

**Presentation to side event at the Civicus forum – OCHA
6 November 2017**

Climate change and forced displacement

Forced displacement related to disasters, including the adverse effects of climate change (disaster displacement), is among the many global challenges facing States and the humanitarian system in the 21st century.

Every year, millions of people are displaced by disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, salt water intrusion, glacial melting, glacial lake outburst floods, and melting permafrost. Others have to move because of the effects of sea level rise, desertification or environmental degradation.

Displacement profoundly affects IDPs, host communities and countries as a whole.

The UN Secretary General Guterres has said that climate change today is undeniable... now natural disasters are becoming more frequent, more intense and with more devastating consequences. We see deserts progressing. We see glaciers diminishing. We see the sea levels starting to rise. So it is clearly a threat to us all”.

The Secretary General has also said that “Climate change is driving the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events around the world. We need to show greater determination to implement the Paris Agreement, with greater ambition.

He has stated that “The poor and most vulnerable, including women and girls, suffer disproportionately in disasters” and called for “more effort into tackling disaster risk to create a safer, more sustainable world for all”.

Looking to the future, there are evidence-based views among scientists that disasters are expected to become more frequent and more severe. I was at a recent briefing by a climatologist from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology that predicted more severe weather conditions in the Pacific – less cyclones of greater

intensity. This is a concern for us as humanitarian practitioners and responders in the Pacific region.

Climate change, in combination with other factors, is projected to contribute to increased displacement. A similar projection is echoed in the former Secretary-General's Report to the World Humanitarian Summit, where he expressed concern that climate change exacerbates other risk factors such as food security and water scarcity, and that disasters are becoming more frequent and intense.

There are specific disaster and displacement risks faced by people living in areas such as small low-lying islands, coastal or delta areas, high mountain areas or areas exposed to desertification.

These situations require special support. For example, the adverse impacts of climate change are increasingly being felt in low-lying Pacific islands that are vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather events.

During recent years, we have noticed that the percentage of the Pacific's population affected is often disproportionate to the size of the affected country and impacts on its response capabilities.

In recent years, Tropical Cyclone Pam affected close to 75 per cent of Vanuatu's population, while Tropical Cyclone Winston affected up to 40 per cent of Fiji's population.

Humanitarian impact in the Pacific

The Pacific has had a strong voice international on climate change and its impact – particularly through Fiji's recent presidency of COP 23 in Bonn.

I would also like to acknowledge the importance of regional Pacific organizations in shaping development and humanitarian action in the Pacific – particularly through collaborative fora like the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat.

And through the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF) – which made significant commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit.

PIDF's commitments at the World Humanitarian summit include:-

Assisting member countries establish national policies that safeguards the rights of displaced persons, particularly as a result of climate change.

Working with island communities to improve their livelihood and their resilience to natural disasters and climate change events through the use of traditional knowledge, as well as innovative methods and technologies.

Convening a Post WHS summit meeting to agree on a Pacific position on Climate Induced Displacement and Migration (CIDM) and prepare a regional declaration and a plan of action on CIDM for high level endorsement - seek update on planning for this.

And to support the implementation of the localization agenda (Pacific solutions for the Pacific)

They have led the development of the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific 2017-2030, which recognizes the impact of climate change and works to strengthen and integrate disaster and climate change.

Forced **displacement** and voluntary and planned **relocation** are **already taking place** in the Pacific region, particularly in the context of disasters and effects of climate change but also inter-community conflicts and violence. **Climate change is likely to exacerbate** these challenges and people will continue to move both inside their countries and across borders.

The World Humanitarian Summit Pacific regional consultations identified a desire to see Pacific countries and their neighbours to start planning now for displacement (internal and international), planned relocation and migration likely to be caused by rising sea levels and reduced food security.

In 2016, Pacific leaders raised at the 71st session of the General Assembly their concerns about climate change in relation to the ratification of the Paris Agreement. The President of the Republic of Kiribati, HE Taneti Maamau, said "It is distressing to see our people continuing to fight the onslaught of sea level rise, storm surges and disasters like Cyclone Pam and TC Winston".

“And I must say that the increasing frequency and severity of such events have exacerbated the heartbreaking impacts on our people...In some parts of our country, whole villages had to relocate due to severe coastal erosion and flooding”.

The Prime Minister of Tuvalu, the Hon Enele Sosene Sopoanga, spoke at the same event on behalf of atoll nations who are ‘suffering the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, and are predicted by many of total extinction’. He also called for the “protection of the human rights of those people displaced by the impacts of climate change and sea level rise”.

The humanitarian system and others ‘can and must do better’ to reduce risks and vulnerability, and strengthen the capacity to address disaster displacement. There are many international initiatives to do this – and OCHA was part of the World Humanitarian Summit where this was raised as a key issue.

We need to work together to address and anticipate the scale and complexity of present disasters, which will otherwise leave affected and displaced populations with inadequate protection.

Supporting localization of responses

OCHA in the Pacific is seeking to engage in ways that support implementation of the WHS, and regional and government-led responses to longer term issues of climate change and displacement, as well as in emergency response.

OCHA seeks an enabling role in the Pacific, recognizing the strength of regional and government-led initiatives and responses – and the importance of local capacity being maintained and local solutions implemented.

We are also supporting preparedness and contingency planning for Pacific Islands’ responses to emergencies and natural disasters, with our partners – the Pacific Humanitarian Team, a network of 15 organizations - UN agencies, INGOs and IFRC that work together in disaster response and preparedness.

Recently we have been working to support preparedness efforts in Kiribati and Tuvalu – in part due to concerns about the likely impact of climate change in these countries.

And working to provide direct capacity building of Pacific partners to respond to local and international emergencies – and support preparedness initiatives.

I would like to speak briefly today on recommendations from the recent Pacific Humanitarian Partnership Forum, calling on the international community donors to support the approach to localisation in the Pacific.

These recommendations, if implemented can work to support climate change initiatives and preparedness – through ensuring that all actors work to support the response at the local level, strengthen their decision making power and focus more on local communities through sustainable projects and local initiatives.

These recommendations are:-

- Working to localise preparedness – through the Country Preparedness Packages – which the Pacific Humanitarian Team, supported by OCHA and UNDP are working together to support.
- Supporting disaster resilience at a grass roots level.
- the humanitarian community should refocus to adapt to Pacific island country cultures and adopt to their communities, through appreciating Pacific island traditions and encourage humanitarian aid programmes to more effectively adapt global arrangements to Pacific needs.
- Giving particular attention to vulnerable groups at the local level.
 - The involvement and engagement of vulnerable groups is essential to ensure that their key specific needs are met during response. “As local as possible, and international as necessary”.
- Ensure community leaders such as women, people with disabilities and the LGBTQI community have a voice in the discussion.

- And continuing to support capacity development of Pacific peoples for preparedness.

The forum proposed that our common mantra must be - putting people at the centre, and respecting affected people as critical partners and contributors to humanitarian response, preparedness and resilience. In the context of climate change and the possibility of forced displacement, this is critical.

Thank you