27th Anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
2nd National Conference & Formal Launch of the #IDPBillMyBill Campaign

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Dear colleagues, friends, and partners,

I am honoured to join you in commemorating 27 years of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. My sincere thanks to UNHCR Philippines for convening this important event, and to all of you for your commitment to the rights of internally displaced persons.

Since their adoption in 1998, the Guiding Principles have served as a cornerstone for protecting and assisting IDPs. They affirm a simple but powerful truth: that national authorities bear the primary responsibility to protect and support those displaced within their borders.

These Principles are more than a restatement of legal norms—they are a strategic framework for action. They guide us in preventing displacement, protecting rights, and securing durable solutions.

My predecessors, Francis Deng and Walter Kälin, played a pivotal role in their development. Since then, successive mandate holders and I have worked closely with States to translate them into national laws and policies – and even the first regional protection framework in Africa.

And yet, despite this progress, internal displacement continues to rise. Today, over 83 million people are displaced within their own countries—due to disasters, conflict, violence, and increasingly, climate-related shocks. Many remain in protracted displacement, with no end in sight. Many more are displaced by other drivers such as large-scale and aggressive development projects.

This is a global crisis that demands renewed commitment. At its heart lies the principle of **sovereignty as responsibility**. IDPs are citizens and residents of their countries. They have rights—and States have duties.

Globally, we are also witnessing a shift in the global landscape that affects the enjoyment of human rights:

- Armed conflicts increasingly disregard international law.
- Humanitarian principles are under strain.
- Political polarization and funding cuts are weakening our collective response.

In this context, national responsibility becomes even more critical. And law and policy are essential tools. They provide the structure, consistency, and rights-based approach needed to protect IDPs and support solutions.

Let me be clear: there is no substitute for strong national legislation. I have seen firsthand how laws—when well-crafted and implemented—can transform lives. In my country Colombia, for example, the Victims' Law created a reparations regime for IDPs. It had to be extended because displacement persisted—showing the need for flexibility with legal processes—but it laid the foundation for justice and recovery.

Implementation is never static. It is an evolving process that must be flexible, inclusive, and grounded in the lived realities of IDPs. That means ensuring their **meaningful participation**—not just as beneficiaries, but as active agents in shaping their futures.

Too often, participation is overlooked. But international human rights law is clear: IDPs have the right to be heard, to vote, to engage in public life. We must move beyond tokenism and create real mechanisms for inclusion.

This is why I am especially encouraged by today's focus on the IDP Bill in the Philippines. This is a moment of opportunity. A moment to enshrine the Guiding Principles into national law. A moment to lead by example in Asia.

I call on the Government of the Philippines to pass the national IDP Bill without delay and the Bangsamoro Government to effectively implement its landmark IDP law.

Legislation is not just a legal instrument—it is a lifeline. It is a commitment to dignity, to protection, and to solutions.

If we fail to act, we risk reversing hard-won gains. We risk leaving millions behind. But if we succeed, we can build a future where IDPs are not just protected—but empowered.

Let us seize this moment. Let us honour the Guiding Principles not only in words, but in action.