Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to this high-level panel discussion. Our task today is to explore how Member States, with the support of the humanitarian community, can better understand, prepare for, and respond to the risks and vulnerabilities of disasters and climate change. We will place special emphasis on identifying effective strategies for ensuring and make sure we offer adequate protection and assistance for those displaced by natural disasters or the effects of climate change. Every year, disasters force millions of people to flee or leave their homes. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, between 2008 and 2016, more than 227 million people were displaced by disasters. This is an average of 25.3 million displaced people each year. In the future, climate change, in combination with other driving factors, is expected to increase displacement, both within and across borders, because there will be more frequent and more severe natural hazards and disasters.

Several tools exist to help States reduce the risks related to climate change and disasters. The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction encourages States to adopt, at national and local levels, policies and programmes that address disaster-induced human mobility. These tools are intended to strengthen the resilience of affected people and of the communities that host them. The Blueprint for Action produced by the former Secretary-General’s Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate in December 2016 – and I thank very much Mary Robinson and Macharia Kamau - outlines the priority areas for at-risk States and their partners to prevent El Niño and La Niña episodes from becoming human disasters or rather physical disasters that have terrible human consequences.

An essential principle of climate change adaptation is to give priority to the particular needs of the most vulnerable groups of societies. When disasters force people from their homes, pre-existing patterns of discrimination are often exacerbated, making it a struggle for marginalized and vulnerable groups to access humanitarian assistance. These vulnerable and marginalized groups also find themselves at heightened risk of human rights violations, including such acts as sexual and gender-based violence.
While the vast majority of people displaced by disasters remain within their own country, cross-border displacement is also common and is expected to increase as climate change continues. The Platform on Disaster Displacement, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit just one year ago, continues the important work that began under the Nansen Initiative on cross-border displacement in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change in implementing the Protection Agenda. The Platform is an important vehicle for Member States, international organizations and other relevant actors to enhance cooperation and coordination, and to ensure a comprehensive approach to cross-border displacement due to disasters.

Just as we need to acknowledge that not all disaster-induced displacement is internal, we must also guard against the assumption that it is only short-term in nature. On the contrary; in many cases, people do not find solutions for years after the event. They end up in a situation of protracted displacement. They become increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance and are unable to move forward with their lives.

Large-scale disasters and the ensuing displacement can undermine a Government’s efforts to achieve its development objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals. And in addition, responding to such situations can often overstretch the capacity and finances of national and local authorities.

It is, therefore, essential that humanitarian and development actors, financial institutions and the private sector work together and complement the efforts of the authorities to protect, assist and support solutions for those displaced, as well as their host communities.

This afternoon, OCHA will launch a study entitled Breaking the Impasse, that examines these issues in more detail. A key recommendation of the study is that Governments as well as humanitarian and development actors focus on clear and measurable collective outcomes that reduce the vulnerabilities of internally displaced persons and host communities over time. Through this new approach, millions of IDPs and host communities could secure better access to livelihood opportunities, adequate housing with security of tenure, and basic services.

So let us use the time available to better understand the risks linked to disasters and climate change; and the approaches we can take, including collective approaches, to prepare for and respond to those risks in ways that meet the protection needs of, and assistance and solutions for, the displaced. Thank you.

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