

Foreword: The 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles – building solidarity, forging commitment

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2018 marks the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Much has been achieved over the past 20 years but with over 40 million people internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence, and no sign of numbers decreasing, we need to ask ourselves: Where do we go from here?

The experience of internal displacement is traumatic, life-changing and frequently life-threatening. Each person displaced has lost access not only to the home that offered shelter but also to security, dignity, cherished possessions, livelihoods, memories and a sense of belonging and community.

For children, the experience can be particularly traumatic and confusing, often leading to long-lasting psychosocial issues and difficulties that commonly go untreated. Deprived of education, stability and routine often for months or years, it is no exaggeration to speak of a lost generation of young people in some situations. Too often, displaced women and girls experience the further atrocity of sexual violence, exploitation or the threat of violence. And there is increasing evidence that sexual violence against displaced men and boys may be far more widespread than was previously understood.

For older people with strong ties to their homes and who often have weaker coping mechanisms than the young, the experience can be shocking and disorientating. For those with disabilities, the experience can bring immense problems, sometimes relating to their mobility or their ability to access basic assistance and services. For those who may face discrimination in daily life generally, such as ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples or members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities, displacement can exacerbate the challenges and threats that they face and they may find themselves targeted, marginalised or excluded from assistance.

The Guiding Principles constitute the key international standard on internal displacement. They provide a definition of

an internally displaced person (IDP) and set out IDPs' rights to be protected and assisted before and during displacement and in their search for durable solutions following displacement. They give national authorities the primary responsibility for protecting IDPs and clarify key principles relating to humanitarian assistance provided by international and non-governmental bodies.

Work is still needed on those elements of the Guiding Principles that have been somewhat neglected. For example, millions of people are affected each year by development-related displacement but their protection often falls short of agreed standards. Equally, in some settings there has been a reluctance to recognise situations characterised by scattered displacements of individuals or families rather than mass movements, when people are forced to flee as a result of generalised violence and human rights violations.

With the 20th anniversary we have launched the GP20 Plan of Action to galvanise and support multi-stakeholder action around the overarching goal of reducing internal displacement in line with the Guiding Principles. Articles in this special issue of Forced Migration Review introduce the Plan of Action and examine the varying elements involved in this commitment to more strategic, concrete and joined-up action, including: incorporating the Guiding Principles into national law and policy, improving the evidence base and statistical resources, raising awareness of human rights and the Guiding Principles and making them accessible to a wider audience, enhancing regional frameworks to support States affected by internal displacement, working towards collective outcomes through

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the New Way of Working, and building solidarity across and between States.

It is imperative that internal displacement is understood, not only in terms of a particular challenge facing a few States afflicted by conflict, violence or disaster, or as an issue solely of the internal affairs of States, but as a regional and, ultimately, a global issue that has implications for many countries. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons is to assist stakeholders in their responses to internal displacement and their implementation of the Guiding Principles. I urge States to make greater use of my mandate and the resources that are available to me. We stand ready to provide technical assistance and advisory services, including on law and policy and provide guidance, where pertinent.

Just as my predecessors wrote for Forced Migration Review when the Guiding

Principles on Internal Displacement were introduced in 1998 and again on their 10th anniversary, I welcome this 20th anniversary issue and encourage you to make use of it and disseminate it. The 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles offers a unique opportunity to reaffirm our solidarity with internally displaced persons by forging a stronger commitment to more robustly and effectively prevent internal displacement, enhance protection for IDPs and support durable solutions for them.

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www.ohchr.org/en/issues/idpersons/pages/idpersonsindex.aspx

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The **Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement** (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2) restate and compile human rights and humanitarian law relevant to internally displaced persons. They were presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1998, and are currently available in 54 languages.

www.ohchr.org/en/issues/idpersons/pages/standards.aspx