**Shining a light on the human rights challenges of Internally Displaced Persons**

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This Refugee Week, I would like to shed light on the human rights challenges faced by a specific group of forcibly displaced individuals – internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, disasters and other causes, their protection challenges echo those of refugees. Yet, unlike refugees, they have not crossed an international border, and primary responsibility for their protection and assistance lies with the national authorities.

While refugees warrant specific attention, it is equally important to focus on IDPs. By the close of 2023, 63% of the world's forcibly displaced people were displaced within their own countries. The aim is not to privilege assistance to IDPs. Rather, by understanding and addressing their unique needs and risks stemming from their displacement, we can ensure their human rights are equally upheld.

**The unique challenges of internal displacement**

Displacement forces people from their homes, depriving them of shelter, land, possessions and livelihoods. The struggle to secure new income sources is often exacerbated by general unemployment, limited skills, loss of social networks and discrimination. As a result, IDPs often endure more severe and persistent poverty and higher food insecurity than others in society.

IDPs' living conditions, often precarious and overcrowded, expose them to health risks. Access to health care, education and other services is often difficult as their personal documentation is frequently lost or destroyed during displacement. IDPs are also more exposed to protection risks during flight and once displaced. These include family separation, forced evictions, sexual and gender-based violence, child recruitment, early marriage and landmines.

These protection risks, coupled with the trauma and psychological repercussions of displacement and the breakdown of community cohesion, can amplify IDPs' vulnerability and erode their resilience. It can also generate tensions and sow the seeds for future displacement risks. Combined, these challenges obstruct IDPs' access to their rights, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives and secure a stable future.

**Overcoming displacement challenges**

Despite these daunting challenges, many of the internally displaced persons I have met are not passive victims defined by their displacement. At this year's UNHCR Global Consultations with NGOs, I had the privilege of participating in a panel with internally displaced persons from Ukraine, Colombia, Nigeria and Libya. These panelists are leaders of formal participation mechanisms for IDPs in their countries. Some have established NGOs, undertaking unpaid, volunteer work in their spare time despite ongoing violence, insecurity and other risks.

I heard similar stories in virtual conversations with IDPs earlier this year. In Ethiopia, IDPs established committees in 20 sites to share resources and aid. Their work has evolved to the point where they now meet regularly with international actors and local authorities to discuss challenges and priorities and exchange information. This experience highlights that participation requires a budget, but it is difficult to secure funding since the output is intangible.

**Supporting the human rights of IDPs**

While the agency and work of IDPs is inspiring, it is not enough. More must be done to assist them and ensure their human rights are respected and protected through to the achievement of durable solutions. Several recommendations from the recently published review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee-commissioned *Independent review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement* are key in this regard.

First, we need to reinforce national responsibility for the protection of IDPs. This includes supporting the development and implementation of laws that prohibit forced displacement, protect IDPs' rights, ensure access to justice for rights violations and establish conditions for the achievement of durable solutions. It also includes supporting UN Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators with humanitarian diplomacy.

Second, we need to improve humanitarian assistance to IDPs, ensuring it is timely, adequate and responsive to their specific needs. Humanitarians must lay the groundwork for solutions to internal displacement as early as possible to avoid aid dependency and protracted displacement. This includes prioritising safe and dignified shelter, supporting livelihoods and education, documentation and housing, land and property rights.

Third, we need to invest more in addressing the root causes of displacement through conflict resolution, climate change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable development. Development and peace organisations need to arrive earlier, and national authorities and organisations need to work harder to keep the peace and maintain security. Otherwise, we risk further displacement, dispossession and social dislocation.

Lastly, we need to ensure that IDPs are at the centre of the response to internal displacement. It is time that we work alongside them as rightsholders rather than treat them as mere beneficiaries of assistance. We also need to better understand and address barriers to participation, offering conditions conducive to participation.

While the challenges faced by IDPs are significant, they are not insurmountable. With concerted effort, political will and the active participation of IDPs themselves, we can ensure that the human rights of IDPs are upheld, and that they can look forward to a future of dignity, security and peace. Let us all work together towards this goal.

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