



**PANEL DISCUSSION ON ADDRESSING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT:
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARLIAMENTS**

8 October 2013 (11 a.m. - 1 p.m.)
(Rooms 3 & 4, level 0, CICG)

Concept note

When people are forced to leave their homes because of conflict, human rights violations or disasters, their lives are uprooted in every possible way, even when they remain in their own country. They leave behind their property and livelihoods and in many cases, are separated from their families and communities.

As a result of internal displacement, citizens and residents, who themselves become internally displaced persons (IDPs), find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. En route to a better place, the safety and security of IDPs are at risk, especially that of women and children.

Wherever they may choose to settle, IDPs often have severely limited access to basic amenities. Shelter, water or food in areas where they have sought refuge may simply not exist and access to work and education may be problematic. Even where they do exist, the influx of people into an already populated area may lead to discrimination and further abuse. The physical and mental toll on displaced individuals and families is overwhelming.

Despite being a very personal experience, internal displacement occurs on a massive scale. Over 50 countries have, to some degree, experienced internal displacement caused by armed conflict and violence. Many others have faced such displacement in the context of flooding, storms, earthquakes and other natural disasters, with tens of millions of IDPs finding themselves in need of the protection and assistance of their governments. In 2012, it was estimated that 28.8 million persons were internally displaced.

The impact of internal displacement on the State can be equally devastating. Formerly self-sustaining populations find themselves requiring protection and assistance, which the State may have neither the capacity nor the infrastructure to address. The areas to where IDPs move are more than likely ill-prepared and under-resourced to cope with the sudden influx. When displacement takes place on a large scale, entire regions can be destabilized, posing severe security and humanitarian challenges.

The protection of IDPs is the primary responsibility of States. Yet experience has shown that existing laws – which are generally not designed for situations of humanitarian crisis – are often unable to cope with the challenges caused by internal displacement.

It is necessary to establish effective national protection systems to address situations of internal displacement and strengthen national responses through the development of an appropriate legal framework, backed by proper enforcement. This is where the role of parliaments becomes so crucial. From this perspective, UNHCR and the IPU partnered to develop a Handbook for Parliamentarians on Internal Displacement with a view to supporting the role and action of parliaments.¹

The panel discussion will offer a unique opportunity to examine the current crisis of internal displacement, highlight the plight of IDPs in several parts of the world, introduce the Handbook and underscore the role of parliamentarians in ensuring that internal displacement is properly addressed at the national level, including through appropriate legislative action.

Debates will be launched by members of parliament and representatives of international organizations working on this issue.

Panellist:

- Mr. Volker Türk, Director of International Protection, UNHCR

¹ The development of the Handbook was supported by an advisory group composed inter alia of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.