

62nd Session of the Human Rights Council

Side Event: International Humanitarian Law Challenges Affecting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs

26 June 2026

SUMMARY

The Special Rapporteur convened a side event at the 62nd Session of the Human Rights Council on **international humanitarian law (IHL) challenges affecting internally displaced persons (IDPs)**, together with the Permanent Mission of Austria, the Permanent Mission of Uganda, the Global Protection Cluster and UNHCR. The central message is that internal displacement is not an inevitable by-product of war, but often the foreseeable result of violations of IHL and human rights law. Speakers repeatedly stressed that respect for IHL is one of the most important tools available to prevent displacement, protect civilians, and create conditions for durable solutions.

A core theme is the **gap between legal protections and realities on the ground**. The Special Rapporteur framed IHL as both a “shield” and a “guide” for preventing and addressing displacement, but emphasized that the rules are too often ignored, circumvented, or deliberately violated. This gap is especially visible in contemporary conflicts increasingly fought in urban areas, where attacks on civilian infrastructure, family separation, disrupted education, loss of livelihoods, and limited humanitarian access deepen displacement risks. Across the discussion, participants underlined that accountability is essential: without justice, violations continue unchecked, protection remains weak, and sustainable peace becomes harder to achieve.

The event also emphasized that **displacement should be understood as an indicator of civilian protection failures**. Among other panelists, the ICRC highlighted that IHL is experienced not as an abstract legal framework, but through concrete outcomes: whether families remain together, whether civilians can access assistance, whether infrastructure survives, and whether people can avoid repeated displacement. Family separation as a common consequence of displacement and pointed to the need for advance planning, safe reunion spaces, and renewed political commitments to IHL, especially by parties to armed conflict.

Several country examples illustrated how IHL violations and civilian harm drive internal displacement. Ukraine described displacement as one of the gravest humanitarian and human rights consequences of Russia’s aggression, with new waves of displacement from frontline and border areas, intensified attacks on civilians and infrastructure, repeated displacement, trauma, loss of livelihoods, family separation, and uncertainty about safe return. Ukraine presented its **Strategy of State Policy on Internal Displacement until 2030** as an example of a comprehensive approach linking immediate needs with long-term recovery, coordination among national authorities and partners, housing and livelihood opportunities, and support for both IDPs and host communities. Key lessons included national ownership, collaboration with international and local actors, IDP participation in decision-making, and moving beyond emergency assistance toward self-reliance and durable solutions.

Colombia’s intervention reinforced that IHL violations are not only consequences of conflict, but also key drivers of displacement. Colombia highlighted decades of displacement linked to

armed conflict, human rights violations, child recruitment, attacks on teachers, military use of educational facilities, repeated displacement, and confinement of communities. It stressed that preventing displacement requires humanitarian assistance, respect for IHL, sustained political commitment, strong institutions, and international cooperation. Colombia also welcomed the Special Rapporteur's recent visit undertaken together with the Champion Agencies and reaffirmed its commitment to durable solutions through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including recent national policy efforts. Finally, Colombia reiterated its full support for the Special Rapporteur's mandate as an essential mechanism to strengthen protection, promote accountability and advance durable solutions.

The perspectives of Global IDP Advisory Group members brought out the lived realities of displacement. They stressed that when IHL is not upheld, displacement becomes predictable, and IDPs experience the effects most directly. Restricted humanitarian access, legal and administrative barriers and funding constraints are key barriers. Three priorities were identified: strengthening IHL compliance to prevent civilian harm, ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, and reinforcing accountability mechanisms. Displacement will only be resolved when civilians are protected, barriers to return and reintegration are removed, IDPs' losses are addressed, and displaced people meaningfully shape decisions about their future. IDPs are not only affected populations, but key sources of knowledge on risks, gaps, and operational challenges, and should be included in humanitarian planning and policy development.

IDPs in South Sudan continue to face serious protection risks, including increased airstrikes, child recruitment, securitization of men and boys, conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence, and a reduced humanitarian footprint that leaves some areas without protection actors. There is a growing use of evacuation orders by parties to conflict, which complicates response, creates evidentiary gaps, and can lead to further attacks on civilian infrastructure and security vacuums exploited by armed groups. Displacement in South Sudan is driven not only by conflict but also by climate shocks.

Another recurring theme was **humanitarian access and the politicization of aid**. Participants warned that administrative barriers, operational restrictions, funding constraints, evacuation orders, and the instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance undermine protection. The discussion recognized the political realities surrounding humanitarian work while reaffirming the need to preserve impartial humanitarian action and insist on unimpeded access in line with international legal standards.

The interventions also highlighted broader geopolitical tensions affecting IHL. For example, many conflicts in Africa are internally driven but externally funded or sponsored, with some states claiming to uphold IHL while undermining it elsewhere. Settler colonial violence was also raised as an example of a coercive environment that enables forced displacement.

The Special Rapporteur's final reflections drew the discussion back to prevention, participation, and future work. She encouraged greater inclusion of the Global IDP Advisory Group in events and policy discussions, emphasizing their expertise. She also cautioned that durable solutions should not be discussed in isolation from prevention: addressing the drivers of conflict and displacement must remain central. Finally, she noted that her next report will focus on **reconstruction and internal displacement**, with interest in learning from Ukraine's experience of rebuilding amid ongoing conflict.

Key takeaways

- Internal displacement is often a direct and foreseeable result of IHL and human rights violations.
- Respect for IHL is central to preventing displacement, protecting civilians, and enabling durable solutions.
- Accountability is essential to deter violations and prevent repeated displacement.
- Humanitarian access must remain safe, timely, impartial, and unimpeded, despite political and operational constraints.
- IDPs must be involved in decisions affecting them, including humanitarian planning, policy design, return, reintegration, and durable solutions.
- Durable solutions require more than return; they require safety, dignity, livelihoods, housing, restored rights, and meaningful choice.
- Prevention must be integrated into discussions on solutions, including by addressing the drivers of conflict and civilian harm.

Open questions or unresolved issues explicitly raised

- How to ensure accountability for IHL violations in contexts where violations continue unchecked.
- How to preserve impartial humanitarian access amid increasing administrative, legal, operational, political, and funding constraints.
- How to distinguish genuine durable return from returns driven by lack of alternatives, declining assistance, or economic pressure.
- How to better integrate IDP expertise into humanitarian planning, policy development, and international events.