

Madam High Commissioner,

Madame President of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

Thank you very much for inviting me to the opening of this intersessional seminar mandated by the HRC 2 years ago – when the world was still “normal”. We did not know at the time how timely it would be once it happened.

It is a very important event because it allows us to shed some light on one of the major human rights issues of our time, which nonetheless sometimes get overshadowed by other phenomena like refugees, migrants, victims of human trafficking or other groups of persons on the move.

Today IDPs amount to over 50 million people, the biggest communities are to be found in Syria, Columbia, DRC, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia and Nigeria. They are more than double the number of refugees, and yet they often get a bit overlooked. However, they deserve a very special attention by the international community not least because they are often the subject of multiple human rights violations.

Most IDPs have been arbitrarily and forcefully uprooted by conflict, violence or climate disaster but also by organized crime or land grabs. We are told that there are about three times as many IDPs due to natural disasters than because of armed conflicts or violence.

Very often they not only lost everything when they had to leave home, they also remained traumatized from the upheaval of displacement and all the psychological and physical scars that came with it.

Very often IDPs find themselves in unstable situations for many years. Research tells us that the average conflict on this planet lasts for more than 30 years. So being a displaced person often means to be in the waiting room of life.

The problems surrounding IDPs are not new: In 1998 the then Commission on Human Rights issued the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement whose 20th anniversary we celebrated two years ago. They recognized that there was a specific protection gap with regard to IDPs which was not ready to go away so soon. The guiding principles recalled the obvious: which is that internally displaced persons should enjoy the same rights and freedoms as everybody else and should not be discriminated against, yet experience shows us that this simple truth is never easy to implement.

The GP20 process launched 2 years ago tried to bring to life the GP. It is never easy to guarantee even the basics to displaced persons when their host communities are equally affected by disasters or conflicts. How to make sure big numbers of people in densely populated areas get full access to food, water, land, credit, energy, justice, education, health care, housing, social protection, employment and what have you. Each of these aspects will be looked at today.

Today's panel rightly looks back into what has been achieved in the last two years and ahead in order to explore what needs to be done to reinvigorate the implementation of the guiding principles and create synergies between the different actors working with IDPs.

The Human Rights Council, whose president I have the honour of being this year, analyses the problems of IDPs at regular intervals.

It is aware of the fact that IDPs are especially exposed to a multiplicity of human rights issues which need constant monitoring. We often talk about human rights mainstreaming. This is exactly what is required here.

The guiding principles offer a wealth of recommendations and tools in this regard and I can only commend the commitment of the special rapporteur and her team for their relentless work in this area.

We always say the Special Procedures of the human rights council are the eyes and ears of the Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur for IDPs does even more than that. She has a truly hands-on way of bringing concrete change at the national level, she advises governments how best to reform their legal and political systems, she never fails to mention that what is needed is a human rights-based approach and she follows up relentlessly on implementation. Wherever human rights are respected, IDPs will be more resilient, more in a position to cope with the multiple challenges of their situations and they will have more confidence in what is being done for them.

In his call for action the SG insisted on the importance of taking into account human rights whenever the UN takes decisions. The seminar will focus among other things on the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peace. There will be no durable solution of the humanitarian problems and no peace without a rights-based approach.

It is therefore important that all actors on the ground, in particular UN missions, resident coordinators and UN country teams are encouraged to use the tools provided by the guiding principles and to follow the recommendations regulatory recalled by the special rapporteur.

This issue will not go away. On the contrary - the special rapporteur warns us - that slow-onset root causes are on the rise.

IDPs are getting more and more numerous. They do not have a lobby, but in any case: looking away is no meaningful strategy.

The HRC can only diagnose and observe the problems and try to help those who let themselves be helped. Host countries are often among the poorest and still show an incredible degree of generosity. They need our support to make sure that whatever is being done for IDPs is not done at the expense of their human rights.

I hope that this intersectional seminar will not only reconfirm the importance of work already done in the past - and put the topic on the mental map of a wider audience - but also come up with concrete ideas on how to make use of the plan of action and recommend whatever further action is needed against a background of current developments (COVID). The world finds itself in a situation of multiple challenges and

possibly in a phase of transition. The weak usually suffer the most from such situations. And no doubt IDPs are among the weakest. It is for their benefit that I wish you a very fruitful discussion.