Foreword

Børge Brende and Didier Burkhalter

While the international community has already been addressing many aspects of disasters, climate change and human mobility, in order to really make progress it is essential to bring together different strands of the discussion so as to develop a comprehensive response that also anticipates future challenges associated with climate change. The Governments of Norway and Switzerland are contributing to the development of future responses to disaster displacement through the Nansen Initiative.

On 12 March 2015, the Pacific island state of Vanuatu was hit by a Category 5 tropical cyclone – stronger than anything previously experienced on the islands – that affected 166,000 inhabitants, leaving 75,000 of them without adequate shelter and 110,000 in need of fresh water.

Projections indicate that previously unprecedented extreme weather events may become the norm rather than the exception. Worldwide, sudden-onset hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides and tropical storms displaced some 165 million people between 2008 and 2013. Consequently, both sudden- and slow-onset climate-related hazards – combined with rapid urbanisation, population growth and pre-existing social vulnerabilities and poverty – are likely to increase displacement and migration in the future, including across international borders.

As a consequence of the consultations we now know a lot more about the impacts of disasters and climate change on displacement and migration, and have identified effective practices currently used to prevent, prepare for and respond to such challenges, such as when people are forced to flee across international borders. Potential areas of future action have been compiled in a ‘Protection Agenda’ on cross-border displacement in the context of disasters and climate change, which will be presented and discussed during a global intergovernmental consultation in Geneva in October 2015.

Findings from the Initiative have already been fed into various international policy agendas. Prevention of displacement and migration as adaptation turned out to be major concerns of stakeholders and for this reason it was important to bring these issues to the table of the negotiators of the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. We are happy that the language about displacement adopted by the Sendai meeting in Japan reflects this. The initiative has also fed similar language into regional instruments like the Cartagena +30 declaration.

The timing of this issue of FMR about how climate change will affect us in terms of human mobility could not have been better. With the final global consultation of the
Nansen Initiative coming up in Geneva in October and the COP 21 meeting in Paris one month later,³ the international community has a significant opportunity to make sure that human mobility in the context of natural disasters is addressed in a more coherent and comprehensive manner.

The Nansen Initiative: building consensus on displacement in disaster contexts

Walter Kälin

Over almost three years, the Nansen Initiative consultative process has identified a toolbox of potential policy options to prevent, prepare for and respond to the challenges of cross-border displacement in disaster contexts, including the effects of climate change.

The Nansen Initiative was initially launched by the Governments of Switzerland and Norway in October 2012, recognising that under existing international law there is no assurance that people forced by disasters to flee across international borders will be admitted and receive assistance, let alone find durable solutions to their displacement. Such displacement creates not only legal protection problems but also operational, institutional and funding challenges, since no international organisation has a clear mandate for such people.

However, over the course of the Nansen Initiative’s consultative process with states, civil society, academics, international organisations and affected communities, it quickly became evident that a holistic approach to the topic would also need to look at prevention of displacement; planned relocation or voluntary and regular migration to avoid a situation where displacement with all its negative impacts becomes inevitable; and better protection and sustainable solutions for internally displaced persons too. The consultations have also brought out the multi-causal nature of displacement, particularly following slow-onset hazards and other gradual effects associated with climate change, and highlighted that such population movements are occurring in the context of disasters and climate change rather than being exclusively caused by such events.

Building consensus

The Nansen Initiative’s primary purpose is to build consensus among affected states about how they could adequately respond to the challenge of cross-border displacement in the context of disasters, including the adverse impacts of climate change. To this end, it has held inter-governmental consultations hosted by members of the Nansen Initiative Steering Group¹ within five sub-regions (the Pacific, Central America, the Greater Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia and South Asia), and separate civil society meetings in these same regions. These consultations emphasised the diverse and distinct dynamics of cross-border displacement, and human mobility more generally within disaster contexts. Furthermore, the consultations highlighted the largely regional nature of these movements and the numerous processes under way for responding to displacement in disasters.

Disaster displacement, including across international borders, is either already a reality in many parts of the world or is likely to increase or occur, since climate change is likely to increase the magnitude and frequency of disasters. The consultations have affirmed the primary responsibility

---

¹. www.nanseninitiative.org/global-consultations/
². www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Political_Declaration_WCDRR.pdf
³. www.cop21paris.org/

Børge Brende and Didier Burkhalter are the Foreign Ministers of Norway and Switzerland respectively.