

15TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES UNFCCC COPENHAGEN

Side Event

**Climate Adaptation Continuum, Migration and Displacement:
Copenhagen and Beyond**

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14:45 – 16:15

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- Who is an environmental migrant? What images come to mind?
 - The person who leaves everything behind to flee a rapidly approaching hurricane.
 - The farmers, once self-sufficient, whose fields and villages have been consumed by gradual erosion of the coastline and increasingly extreme monsoon rains and who find themselves begging in the slums of the big city.
 - Entire nations who are faced with the prospect of moving because their land is literally disappearing.
 - The young man who leaves for the city for a few months a year to support his family during the dry season by sending remittances to purchase seeds and new tools.
 - Nomadic peoples who for centuries have adapted to variable environments by making mobility a way of life.
- All these are environmental migrants. All these scenarios are already happening now.
- The cases I have described illustrate a spectrum of the ways in which the impacts of climate change result in migration and displacement.
- We must recognize that climate change will have serious consequences for millions around the world. It will change the way people relate to their natural environment and in some cases it will change where they can live, and where they cannot.
- IOM is working in more than 400 field locations in all parts of the world. As an Organization, we have years of experience helping mobile populations affected by environmental factors, above all by natural disasters.
- Certainly since Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998, IOM, together with its humanitarian partners, has been there every time a major disaster struck and forced populations to flee for sheer survival. We know how to put up the tents in displacement camps, we know of the protection and assistance needs of displaced persons, we know how important it is to “build back better”.

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- But IOM also sees another side of environmental migration. It is the gradual, sometimes imperceptible deterioration of the environment – through droughts, erosion, declining supplies of drinking water – which in our view poses an equally formidable challenge.
- We realize that different environmental factors influence people’s decision to migrate in big and small ways. We see people using mobility strategically, to adapt to their changing environment. Not unusually, this can bring about benefits for migrants and their family and community. By contrast, preventing migration at all costs can sometimes actually make people *more*, not less, vulnerable.
- The crucial point is this: don’t make migration the last resort. Do not wait until the movement of people spells a crisis situation, when instead you can manage and use migration to counterbalance some of the adverse effects of climate change on people’s lives and livelihoods.
- IOM has engaged with the subject in its programmes, policy and research. IOM’s programmatic action has constructed a solid foundation of first-hand experiences and lessons learned. This knowledge and connection to the ground energizes the Organization’s policy and research on the issue. In turn, the cross-fertilisation between strategic thinking and investigation and IOM’s activities has given rise to new approaches.
- Copenhagen and Beyond: my fellow panellists and myself, we are here today to make sure migration and displacement are not forgotten as the world debates what to do about climate change.
- Anticipate, integrate and react are the key words. We need to think ahead and plan for change, we need to come up with integrated solutions that link migration and climate change adaptation, and we need to be prepared to respond to the humanitarian challenges that climate change is already posing.
 - First - minimize forced migration and ensure protection and assistance where displacement is inevitable;
 - Second - facilitate the role of migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change and seek to strengthen the developmental benefits of such migration for areas of origin;
 - Third - plan for relocation in areas that are expected to become uninhabitable to avoid a crisis situation and ensure sustainability;
 - Fourth - bolster humanitarian action with adequate resources to meet the growing challenge of climate change, especially to ensure assistance and protection for people on the move as a result of natural disasters;
 - Fifth - mainstream environmental and climate change considerations into migration management policies and practice, and vice versa;
 - Sixth - consider the migration and displacement consequences of climate change in the new treaty as it is being negotiated.