vulnerable people. As climate change rapidly intensifies so we see the scale and nature of human mobility shifting globally, with repercussions on the human rights of internally displaced persons and other displacement-affected populations.

This year on World Humanitarian Day, humanitarians in different parts of the world tackle the climate change emergency, while experiencing challenges to their safety as they are sometime targets.

We continue to stand in solidarity with people who are least equipped to adapt to the changing climate and are left with no options other than to leave their homes or suffer in dangerous uninhabitable areas.

We want their voices to be heard and climate action raised to the top of the agenda.

The outlook for countries burdened by conflict, violence, poverty and underdevelopment includes dangerous compounded effects related to extreme and sudden events as well as slow-onset adverse effects of climate change. Tensions and conflict over land and natural resources are likely to heighten and exacerbate existing disputes and inequalities, drive inter-communal violence and increase displacement.

The climate crisis does not affect everyone equally.

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep-rooted vulnerabilities within societies, so we see how the effects of climate change uncover the vulnerability of households and individuals on the move and affect their ability to cope with its impacts.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur, “indigenous peoples, children and young persons, women and girls, older persons and persons with disabilities, are among the most vulnerable.” She added that “the poorest and most vulnerable people, with limited social and economic alternatives, often stay as a slow-onset process worsens and leave their homes and communities as a measure of last resort.”

Today we join #TheHumanRace against climate change in support of the people in the eye of the storms and in the shadow of the climate crisis – people who need more options.

According to the Global Protection Cluster Coordinator, “the climate change impact in conflict zones reminds us on this World Humanitarian Day that local organisations and communities themselves are the first humanitarians”. He added that “without protective actions, people are left with few choices and bad outcomes. Without tangible solutions, fragility and insecurity risks escalate into unrelenting chaos. While humanitarians strive to deliver those protective actions, we require stronger international support for local humanitarian and development actions”.

We echo the words of the Chair of the IPCC on the need for “extraordinary efforts under exceptional circumstances” and call on world leaders to take meaningful climate action for the world’s most vulnerable people, including to address internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change.

The UN Special Rapporteur and the GPC Coordinator give their heartfelt thanks and support to all humanitarians for the work they do in the frontlines, especially volunteers, local communities and organisations in all humanitarian contexts.

In view of the current developments, we reiterate our duty of care for our colleagues and partners, including those in Afghanistan.

Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

William Chemaly, Global Protection Cluster Coordinator

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For more information on this topic, please see:

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, to the General Assembly, 2020, <https://undocs.org/A/75/207>

Global Protection Cluster Strategic Framework 2020-2021, <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/strategic-framework-2020-2024/>