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Remarks by:

David L. Phillips

The Global Refugee Crisis

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Introduction

The unprecedented refugee and migration crisis demands a more coherent response from the international community. Today, more than 65 million people are displaced by violent conflict or persecution. Another 15 to 20 million are displaced by disasters and climate change. Of these, about 20 million are refugees, meaning they have crossed an international border. The rest are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are not subject to the same protection under the Geneva Conventions because they are displaced within their own country. The international system, as well as donor countries like Japan, are overwhelmed trying to meet the needs of refugees, IDPs, and migrants who take flight from poverty in search of economic opportunity.

Current Conditions

More than a dozen conflicts have broken out since 2010. Primary producer countries are Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, and the Central African Republic. My remarks focus on macro-strategic approaches to the global refugee and migrant crisis. I will reflect on lessons learned from the Syria case, as well as the international response, including the response of my country – the United States.

Architecture

The United Nations (UN) has a mandate to address refugee and IDP issues. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), a related organization to the UN, has a specific role to support governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on matters concerning migrants and migration. The responsibility for migrants resides with individual countries or regional such as the European Union (EU).

UN agencies are conceptually divided into two types: humanitarian and development. The humanitarian agencies, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), respond to crises as they arise. Under the leadership of Antonio Guterres who headed UNHCR for the past decade, the UNHCR expanded its responsibilities. It assumed the leading role for the protection of IDPs, adding the Global Protection Cluster alongside its role protecting refugees. Development agencies and the UN Peace-building Commission work with governments to help build the capacity of their states, mitigating humanitarian emergencies before they occur.

Challenges

The UN Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) sought \$20 billion from donor countries in 2015. Due to donor fatigue and budget austerities, only \$11 billion was raised. While the CAP focuses on emergency assistance, donors want better aid not simply more aid. Better aid can be achieved through innovation in the humanitarian space, focusing on:

- Bridging the humanitarian and development divide.
- Mitigating the impact of climate change on displacement.
- Emphasizing conflict prevention to address the root causes of displacement.

Bridging the Gap between Humanitarian Assistance and Development

Humanitarian aid and development assistance should be strategically conceptualized together. This year -- 2016 -- marked the official launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September at the UN General Assembly. The new agenda calls on countries to achieve 17 SDGs with 169 targets over the next 15 years. Only two of the 169 targets refer to migrants, and none to refugees. To more effectively manage today's refugee and migrant crisis, UN action should be addressed through the prism of SDGs. Implementing the SDGs will strengthen the resilience factor in humanitarian programming.

Relevant SDGs to displacement are:

- SDG 1: poverty
- SDG 2: hunger
- SDG 5: gender equality
- SDG 8: work conditions and economic growth
- SDG 10: inequalities
- SDG 13: global warming and climate action
- SDG 16: peace, justice and strong institutions.

SDGs should be adapted to the global refugee crisis. The displaced need durable solutions, linking humanitarian aid and economic development. IDPs are displaced for an average of 23 years and refugees for an average of 17 years. In 2014, only one percent of refugees returned to their homes. SDGs can enhance stability and

promote long term development in failed and fragile states, which produce displacement.

I propose that UN Secretary General lead an initiative, with UNHCR as the focal point and involvement by IOM, to assess and plan the UN's "whole of system" approach. The initiative would adapt SDGs to refugee needs through the UN's projects, policies, funding, and indicators.

Climate Change

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, otherwise known as the Paris Agreement, seeks to combat climate change and adapt to its effects. It has been adopted by 195 countries and so far ratified by 114 countries. Climate change induced famines and droughts are increasingly important drivers of conflict and displacement, particularly in conflict prone areas of sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. It is estimated that between 50 and 200 million people may be displaced from climate change by 2050. Building on the Paris Agreement, the UN needs to lead an effort to prepare for the impacts of climate change on displacement.

The Paris Agreement calls for the establishment of a "Climate Displacement Task Force" to recommend measures "to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse effects of climate change." Collecting and sharing knowledge is a good start. However, findings must be quickly translated into action items. Projects and policies are urgently needed to address climate displacement risk -- hazards (e.g. floods, storms, droughts, sea level rise, etc.), vulnerabilities, and resilience in affected communities.

The UN Secretary General can lead an effort to engage national and local governments, as well as civil society in the development of regional plans. Regional cluster groups could focus on implementation. Their research and recommendations would focus on UN resources to build national capacity and mitigate the risks of displacement from climate change. Regional plans would be the basis for a global master plan on hazards, vulnerabilities, and resilience strategies.

Conflict Prevention/Peace-building

More must be done in the fields of conflict prevention and peace-building to break the cycle of violence, ending conditions that cause displacement and stabilizing fragile or failing states. National conflict prevention and peace-building plans should take a comprehensive approach, addressing:

- Security and justice reform/rule of law (local police, administration of justice, accountability).
- Local governance (services, border security, coordination with the central government).
- Public administration (civil service, land ownership, property rights).
- Economy (job creation, infrastructure, taxation, budgeting, anti-corruption, transparency, and equitable resource sharing).
- Democracy (electoral systems, press freedom, human rights protection/promotion).
- Dialogue (mobilize traditional society and community for dialogue/reconciliation).

UN agencies, such as UNDP, have vast experience in conflict prevention and peace-building. The Department of Political Affairs is mandated to mediate in service of peace and security. Other agencies and departments provide invaluable services or have early warning capacity. Frankly speaking, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office are moribund. They can be revitalized with a more relevant mandate and more pro-active leadership.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission can be revitalized by focusing on displacement. A “Working Group on Displacement” could coordinate the “operationalization of interoperability,” bringing together of all the various parts of the UN system. The Working Group would develop integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery, considering countries affected by large scale displacement and focusing on the reconstruction and institution-building efforts necessary to create conditions so that displaced can return to their homes.

Lessons Learned

Innovative macro-strategic approaches can enhance the international response to the refugee crisis. However, they need traction. Evidence generation based on field experience can inform key areas of humanitarian practice. The following recommendations are based on lessons from the field.

- Focus on women and girls, empowering their leadership as peace-builders.
- Prioritize refugee education to avoid creating a lost generation.
- Emphasize livelihoods, which provide mutual benefit to refugees and host communities.
- Foster economic development via micro-finance and concessional loans. Enhance trade through tariff and quota free exports to consumer countries.

- Send cash. Experience shows that cash transfers reduces child labor; increases school attendance; and has a positive impact on GDP.
- Provide predictable multi-year funding to communities/governments via the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, which represents a coordinated region-wide response. .
- Use impact evaluations to measure outcomes and encourage donors.

The Syria Case

Syria is an epicenter of human misery. As many as 500,000 people have died in Syria's civil war. Half of Syria's 23 million people are displaced. In the Syrian case and typically in other humanitarian emergencies, responsibility for humanitarian assistance rests with front-line states, which are often poor and lack capacity. Refugees constitute 20 percent of Lebanon's population. Jordan has 660,000 Syrians who have registered and many more who have not. Turkey shelters 2.7 million Syrians.

Instability is a transnational problem. Conflict is contagious, spreading to fragile states, which may become failed states without adequate support from donor countries and the international community.

In 2015, more than one million people took flight seeking sanctuary in Europe. More than 300,000 people have risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea so far this year. Over 2,600 didn't survive the dangerous crossing

Sanctuary

Europe has failed to find an effective common response. Europe needs more coherent policies for external aid and internal resettlement. The EU must provide adequate emergency reception, assistance and registration. More effective international cooperation is required to crack down on smugglers, including those operating inside the EU. With the exception of Germany and Sweden, Europe has failed to resettle refugees. Some countries in Eastern Europe, such as Hungary and Slovakia, have rejected burden sharing proposals put forward by the European Union (EU).

The United States has also performed poorly. My great-grandparents arrived in New York as refugees in 1898. They were inspired by an inscription on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" The US was admired for its democracy, prosperity, and civil liberties. Not so today.

US Trends

In 2015, only 85,000 people from around the world were resettled. Only 10,000 Syrians have been resettled in the United States to date. Asylum seekers are carefully vetted. They must prove “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation conduct extensive interviews and background checks. The meticulous process takes between 18 and 24 months.

The recent tenor of the US presidential election raises real concerns about US refugee and migrant policy. During the campaign, President-elected Donald J. Trump impugned the character and intentions of refugees. Trump said, “We have to stop the tremendous flow of Syrian refugees into the United States. We don’t know who they are. They have no documentation, and we don’t know what they’re planning.” He called them a “Trojan horse” for the Islamic State.

Trump has proposed draconian measures towards refugees and migrants:

- Halt all Syrian refugees coming to the US.
- Suspend immigration from countries and regions that are “compromised by terrorism.”
- Conduct “extreme vetting” of other refugees, including an “ideological certification,” showing they share American values.
- Seek Congressional approval to reduce legal immigration from current levels.
- Tighten scrutiny across the immigration system, including those applying under family reunification program.
- Build a wall between the United States and Mexico.
- Deport two million undocumented immigrants with criminal records.
- Use widespread raids in communities and workplaces to enforce the deportation diktat.
- Expand detention centers along the border, ending the Obama administration’s policy of allowing those fleeing violence in Central America to seek asylum in immigration courts.

- Punish sanctuary cities that have curbed their cooperation with immigration authorities, by withholding federal funding.

Humanitarianism is more than a project or policy. It is based on humanitarian values. When one person suffers, we all suffer. The homeless child could be our child. We can safeguard security and still be agents for healing and help. Now more than ever, the world must rally in support of victims who are displaced by conflict.

David L. Phillips is Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. He served as a Senior Adviser to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 1999-2000.