

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

High-level Panel on IDPs at the 2020 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

“Mobilizing action to improve humanitarian assistance for IDPs and achieve durable solutions”

USG/ERC Mark Lowcock - Opening Remarks as Moderator

11 June 2020

As delivered

ECOSOC Vice President Ambassador Omar Hilale, Excellencies, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As you all know, we entered 2020 with a record number of more than 50 million internally displaced people across the world.

If IDPs on their own were a country, they would be the size of Spain, South Korea or Kenya.

Ninety per cent of them are displaced by conflict which of course brings with it the additional problems of stress, uncertainty, trauma and loss.

With COVID-19 now affecting every corner of the planet, IDPs are going to be disproportionately exposed and they are even more vulnerable than anyone else to job losses and food shortages.

The truth is, we as the international community need to do a much better job in helping IDPs, as well as the communities who host them and their governments. We need long-term solutions that can start working from the very start of the kind of humanitarian emergencies that often result in long-term displacement.

So these are the difficult questions that our session today will focus on.

Year after year, we see ever more people becoming displaced. Displacement tends to last longer and longer. As new displacement problems arise, the old ones are not solved, and so the number just keeps on growing.

And the toll displacement takes on communities and families, especially the most vulnerable – women, children, disabled people – the economic costs are rising as well. So the whole toll just keeps growing.

That includes the financial burden, the cost of providing basic services and accounting for lost income has been estimated at US\$20 billion a year in 2019.

So this situation is really untenable.

It's untenable most importantly for the displaced people themselves because every time you meet them and talk to them, the overwhelming message you take away from those encounters is their strong desire to have a chance to re-establish their lives, to gain back their dignity and their self-sufficiency.

It's also untenable for the affected countries because this large community of displaced people constitute a major hurdle to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

And of course it is untenable for an already overstretched and under-financed humanitarian system.

The pandemic starkly reinforces the need to find solutions for IDPs. You will all have seen the Secretary-General's *Policy Brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move* which we published last week and reinforces how vulnerable IDPs are to the virus and its socio-economic consequences.

And that's partly because they often live in crowded camps or settlements in countries with very weak health systems. They typically have almost no access to adequate sanitation and other basic services. The humanitarian organizations trying to help them are really stretched to the point at the moment of being overwhelmed.

So we need to do things differently.

We now have an opportunity to make serious progress on this issue. Let me tell you why I think that is.

First, because we have renewed high-level attention, interest and action to address the issue. Member States entered a commitment in the Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind, including IDPs and there is reason to be encouraged by increasing number of States affected by displacement acting on their promises to deal with the problem.

Secondly, we see some innovation in practice by governments, local authorities, UN agencies and others. I hope that our panel will talk to us a bit about some of the creative and innovative solutions they have seen.

And finally, as you all know, the Secretary-General established his High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and has asked the Panel to generate new ideas and approaches to find solutions to

protracted displacement. Given the Panel's high-powered make-up, I'm sure that its recommendations are going to help us move the dial on this important issue.

I want to say at this point that of course the COVID crisis itself has impacted on the Panel too. The first meeting the panel had was in February just before lockdown and it's been difficult for them to do all the things they wanted to do because of lockdown.

We think that it would be desirable to extend the timeline available to the Panel to conduct its work. We very much hope that we'll win support for that. In particular we're going to need to ask donors for just a very little bit of extra money to enable the Panel to go on with its work long enough, in particular interactions in the countries affected by displacement with the national authorities and with displaced people themselves. So we're already talking to some of you about that. We really do ask for your help with it. It's really a tiny amount of money in the greater scheme of things but it will make a big difference to the ability of the Panel to maximize their contribution.

So let's get started. I am thrilled of course to be able to call first of all, on Federica Mogherini, who everybody here knows very well, and who has kindly agreed at the request of the Secretary-General to co-chair the High-level Panel.

ENDS