



International Foundation for Electoral Systems
Submission in response to
Call for Input for the HRC56 Thematic Report on
Climate Change and Internal Displacement issued by the
Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

“It is imperative that climate displaced people’s rights to fully participate in the political life of their communities, and in particular the right to vote, are respected.”

– IFES President Anthony Banbury

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) welcomes the efforts of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in collecting input for the HRC56 Thematic Report on Climate Change and Internal Displacement. In this submission, IFES respectfully provides comments drawn from our global experience promoting electoral and political rights of all people that has spanned over 146 countries over the past 35 years, including large numbers IDPs and externally displaced persons. IFES further submits two case studies pertaining to the rights of people displaced by disaster and climate displacement from Ukraine and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, in the South Pacific.

With its mission “Together we build resilient democracies that deliver for all”, and as a global leader in democracy promotion, IFES advances good governance and democratic rights by providing technical assistance to election officials and governments, empowering the underrepresented to participate in the political process, and applying field-based research to improve electoral and political participation. (www.ifes.org)

Climate change and natural disasters pose a significant threat globally, impacting livelihoods and human security, particularly communities that are traditionally underserved and under-represented. As these challenges mount, it is critical to protect and bolster electoral and political rights for all people by building dynamic and adaptive systems of governance.

IFES supports key stakeholders to effectively address the effects of climate change on democratic rights and governance. IFES offers unique tools, research, and recommendations for adapting elections and political processes to environmental disasters and climate change, bringing deep expertise in how to support the full and equal participation of marginalized and underserved groups in decision-making.

Political Participation – Key to Protecting Rights of Climate Displaced People

International agreements emphasize the importance of ensuring that IDPs irrespective of their reason for displacement - conflict, climate, natural disasters or other challenges, maintain their fundamental human rights and are involved in decision-making. One of the most effective ways for IDPs to be involved in decision-making is through electoral and political participation.

In 2021, IFES published a paper on the [Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons](#). In the paper and our subsequent efforts, we make a strong case that those most affected by environmental problems need to be able to vote, run for office and engage with candidates and elected representatives to influence agendas, challenge policies and hold governments accountable.

To address challenges IDPs face in political and electoral participation, IFES recommends the following:

- Plan in advance to ensure political and electoral participation of IDPs;
- Undertake consultations with IDPs themselves including those with intersectional identities who face additional barriers;
- Engage a range of stakeholders from health, education, humanitarian assistance, security, and other sectors serving IDPs;
- Build political consensus to reach cross-party agreement;
- Make data available so informed judgements and decisions can be made regarding IDP political participation;
- Undertake special measures as required to facilitate IDP participation, and
- Make every effort to provide IDPs individual choice on voting for constituencies of origin or current constituencies (those to which they are displaced).

IFES also makes following recommendations to build countries' adaptive capacities and strengthen the fulfilment of IDP's rights:

- Governments should develop data and plans to protect IDPs political rights;
- Parliaments should undertake methodical consultative processes and amend legislation to provide for special measures;
- Election management bodies should designate dedicated focal points, undertake research and consultation, make data available, increase specialized voter education, engage security services and sensitize the judiciary;
- Political parties should address environmental and displacement issues;
- Media should cover displacement in an accurate, effective and inclusive manner especially speaking with affected people themselves;
- Civil society should advocate for, observe and report on the political participation of environmentally displaced persons;
- All actors should leverage the roles played by women, young people and Indigenous communities who have often been at the forefront of sustained climate activism on both national and global level, for effective political participation and policy.

A detailed set of recommendations are provided in the IFES paper mentioned earlier. As the environmentally displaced population continues to grow, it is necessary for the international community to take proactive measures to promote continued enfranchisement and political participation of displaced peoples. In doing so, it is extremely important to look at displaced people themselves as both knowledgeable and key stakeholders in their own life circumstances and who bring skills, insights and talents that benefit their new communities.

Annex 1: Kakhovka Dam, Ukraine Case Study

Background

On June 6, 2023, the Russian military occupational forces blew up the Kakhovka dam in the Kherson region and destroyed the Kakhovka electric power plant. This resulted in the flooding of an extensive area, directly affecting up to 100,000 inhabitants of the region.¹

The Government of Ukraine declared a state of emergency in some 28 towns and villages in southern Ukraine, where the flooding destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes and sent up to 17,000 people on the move.² The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that 2,700 individuals were evacuated from the river's right bank for their safety, most of whom have yet to return home.³



Impact

The UN assessed that the draining of the Kakhovka Reservoir caused by the dam collapse could impact up to 700,000 people.⁴ It affected the southern region's energy production, access to drinking water, irrigation, and river transport, destroying housing, infrastructure, and cultural heritage. Preliminary loss estimates were USD 14 billion, with an additional USD 5 billion needed for recovery and reconstruction costs.⁵ Some 37,000 homes, primarily single-family ones, were flooded and damaged, 15 percent beyond repair.

Compensation

On June 19, 2023, Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers assigned one-off financial compensation to the Mykolaiv and Kherson regional military administrations from the State Reserve Fund in the form of USD 147 per person affected by the dam blast.⁶ Some 23,000 persons affected

¹ UN Post-Disaster Needs Assessment [report](#).

² Kyiv School of Economics report; UN Environmental Programme [Rapid Environmental Assessment report](#).

³ IOM [report](#).

⁴ UN News [Ukraine: 700,000 people affected by water shortage from dam disaster](#).

⁵ Relief [Post-disaster needs assessment report](#)

⁶ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [Resolution 626 of June 19, 2023](#)

received support under this government initiative, which totalled USD 3.4 million. In addition, international organizations paid about USD 194, in compensation to 13,400 residents affected by the flooding (USD 2.6 million).

The Ukrainian government has approved guidelines for using State budget funds to repair housing damaged or destroyed in the Kakhovka Dam disaster.⁷ They have also outlined plans to allocate budgetary resources to compensate citizens for their damaged and destroyed homes and the restoration and construction of new housing units.

Displacement

People who left flooded areas had the right to receive the status of internally displaced and were eligible for social benefits on the same grounds as IDPs related to the war.

The UN anticipates that climate-induced displacement and migration could lead to up to 400,000 people leaving the southern regions of Ukraine in the coming years. The anticipated displacement is linked to a shortage of adequate housing, limited access to clean water, worsening environmental conditions, and decreased livelihood opportunities, all of which could influence mid- to long-term mobility decisions.⁸

Recommendations

The following recommendations would prevent further mass population displacement in Southern Ukraine. The Government of Ukraine could:

- Ensure long-term solutions for adequate housing, employment, and access to essential social services for the residents of affected regions;
- Ensure coordination of State and international investments in restoring reliable water supply sources and pipelines in the affected regions;
- Strengthen state policy on internal displacement caused by catastrophic incidents including those caused by climate change;
- Assume legal responsibility for addressing mid- and long-term challenges of internal displacement caused by environmental impacts of the war;
- Strengthen efforts to remove the formal and practical obstacles to integrating IDPs into new communities, including by ensuring they can exercise their electoral rights; and
- Incorporate measures to overcome the aftermath of the Kakhovka Dam disaster and the related internal displacement into the State Strategy for Regional Development and other relevant strategic documents of the government.

⁷ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [Resolution 609 of 16 June 2023](#)

⁸ [UN Analytical Note](#)

Annex 2: Climate Displacement, Bougainville Atolls District Case Study

Background

The Carterets is a group of small low-lying islands within the Atolls district of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), located approximately 100 km northeast of Buka, in the Pacific. These islands are affected by rising sea levels, and due to salinization, the number of people they can support is decreasing. All communities in the Atolls district are susceptible to the effects of climate change. However, the situation for the inhabitants of the Carteret Islands is particularly dire, prompting them to start relocating to other areas of Bougainville due to severe climatic disturbances.

The predominant ethnic community on the Carteret Atoll are the Halia. Halia speaking Carteret islanders often have family connections in Halia constituency on the larger Buka island which aids in their resettlement. Emigrants without such connections to Halia lack this opportunity and are much more vulnerable. Over the last 12 years, the Catholic Church in Tinputz, Buka has made land available to re-settlers from the Carterets. People travel back and forth from this settlement to the Carterets. The population numbers vary between 10 families (100 people) to 40 families (400 people). There are approximately 530 families in the Carterets.



(Map Source: <https://geology.com/world/bougainville-satellite-image.shtml>)

Since 2020, IFES has engaged with the Carterets diaspora and the civil society group Tulele Peisa, which represents the community's interests. In 2022, IFES engaged with the broader Atolls diaspora to develop and deliver voter education messages aimed at encouraging women to stand for election in Community Government elections. This report is based on interviews conducted with people displaced from the Carterets by IFES staff.

Critical Issue: Land ownership

Land ownership has significant cultural ramifications in Halia culture. Clans are connected to the land, which is handed down from mother to daughter in a matrilineal system. Losing connection to the land can also mean losing clan membership and breaking the matrilineal chain. Some community members said that loss of land leads to feeling of shame that prevents them from seeking assistance.

Since the 1990s, there have been several efforts to implement a resettlement plan. During the Bougainville Crisis, some Bougainvillean leaders stated an aim to purchase a parcel of land for climate refugees. However, following the 2001 peace agreement, the land that had been earmarked for climate displaced people was reclaimed by returning IDPs. A second attempt to provide land was led by the late Bishop Unabali. Lands were set aside in Tinputz, Tearuki, Mabiri and Jimba. This proposal was forwarded by Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) to Papua New Guinea (PNG) Government and a supplementary budget was issued. However, insufficient funds reached the community and land was not purchased.

The Tinputz Mission, aligned with US and German Lutheran churches, made available some of its land in Isiru ward, Tinputz, on mainland Bougainville, in the mid 2000s. The land is still owned by the Church, but work is progressing on transferring ownership title to Carterets community. The Church has made it clear that it expects the land to be paid for eventually. Community members were unanimous that being a landowner would be a significant cultural development: they said they would 'no longer be foreigners,' and that their matrilineal chains can be resumed.

There has been little integration between the re-settlers and the people of Isiru. Despite both communities being matrilineal, people from Isiru speak Teop while Carterets islanders speak Halia. Some members of the community refuse to see their resettlement as anything but temporary. They refer to finding technical solutions, such as land reclamation, that would 'fix' the Atolls for their return.

Political engagement

Settlers expressed a sentiment that the PNG National Government and the ABG neglect the Atolls region. They gave an example of a project to regrow mangroves which protect against sea level rise. The ABG is deliberating on a policy on climate change and mangrove rehabilitation, and mangrove rehabilitation projects supported by donors have had some success. However, interlocutors alleged that the mangrove project funds were mis-spent by elected officials on to popularity boosting efforts such as rugby tournaments. When asked

who they trusted, they said that they trust the Church and civil society more than government institutions.

Settlers are on the electoral roll for Isiru ward, which is part of Taonita Tinputz ABG constituency and Central Bougainville national constituency as well as for their wards in the Carterets. Although this is not legal, it reflects the itinerant nature of some settlers and enables the diaspora to maintain a claim to clan lineage. They vote for community government elections (for Isiru), ABG elections (for Taonita Tinputz constituency and Central regional seats) and National Elections (for Central Open Electorate).

Settlers do not field candidates for elections. In the recent Community Government elections, one Carterets islander was asked to nominate himself for Isiru ward but declined saying he is 'still a foreigner.' This is even though the settlers constitute the majority of residents in Isiru ward.

The NGO Tulele Peisa attempts to fill the gap in representation left by the reluctance to hold elected office. The NGO was given observer status by the local Council of Elders in 2008, which enabled it to have a seat in meetings and advocate for the community.

Recommendations

- Ensure long-term solutions for adequate housing, employment, and access to essential social services for displaced people including those without clan-connections;
- Conduct civic and voter education for both re-settlers as well as the host community especially regarding voter registration and citizen engagement;
- Encourage and support re-settlers to consider fielding candidates in elections; and
- Support efforts for transfer of land ownership to settlers.

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End of submission