**Maat for Peace’ Submission on thematic priorities of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons**

**Introduction**

Internal displacement in Somalia and Sudan, which are the two countries this report focuses on, is mainly caused by climate change and generalized violence. Vulnerable groups such as women, children and pastoral communities are those most affected by this displacement and it is unlikely that they are invited to take part in peace negotiations and mediation efforts. Nevertheless, they, along with other groups in the affected society, can have significant roles if they are given adequate chances. The report identifies some elements of effective preventive strategies and concludes with a set of recommendations.

**Climate change and internal displacement: The Case of Somalia**

In 2022, a drought caused by climate change killed 43,000 Somalis[[1]](#footnote-1). The ramifications of this crisis, which the people of Somalia did absolutely nothing to cause, are still being felt today. The drought has forced 1.4 million Somalis to leave their homes after five consecutive failed rainy seasons, with women and children accounting for 80% of this significant number[[2]](#footnote-2). Nearly half of the population now requires urgent humanitarian aid as a result of the climate disaster, but it is regrettable that just 15% of the country's $2.6 billion aid requirement for this year has been satisfied[[3]](#footnote-3). Some Somalis have been displaced by both climate change and by fighting between Al-Shabaab and government forces.

This climate crisis and the internal displacement that they were forced to go through had a particularly negative impact on certain populations. According to estimates, half of the 43,000 Somalis who perished as a result of the drought were children[[4]](#footnote-4). To make matters worse, officials claim that one more child is being admitted to a hospital suffering from malnutrition every single minute of every day in Somalia, where it is predicted that close to 500,000 children will be severely undernourished this year[[5]](#footnote-5).

Agro-pastoralist communities in Somalia have also been severely impacted by the drought and the accompanying economic shocks. There have been widespread reports of significant livestock mortality brought on by the drought. Due to the loss of herds of cattle, which were frequently the sole source of food and income for many Somali families, farmers were forced to turn to illegal practices as an alternative way of earning a living, one of which was gathering firewood to trade for charcoal[[6]](#footnote-6). Despite the government’s 2012, there is still a considerable demand for charcoal in the Gulf States, and Somalia continues to export charcoal despite this demand[[7]](#footnote-7). By turning to this illicit practice, Somalis are negatively contributing to the crisis by helping the charcoal industry which is one of the main causes of global warming.

Pastoralists are adopting new livestock and agricultural techniques as a result of how climate change is changing their typical seasonal migration patterns. They also frequently travel across uncharted areas in search of pasture and water for their livestock, which exacerbates land disputes[[8]](#footnote-8). Between 35 and 40 percent of all violence in Somalia is attributable to intercommunal conflict[[9]](#footnote-9). Most disagreements concern who has access to certain areas of land and water for farming and grazing. In addition to depleting already restricted water supplies, climate change and environmental degradation are forcing populations to move and compete with one another for control over declining ecological returns. Clan militias and extremist groups take advantage of the climate catastrophe by mobilizing and recruiting young people to carry out violent land claims[[10]](#footnote-10). In addition, they are imposing taxes on charcoal and other natural resources to challenge weak government institutions and strengthen their hold on power[[11]](#footnote-11).

Humanitarian aid in some parts of Somalia is hampered by an ongoing Al-Shabaab blockade. One of the areas in Somalia most severely impacted by the drought is Bakool in the southwest, which has been under an Al-Shabaab blockade for more than ten years[[12]](#footnote-12). The only ways to get humanitarian aid to those in need are by air or by utilizing donkey carts to bring food[[13]](#footnote-13). According to the mayor of Bakool’s provincial capital Hudur, Al-Shabaab set fire to more than four donkey carts that were transporting desperately needed food supplies to the area in the first half of October[[14]](#footnote-14). Spokesperson for Gedo’s regional administration, also disclosed that Al-Shabaab executed 11 engineers who were constructing a water well in the area[[15]](#footnote-15).

Another obstacle to humanitarian aid in Somalia is US counterterror legislation, which places restrictions on aid organizations' freedom of movement in order to prevent their aid from ending up in Al-Shabaab's hands[[16]](#footnote-16). Most US-backed agencies are unable to pay al-Shabab's fees at checkpoints and bigger, formalized payments of "taxes" in exchange for entry to the areas it controls since doing so may result in fines of up to $1 million and 20 years in prison[[17]](#footnote-17). Although the US claims that its law does not intend to target relief operations, it indirectly does so by denying help to 900,000 Somalis who live in Al-Shabaab-controlled territories. If relief organizations are to reach the vast majority of people who are on the verge of famine negotiations with Al-Shabaab must take place without fear of prosecution in the US.

***Main elements of effective preventive strategies***

Two main elements that go hand in hand are early warning systems and sustainable land and water management. Early warning systems can assist communities in preparing for climate-related dangers and taking prompt action to lessen their effects. These systems should be accessible, reliable and provide accurate information approaching catastrophes or extreme weather events. Implementing sustainable methods for managing land and water can also lessen the effects of climate change and support more livelihoods. This entails methods that can increase ecosystem resilience and sustain livelihoods, such as watershed management, soil conservation, reforestation, and water harvesting.

Another important element that is highly needed due to the described situation in Somalia is diversification of livelihoods. Communities depending on industries susceptible to climate change may be less vulnerable if economic diversification is encouraged and supported. This may entail offering training, funding and resources for initiatives like sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, renewable energy, and small-scale businesses. On a closely related note, putting in place social safety nets and social protection systems is crucial because they can aid vulnerable groups in coping with the effects of climate change. These could include cash transfer programmes, insurance plans, and targeted aid for the most vulnerable populations to make sure they have access to essentials in times of need.

However, these elements necessitate effective institutions and governance at different levels. This entails incorporating climate change concerns into regional and local development plans, improving coordination across pertinent government departments, and collaborating with communities, international partners, and civil society organizations to support capacity-building. Recognising that preventative methods should be participatory, context-specific, and involve local communities and take into account their unique needs, expertise, and objectives is crucial. To support the implementation of these initiatives, it is also essential to guarantee enough finance, technical support, and international cooperation.

**Internal displacement due to generalized violence: The Case of Sudan**

With 3.8 million internally displaced people already in Sudan before the current conflict, 1.8 million more are expected to be internally displaced if it persists[[18]](#footnote-18). By May 23 2023, more than 1 million people have been internally displaced since hostilities started on April 15[[19]](#footnote-19). During a five-week period, between April 15 and May 23 of this year, there were more newly displaced people within the country than there were over the entire years of 2020 to 2022[[20]](#footnote-20).

Women and girls particularly are being disproportionately impacted by this conflict. Since women play a crucial role in the food production chain and are now unable to access fields and agricultural inputs to generate food, families and communities are unable to eat[[21]](#footnote-21). Because they are undernourished, underweight pregnant women and nursing moms directly but unintentionally contribute to rising child malnutrition rates. Moreover, the conflict needs to end for Sudanese farmers to confidently return to their fields to support not only their families but also the wider community. Another way in which the conflict has affected women and girls is the fact that they have been enduring different types of violence. There have been an increasing number of allegations of domestic violence and gender-based violence amid the widespread displacement, particularly among populations of internally displaced Sudanese[[22]](#footnote-22). There have also been charges of rape and reports of sexual assault against women and girls committed by the parties to the conflict[[23]](#footnote-23).

El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, has seen a displacement of over 200,000 people[[24]](#footnote-24). At least 125,000 of them were already internally displaced people, who had been forced to relocate after RSF-backed militias attacked and entirely destroyed 25 IDP sites[[25]](#footnote-25). Most of the 3.7 million internally displaced persons who were in the country before the start of the armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF were already living in the Darfur region in western Sudan[[26]](#footnote-26). The majority of them were sedentary farmers who had been driven from their homes and lands by the raging Janjaweed militias, which were formed in the 2000s during the civil war and were equipped and trained by the administration of former president Omar al-Bashir and comprised mainly of nomadic herders[[27]](#footnote-27).

***IDPs in peace negotiations or mediation processes***

It is rather obvious that Sudanese IDPs are not involved in the peace negotiations and mediation processes. This is proven by the fact that both sides have not been careful when conducting their operations, injuring and killing thousands of innocent civilians. It is of utmost importance that IDPs are included in peace negotiations since they are almost always caught in the middle with nowhere to go.

IDPs should be involved in peace discussions and mediation efforts from the very beginning, starting with the design and preparation of the conversations. This participation guarantees that their viewpoints, issues, and goals are taken into account and incorporated into the peacebuilding agenda. Genuine chances for IDPs to take part in, contribute to, and have an impact on the peacebuilding and peace negotiations processes should be made available. Participation in official negotiations, consultations, public hearings, and dialogue forums may be required. To enable IDPs to effectively interact and be heard, adequate support, capacity-building, and resources should also be made available.

IDPs should continue to also be included in the implementation and oversight of peace agreements as well as the ensuing peacebuilding initiatives even if peace talks are successful. It is essential for their needs to be met and their rights to be maintained in the post-conflict phase and that they participate in decision-making processes regarding topics such as land restitution, durable solutions, reconciliation, and development planning.

It is important to note that time is one of the key elements in effective peace talks. It is frequently considered that negotiations only make sense to begin when both sides believe that they can win more from bargaining than from fighting because discussions normally take place in the shadow of military victories and defeats. It is rather problematic to wait for the "ripe moment" to begin high-level negotiations. It can unnecessarily extend a conflict and cause tremendous misery, as is the case at the moment in Sudan, where more than one million people have already been displaced, as was previously mentioned. Therefore, rather than waiting for the ideal circumstances, peace players should constantly look for entrance points to create opportunities for fostering peace. Peace actors could be members of civil society and IDPs represented through non-governmental organizations.

**Recommendations**

One recommendation is **to develop and implement peacebuilding initiatives that address the underlying causes of the conflict and provide opportunities for reconciliation and sustainable peace**. This may involve socio-economic development projects, community dialogue forums, or programs focused on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of paramilitary members. Such initiatives could once again be effectively implemented in collaboration with civil society organizations and community leaders who possess great influence over their communities.

**As mentioned previously in this report, IDPs must have an ongoing role in peace negotiations and mediation efforts. Representatives of the different vulnerable and marginalized groups and communities affected by displacement should have permanent seats** on the table so they are able to voice their concerns and needs. If this will not be easy to achieve due to the circumstances, IDPs can voice their concerns through CSOs who may be able to connect them to the authorities. Their protection must however be guaranteed at all times.

Disputes over land and property rights are often a significant driver of internal displacement as shown in Somalia’s case and so it needs to be addressed. **Peace processes should address these issues by promoting land reforms, ensuring secure land tenure, resolving land-related conflicts, and establishing mechanisms for land restitution or compensation**. Protecting and enforcing property rights can contribute to the prevention of displacement and the resolution of post-conflict disputes.

Another important recommendation **is the establishment of mechanisms to address past human rights abuses, provide justice for victims, and promote accountability for perpetrators. Transitional justice measures, such as truth and reconciliation commissions**, can help address grievances and prevent future conflicts from arising. Ensuring that impunity is not tolerated contributes to the prevention of displacement.

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2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. CBS News Staff. “Somalia drought blamed for some 43,000 deaths, half of them children, as climate change and conflict collide.” CBS News, 20 March 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Ng7ixt>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. IOM Staff. “As Climate Change Strains Somalia’s Path to Peace, Communities Hold the Key.” IOM, 13 July 2022, <https://bit.ly/3MSR1OF>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Dhaysane, Mohammed. “Al-Shabaab blockades exacerbating humanitarian crisis in Somalia.” AA, 18 November 2022, <https://bit.ly/3MjiWbp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Chatterjee, Phelan. “Somalia drought: Are US terror laws hampering aid effort?” BBC, 27 September 2022, <https://bbc.in/3LURteU>. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. TRT World Staff. “More than 843,000 internally displaced since start of Sudan conflict: IOM.” TRT World, 18 May 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Cjvr10>. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Akbarzai, Sahar. “Nearly 1.4 million people displaced in Sudan since civil war erupted, UN report says.” CNN, 28 May 2023, <https://bit.ly/3NfAVjo>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Care Staff. “Humanitarian crisis in Sudan worsens, with disproportionate impacts to women and girls.” Care, 11 May 2023, <https://bit.ly/3X2qLGb>. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kulkarni, Pavan. “Fighting between Sudanese army and RSF has disastrous impact in Darfur as hundreds of thousands are displaced.” Peoples Dispatch, 13 May 2023, <https://bit.ly/3quvsMW>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)