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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is an ecological, economic and political challenge, one that is usually debated at the global, collective level, **often in a heated way, if I may say so**. While this is right and necessary, it also leads to a degree of abstraction from the very concrete consequences that will be felt by individuals around the world and primarily by the most vulnerable groups. I therefore greatly welcome OHCHR's efforts **to situate the climate change *problématique* in a human rights framework**, at the centre of which are the life and dignity of the individual. And indeed the **right to life** is the most elementary of rights which is under threat from climate change and its impacts. The right to development, to property, to health, food and water, as well as the rights of indigenous people, among others, are of central concern.

It is a pleasure and an honour to have been invited on the occasion of this Forum and I am looking forward to the exchanges and discussions. The **specific perspective** which IOM brings to the table in this context **is that of the "migration lens" : where does the movement of people fit** between human rights concerns and the consequences of climate change, those already felt to today and those projected for the future?

As I have been asked to focus on vulnerable groups today, I'd like to conceptualise **three different dimensions of vulnerability**, specifically:

- vulnerability to the **effects of climate change**

- **vulnerability to forced migration / displacement** due to climatic and environmental factors
- **vulnerabilities arising from the migration process in itself**

We tend to think of environmental migration as a **worst-case scenario** and we do all we can to **stem this perceived threat. And, yes**, we should make every effort to prevent forced migration and minimize the vulnerabilities associated with migration. **The human rights framework provides the indispensable starting point for this effort**.

Yet, it is also obvious that ***all* migration *cannot* be prevented //// and my key argument is that indeed we should not**. Attempts to suppress migration at all costs may increase rather than decrease people's vulnerability to environmental pressures acting upon them. Therefore, we must not wait too long to **prepare for the possibility of migration as one legitimate adaptation strategy among others**, one that has been used for millennia. The longer we wait to incorporate this possibility into our climate change adaptation plans, the more difficult it will be and the more severe the outcomes.

My time today does not suffice to go into detail about the **intricate interactions** between climate change, environmental degradation and migration. Let me just summarise that our current state of knowledge indicates that **the largest proportion of environmental migration**, that is likely to be exacerbated due to climate change, **will take place within national frontiers**. For such internal movements the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, **a combination of human rights, humanitarian, refugee law**, apply and specify a number of protection provisions for affected populations. **Although non binding, this instrument has proven effective** over the last twelve years and its provisions have even been included in some national legislations. **Non binding, but working** – a possible ~~option~~ to take into account in today's discussion.

OPTION

By contrast, **cross-border movements** are likely to constitute a **relatively small proportion** of the overall environmentally-induced population flows. However, such movements require further attention as **there are legal and protection gaps relating to them, especially as it is clear that the 1951 Refugee Convention will not cover such cases**. In fact, **IOM and UNHCR have worked together to identify those gaps** and are currently preparing a joint paper on this subject, to be submitted to the Principals Meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (or IASC). **Politically speaking, there seems to be no consensus among governments for the creation of a new legal instrument (or the revision of an existing one) to cover such gaps.** In our view, the most realistic option to enhance protection of environmental migrants is to improve the **implementation of** and **foster the strict adherence to international human rights instruments**. Preventive and remedial mechanisms are particularly crucial to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups.

In terms of *vulnerabilities to climate change*, natural disasters and environmental degradation may be purely physical processes, but **they can reveal underlying structures of marginalization, discrimination and unequal access to rights**. For example, we should note that **women are disproportionately involved** in subsistence farming, natural-resource management and water collection in developing countries. As a result, **they are more likely to be affected than men** by the effects of soil erosion, desertification, droughts, water shortages, floods and other environmental changes.

Likewise, natural disasters are likely to increase in frequency as a result of climate change, with the humanitarian consequences that are only too well known. **Statistically, natural disasters kill more women than men, or kill women at a younger age than men**. In 1991, for example, a cyclone in Bangladesh resulted in five times more deaths of women than men. The

differences in death rates between men and women in natural disasters are **directly linked to the differences in socio-economic status between the sexes and the degree to which women enjoy economic and social rights.**

Secondly, *vulnerability to forced migration* in the environmental context **arises when preparation and prevention have been insufficient** to protect populations against the vagaries of nature. In the event of natural disasters, **flight, including cross border, may be a necessary reaction for sheer survival**. But it is the responsibility of States, first and foremost, to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected populations and avoid protracted situations of displacement. While adequate response mechanisms are indispensable, **in the medium and long term nothing can substitute sustainable development to build the resilience of populations** to the effects of climate change. **Unfortunately, for many poor and debt-ridden countries, which on top of that are likely to be most affected by climate change, this remains a far-off goal.**

With respect to the more gradual effects of climate change, **early planning** is even more important to protect economic, social and cultural rights of **populations who may be left with little choice but to leave their homes**. Indigenous populations often have much to lose and little voice to claim their rights. A number of Alaskan indigenous communities in North America have already concluded that relocation is the only durable solution to the climatic events that are threatening their lives – and indeed some communities have already started moving. **I know relocation/resettlement are still perceived as a kind of last resort but these options should not be a taboo, since there are places where other options are simply not viable in the long run**. Involving concerned communities in the planning and decision-making from the earliest moment on and making sure families and communities can stay together and have a decent life is paramount to ensuring their social, economic and cultural rights are respected.

Lastly, *vulnerabilities also arise as a result of migration.* **Migrants – all migrants – are entitled to respect of their human rights**. However, **their situation as non-nationals, foreigners, third country nationals, however you name it,** increases the risk of suffering abuse, in particular for those in an irregular status. **Unfortunate, but true**. Both in gradual and sudden migration and displacement scenarios, pre-existing patterns of discrimination and abuse are often aggravated. **Women and children are at risk of sexual and/or gender-based violence, human trafficking, child abuse and alcohol-related abuse**. Displaced and refugee women and children face more dangers in conventional camp and urban settings when gathering firewood, water and seeking livelihoods.

Also, environmental migration often takes place in the shape of rural-urban movements. In densely populated cities around the world the poor often live in slums and in the outskirts of these cities, **with limited access to infrastructure, health care and other services and the realisation of their social and economic rights severely challenged**.

Because migration requires economic and other resources, **it is a coping strategy not available to everyone. No, the poorest of the poor will not land *en masse* on the shores of developed countries because of climate change.** The argument may be used but is not supported by evidence. Women, children and the elderly are usually the ones who stay behind, while younger male members are more likely to leave home. **Remaining members of the household, particularly women, may therefore become even more vulnerable** since they may have to shoulder the burden of looking after the household, while having access to fewer income-earning opportunities. In Brazil's **Sertao de Araripe region**, for example, single female heads of household are called **"widows of drought"** as a result of these social changes. (Let me add in parenthesis, however, that **women are not automatically and always the victims**: male

migration can in some cases **empower women, put them in decision-making positions and provoke emancipatory changes in gender relations**). In any case, **an important point to take away is thus that we need to protect those who move, but also those who don't!**

Here **I would like to return to the initial argument about the vulnerabilities of *not* moving**. "Migration-as-adaptation" can also be a way to ensure respect for human rights. Environmental changes, and gradual ones in particular, can mean that lives, livelihoods and economic activities become more difficult to sustain and **people may consequently decide that their best bet for coping with the challenges is migration**. "Keeping them in their place" may **not only be impossible** but **may lead to human rights violations significantly more serious than if safe and orderly movement could be facilitated.** The right to life, health and food may be in jeopardy if people are unable to leave places that are becoming uninhabitable. **But it need not be an "all-or-nothing" response**: with adequate preparation and in combination with other adaptation measures, **temporary and circular migration at early stages** of environmental degradation can, for instance, represent a viable adaptation strategy to environmental changes. **The key point is not to leave it too late.**