

Egypt would like to thank UNHCR for organising this year's High Commissioner's Dialogue, which has addressed the importance issue of the COVID 19 pandemic. Egypt welcomes the opportunity to discuss ways to address the pandemic's impacts on refugees and displaced persons, and how to build back better. Egypt is also pleased to address the ways in which the pandemic has exacerbated already vulnerable situations, and compounded an already concerning humanitarian situation caused, among several factors, by conflict and climate change.

Egypt would like to seize this opportunity to reaffirm its recognition that environmental degradation, water scarcity and climate change constitute important drivers of forced displacement. Numerous UN reports have recognised that climate change, water scarcity and environmental degradation compel people to move. It is thus imperative for the international community to collectively address these phenomena, increase resilience and combat all potential root causes of displacement.

In order for the international community to assume its responsibilities in this regard, we must recognise a number of important contributors to climate change and environment-induced displacement. For example, large-scale projects on transboundary rivers have been recognised to contribute to water scarcity, as well as slow-onset climate change impacts such as rising salinity, sea-water intrusion and desertification. This is particularly concerning in countries like Egypt that suffers from severe water scarcity and high dependence on a single water source. Millions of Egyptian farmers and their families depend on the River Nile for their livelihoods and vital human needs. These rural communities are tied to their lands and their livelihoods; they do not want to be forced to move due to environmental degradation and climate change impacts, particularly where these impacts can be prevented. Numerous reports and studies indicate that water scarcity compels people to move both internally and across State borders.

Failure to address these impacts leads to a violation of a wide range of human rights, primary among which is the right to life, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the right to an adequate standard of living and the livelihoods of rural communities. The violation of these human rights results in displacement, which is itself associated with further denial of basic human rights.

There is a way out of this vicious cycle, but this requires genuine political will. There is an urgent need to better manage transboundary water resources in accordance with the principles of international law, maintain riparian ecosystems, and conduct social, environmental and economic impact assessments for projects on transboundary water resources to eliminate or mitigate their negative impacts and build the resilience of affected communities.

As an extremely water scarce country, Egypt has a keen interest in addressing the water/climate change/displacement nexus. Prevention, where possible, of climate and environment induced displacement is key to addressing the root causes of forced displacement. Building resilience and preventive action are also key to ensuring a better response to pandemics in the future.