

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT

The need for collaboration

John Holmes



The global demand for humanitarian assistance, which is already considerable, is likely to grow in the coming decade, and to see a major increase in our lifetimes. The biggest single cause will be climate change and the increased incidence and severity of extreme weather events associated with it.

Indeed, we are beginning to feel the effects. What we are already witnessing is not an aberration but rather a 'curtain raiser' on the future. These events are

what I call the 'new normal'. The number of recorded disasters has doubled from approximately 200 to over 400 per year over the past two decades. Nine of out every 10 disasters are now climate-related. Last year, my office at the UN issued an unprecedented 15 funding appeals for sudden natural disasters, five more than the previous annual record. 14 of them were climate-related.

Compounding the challenges of climate change are the recent dramatic trends in soaring food and fuel prices, which are poised to have a major impact on hunger and poverty across the world and are having an immediate

impact on the cost of humanitarian operations. We have to ask the question: are we properly prepared for this?

We have the means to tackle all these issues, if we have the will. What we need to do above all is to start investing in the concrete, practical risk-reduction measures that can help save lives and livelihoods. It is going to take all of our combined efforts to prepare for and mitigate their effects. To that end, we must build on and develop lasting and substantive partnerships across all nations and sectors.

In an era defined by a changing climate and the ever-present menace of conflict, no single humanitarian agency or set of agencies can cover all humanitarian needs. Only by working together can we further our ability to alleviate suffering, and help to restore a measure of hope and humanity to a world sorely in need of both.

John Holmes is Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. This article is extracted from a speech given at the 2008 Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition. The full text is available at www.dihad.org.