Good afternoon,

The Norwegian Refugee Council has worked on the issue of climate change and displacement actively over the past two years, both as an individual agency and with key partners, many represented in this distinguished panel. I would like to commend the UN for their leadership in these efforts. Joining our forces in partnerships, we have increased our knowledge, raised awareness and gained acceptance for the issue of displacement in the context of climate change.

Today, I would like to present to you some of the main findings from NRC’s recently published report *Climate Changed: People Displaced.* The full report is also available here today.

We know that climate change has effects here and now. The overall trend shows that the number of recorded natural disasters has doubled from approximately 200 to over 400 per year over the past two decades. The majority are climate-related disasters – that is, disasters which climate change can influence both in terms of frequency and severity. These include sudden-onset disasters such as storm and flood, and slow-onset disasters such as drought.

For the people affected, voluntary migration can be a form of coping or adaptation. However, climate change and disasters also contribute to forced displacement as a survival strategy.

Current projections for the number of people who will be displaced in the context of climate change vary greatly. Natural disasters are already among the leading causes of
forced displacement. We know that millions are already fleeing due to climate-related natural disasters, but so far we have had no good estimates of how many.

To address this knowledge gap, NRC carried out a study together with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs earlier this year. The findings are deeply concerning. Our study reveals that in 2008 alone, more than 20 million people were displaced by climate-related, sudden-onset natural disasters, such as floods and storms. Most of them remain internally displaced within the borders of their own country. For example, up to 800,000 people were displaced from their homes when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar last year. Many of them are still homeless – and NRC is one of many organisations trying to assist.

To put this vast number in context; 20 million persons displaced by climate-related, sudden-onset natural disasters in 2008, may be compared to 4.6 million people who were newly internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence during the course of last year. In addition to those that are displaced by climate-related, sudden-onset natural disasters, it is likely that many million more are displaced by climate-related, slow-onset disasters such as drought, and conflicts that may be linked to climate change and disasters. For these groups, we have no reliable estimates of the number of people displaced.

In one way or another, every country will eventually be affected by climate change, but some are more immediately and particularly exposed. Of the 20 disasters that caused the most displacement in 2008, 17 were in Asia. We also know that Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as drought. In Somalia the drought cycle has gone from once every ten years to becoming an almost constant.

Disaster-related displacement is only set to increase as the number of natural disasters is on the rise. We can not escape the fact that climate-related displacement is significant. Evolving climate change agreements must therefore address displacement issues.
Even the slightest increase in global mean temperature can lead to unmanageable humanitarian disasters and displacement of people. Climate change mitigation requires large and fast reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It is important that mitigation measures, such as bio fuel projects and forest conservation, are carried out with full respect for the rights of indigenous and local people, so they do not lead to displacement.

Climate change is already affecting millions of people worldwide. We must help the most vulnerable adapt to the current and unavoidable impacts of climate change. Initiatives should include reducing the risk of climate-related disasters and thereby preventing displacement. In situations where people are nonetheless forced to flee due to climate-related disasters, the adaptation regime must include assistance and protection of affected populations.

(If suitable: As the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of IDPs have elaborated on, both cross-border and internal displacement in the context of climate change raises protection challenges that must be addressed).

Together with other humanitarian agencies, many represented here in the panel, NRC has focused on getting recognition for migration and displacement issues in the current climate change negotiations. After much awareness-raising and advocacy from migration and displacement agencies – as well as delegations from affected countries – a reference to migration and displacement featured in the draft text prepared for the Copenhagen conference. Since last week the issue has been placed under paragraph 17 in the adaptation section. The humanitarian community welcomes this reference.

Today, we are gathered here to urge our political leaders to ensure that a climate change agreement incorporates this reference to migration and displacement, and addresses humanitarian concerns. While much more research is needed on this issue, there should be no doubt that we do have enough knowledge to act now.
We have to *avoid the unmanageable* by cutting greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change. At the same time, climate change is already having humanitarian consequences. *Managing the unavoidable* is not only necessary – it is urgent. Climate change is here and now. People are displaced. People must be protected.

Thank you for your attention!