



**UNHCR Contribution to the 19th Winter Meeting
of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

**Special Debate on
“The Security Implications of Climate Change and the Role of
Parliamentarians”**

Vienna, 20 February 2020

Thank you, Mister Chair,

UNHCR is grateful to be given the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Please allow me to share with you the following three key messages from a perspective of UNHCR.

First: Climate change is developing dynamicallyⁱ and has impact on all three security dimensions addressed by the OSCE. Climate change will cause and has already caused significant population movements.ⁱⁱ Rising sea levels may in worst-case scenarios ultimately lead to the submersion of entire island states, requiring alternatives for its population.

Second: Parliamentarians, as is the case with all newly evolving phenomena, play a crucial role in addressing the challenges related to climate change in a reasonable, peaceful, balanced and differentiated manner, by contributing to a sober well-informed strategic debate and by ensuring a suitable legislative framework.

Third: International bodies, including UNHCR, analyze whether, how and to which extent climate change-related displacement can be addressed by existing international refugee and human rights law and whether complementary normative action may be required. The UN Human Rights Committeeⁱⁱⁱ has already offered some direction by indicating that people who flee effects of climate change and natural disasters should not be returned to their country of origin if essential human rights, such as the right to life, would be at risk upon return.

In conclusion, we would like to encourage your further engagement and debate on this difficult and complex issue. UNHCR, which recently has enhanced its own research and response capacity on climate change-related displacement^{iv}, stands ready to continue to share its expertise.

Thank you.

*UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE
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Vienna, February 2020*

ⁱ Climate change can be a threat multiplier and may exacerbate conflict over depleted resources and compound pre-existing vulnerabilities. The UN Global Compact for Refugees includes the following reference: *"While not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements."* https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf (page 8). As to the complexity of climate change-related displacement the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi emphasized at the 70th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, *"Forced displacement across borders can stem from the interaction between climate change and disasters with conflict and violence - or it can arise from natural or man-made disasters alone. Either situation can trigger international protection needs"*. See <https://www.unhcr.org/5d9b4a777>

ⁱⁱ According to the 2019 Global Report of the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/>), 17.2 million people were newly internally displaced in relation to disasters in 2018. Some countries have experienced displacement situations linked to disasters and conflict simultaneously. For example, in Ethiopia, 2.9 million were newly internally displaced by conflict, while disasters also triggered 296,000 new displacements, many of them associated with flooding in the Somali region. In Somalia, while conflict and violence generated 578,000 new displacements, 547,000 more were associated with disasters, including both drought (249,000) and flooding (289,000).

ⁱⁱⁱ See https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/127/D/2728/2016&Lang=en

^{iv} UNHCR has increasingly engaged in (i) understanding the protection environment and providing guidance on applicability of refugee law frameworks for people displaced across borders in the context of climate change and disasters, notably when they interact with conflict or violence, (ii) engaging in policy discussions and raising awareness on the impact of climate change on displacement and related international protection needs for affected people, and (iii) promoting that States enhance response capacities and improve disaster preparedness and management, and offering related training and capacity-building support. UNHCR's 2018 study "In Harm's Way" examines the relevance of refugee-law based international protection when cross-border movements occur in the context of the "nexus" between conflict or violence and disaster or the adverse effects of climate change. See: In Harm's Way. International protection in the context of nexus dynamics between conflict or violence and disaster or climate change. Geneva, December 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c2f54fe4.html>