

Universal Declaration on Environmentally-Displaced Persons¹

We... [...]

Aware that the future and very existence of humanity are inseparable from its environment, which continues to deteriorate at an increasing rate,

Bearing in mind the causes and likely consequences of this degradation such as climate change and/or biodiversity loss, drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, epidemics, armed conflicts, major infrastructure and, more generally, natural and technological hazards,

Noting that the victims of these phenomena and disasters are confronted with the destruction of their environment, which may result in the deterioration of their health, compromising the very essence of their right to life,

Considering that the causes of displacement are unfair and the consequences of environmental degradation undermine human dignity and affect particularly deprived people,

Considering that environmentally-displaced persons are those individuals, families, groups and populations confronted with a sudden or gradual environmental disaster that inexorably affects their living conditions, forcing them to leave, at the outset or throughout, their usual life places,

Considering further that forced displacement is as temporary or permanent displacement made inevitable by the environmental disaster, either within a State or from the State of residence to one or more receiving States,

Asserting firmly that the protection of environmentally-displaced persons should be based on respect for international human rights law,

Proclaim:

1. The principle of solidarity whereby States, other public authorities and private actors must do their utmost to accommodate environmentally-displaced persons and contribute to the necessary financial efforts.
2. The obligation of the international community to provide assistance to States stricken by ecological disasters.
3. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities whereby States, according to their respective capacities, have a shared responsibility in terms of reception of environmentally-displaced persons.
4. The right to information and the right to participation of displaced persons and persons threatened with displacement.
5. The right to displacement, within or outside the home State, of any person confronted with a sudden or gradual environmental disaster that inexorably affects her/his living conditions. This right also entails the right not to be displaced by public authorities without her/his consent, except in cases of grave and imminent danger.
6. The rights of environmentally-displaced persons to be rescued, to water, subsistence food aid, health care, housing and respect for family unity.

¹ Prepared by the International Centre of Comparative Environmental Law (CIDCE), August 29, 2014) Organisation with Special consultative status with the UN Economic and social Council since 2015

7. The rights of environmentally-displaced persons to recognition of their juridical personality, to replacement of the documentation necessary to fully enjoy their rights, and to preservation of their civil and political rights. Inter-State environmentally-displaced persons also have the right to retain the nationality of their State of origin.
8. The rights of environmentally-displaced persons to earn a living by working, to education, training and maintenance of their cultural specificities. Environmentally-displaced persons are also entitled to respect for their property, as well as to assistance in the transport of movable possessions of primary interest and of pets to the temporary accommodation.
9. The right of environmentally-displaced persons to return, under strict conditions of safety, dignity and without risk to health, to their place of origin when it becomes again habitable. A displaced person cannot be forced to return to her/his usual life place against her/his will.
10. The obligation of States to ensure that environmentally-displaced persons exercise their rights without any discrimination.

We believe it is urgent to initiate negotiations with a view to adopting an international convention recognizing a legal status for environmentally-displaced persons.