



unitar

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

**Migration and Development Series
Environmentally Induced Migration and Climate change.**

20 April 2010

Closing remarks

by Valeska Hesse

I would like to thank all of you this evening for attending this seminar entitled "Environmentally induced migration and climate change". My gratitude goes to the panellists for sharing their insights and ideas, and also our partners at IOM, UNFPA and the MacArthur Foundation for the sustained excellent support they provide to the Migration and Development Series.

As suggested by many of the speakers today, this event is most timely; and the high number of participants that registered for this event indicates the great interest in the subject. Indeed, many of the issues discussed figure prominently on the international agenda: not least during the current Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the upcoming Global Forum on Migration and Development, as well as the upcoming Climate Summit and in thematic debates of the General Assembly, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council.

Postal Address: UNITAR New York – One United Nations Plaza, Suite DC1-603 New York, NY 10017-3515
T +1 (212) 963-9196 F +1 (212) 963-9686 www.unitar.org E-mail : info@unitar.org

Institut des Nations Unies pour la formation et la recherche
Instituto de las Naciones Unidas para Formación Profesional e Investigaciones



Still, more often than not, climate change, environmental and disaster-related issues, and migration are being discussed unconnectedly, by different expert and practitioner communities.

One of the lessons that we can take away from this seminar is that bringing these various perspectives and actors together provides us with new insights, and multiplies potential areas of investigation and collaboration. Indeed, much of today's discussion went well beyond the scope of the migration and development agenda. Let me conclude by summarizing five important points made over the course of this day:

1) Remaining uncertainties about the impacts of environmental and climate change on migration

Despite the recognition that climate change is real and with real impacts, we still lack the capacity to accurately predict exactly how climate change will affect eco-systems and the livelihoods of people around the globe. This also means that scenarios about the future concerning climate and environment-induced migration flows are still highly speculative. This is all the more true as migration decisions usually depend on a number of variables. Thus, much more research on the role of climate and environmental factors in individual and collective migration decisions is required. The focus of migration should be changed from south-north to south-south and internal migration, since these are expected to be the biggest flows in the future.

The question was also raised how we can measure environmentally induced migration if we still lack a proper definition of what it is and if



we need a number in the first place.

2) The implications for development

Environmentally induced migration affects countries and people around the world, based on global development inequalities. Much more emphasis needs to be put on the impact for developing countries, since they have only limited resources and capacities at their disposal to cope with this phenomenon. Migration induced by environmental degradation and exacerbated by climate change affects (and will do so even more in the future) the three pillars of sustainable development: the Economic, Social and Environmental pillar. As we have heard today, for some countries reallocation of populations in their national territory is not a viable option because of high population density or maybe because their country will disappear. Moreover, environmental displacement can have severe impacts on the achievement of MDG1 (to reduce poverty) and jeopardize urban social-cultural patterns. Also, we need to look more closely at the environmental migration, development and security nexus, as it was suggested that statelessness of entire populations might be a security threat.

3) Legal protection

The third point relates to international protection frameworks. Greater clarity about the legal frameworks applying and affording protection to those displaced by/ or migrating from/ environmental hazards is essential. We have seen that human rights standards and other instruments such as the Guiding principles on internal displacement spell out relevant rights and obligations. As was reaffirmed by UNHCR,



however the 1951 UN Refugee Convention does not. It defines refugees as those fleeing across international borders for a “well-founded fear of persecution” tied to a fixed set of reasons that do not include environmental factors. However, the call for a new convention or an internationally accepted protocol on displaced populations due to climate change has been raised in the seminar.

4) Policy responses

The fourth point deals with policy responses to environmentally and climate induced migration: starting from the premise that migration should be part of a human development strategy; a long term agenda would include liberalizing and simplifying **regular channels of migration and ensure basic rights for migrants. Moreover it is important to ensure consistency between policies for development; environmental and climate change, and migration. Climate** change and environmental migration must be integrated into national planning instruments such as poverty reduction strategies, and taken into account in a wide range of other policy areas, including immigration, trade and industrial policies, disaster related strategies, urban planning and land management, development cooperation etc.

5) Capacity building for developing countries

Finally, the last point relates to the importance of building capacities in developing countries to implement policies that deal with migration as a result of climate change and environmental degradation. Moreover, migration should be integrated in the climate change adaptation strategies that are developed under the UN Framework Convention on



Climate Change. What we saw today is that, in light of environmental hazards, migration has already become part individual and collective adaptation strategies. Adaptation Policies and frameworks should be designed to accommodate this reality and to ensure that migration can happen in a legal and safe manner.

Besides political will, resources and capacities will be needed to further explore, better understand, and humanely handle the complex interlinkages between climate change, environmental degradation and migration.

- The international community needs to invest in and help build capacities in developing countries, for improved data gathering, research and forecasting.
- Those most affected must have a say in the design of adaptation and resilience strategies, which need to be tailored to local situations.
- Last, but maybe most importantly, efforts to mitigate climate change must be vehemently pursued at all levels of governance.

With this, let me conclude and thank you all again for coming. We look forward to welcoming you at the next event of the Migration and Development Series, the seminar on “Social Integration of Migrants”, organized with our Series partners, as well as the UN Alliance of Civilization, which will take place on 18 May.