

## **Twenty-five years of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement**

### **A Call to Action: Ending the curse of internal displacement**

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More people are being forced to flee within their own country than ever before. Last year, tens of millions were driven from their homes due to conflict, violence, and disasters, including by the invasion of Ukraine, catastrophic floods in South Asia, drought in East Africa, and violent clashes between armed criminal groups in Central America and the Caribbean. Internally displaced persons are among the most vulnerable populations globally. Displaced in their homeland, often for years and sometimes for decades, internally displaced persons trail their fellow citizens on almost all socio-economic indicators. To be displaced is to be uprooted, to lose your sense of belonging, your assets and to be separated from your community and thrown into the unknown. In displacement, far too many children lose access to schooling, families to health services and breadwinners to their livelihoods.

Twenty-five years ago, on 17 April 1998, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. A milestone for the human rights of internally displaced persons, the Guiding Principles provided a descriptive definition of who is an internally displaced person and restated the human rights which are particularly at risk of being violated as a result of displacement that must be respected. At the heart of the Guiding Principles is the notion of “sovereignty as responsibility”, which emphasizes that internally displaced persons are full-fledged citizens or residents of their country and that national authorities must provide protection to restore and fulfil their rights and to find solutions to end their displacement in line with their wishes and international standards.

Great strides have been made since then in raising awareness and implementing the Principles. The Guiding Principles were recognized by more than 190 Heads of State as “an important international framework for the protection of internally displaced persons” at the 2005 World Summit, a formulation subsequently mirrored in several General Assembly and Human Rights Council Resolutions. The Guiding Principles have been translated into more than 40 languages and incorporated into domestic laws and policies by 46 governments worldwide, and in a landmark regional instrument, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons. They have continued to set the strategic direction for international responses and have most recently been reflected in the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. Most importantly, the Guiding Principles have served as the basis for internally displaced persons to advocate for their rights and to participate in decisions that affect them. With record levels of internally displaced people worldwide, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are more relevant than ever.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Guiding Principles offers an occasion to commemorate and build on the immense progress achieved to date under this framework, and to remind us all of the challenges internally displaced persons continue to face. It is also an opportunity for all stakeholders – in particular national authorities- to strengthen and renew responsibilities and commitments to implement the Guiding Principles, setting up systems to prevent and mitigate displacement crises, to protect and assist those who are brutally cut off from their homes and livelihoods, and enable lasting solutions to displacement.

Towards this end, we urge Governments worldwide to continue incorporating the Guiding Principles into national law and policies, to lead on developing and investing in solutions pathways that will end internal displacement and to integrate this vulnerable community into their plans to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes ensuring effective implementation of laws and policies and facilitating the participation of internally displaced persons in shaping the decisions that affect them.

In line with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, we also urge Governments to organize national dialogues that draw together IDPs, civil society, national and local Governments, and international partners, to guide efforts to address internal displacement, in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Displaced people are caught in a state of limbo somewhere between returning home, anchoring themselves where they first found safety or perhaps moving to somewhere new. This protracted sense of being in transit takes an immense toll on their well-being and sense of belonging, not least on children born in displacement without a sense of where, exactly, is 'Home'.

We call upon the States to help millions of displaced persons to get out of that limbo and regain their peace – living a life in safety and dignity without the anxiety and uncertainty of wondering whether tomorrow will bring yet more upheaval and loss.

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