

Statement to UNHCR's Executive Committee
Plenary Debate

University for Peace

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Human Mobility, Climate Change and Disasters
(Geneva, 13 October 2022)

Allow me to commend you, High Commissioner, for your frank and courageous opening statement. We live in troubled and turbulent times. The courage and fortitude shown by Fridtjof Nansen is much needed today. We congratulate you for the extension of your term in this stormy era and wish you much courage, determination, imagination, and fortitude.

Two themes have emerged at this ExCom. One is the multiple, very real threats to peace today. The second is climate change and environmental degradation – as enhancers of pre-existing vulnerabilities and as drivers of both migration and forced displacement.

The University for Peace is part of the academic arm of the United Nations. We have been mandated by the UN General Assembly to "contribute to the universal task of educating for peace by engaging in teaching, research and the dissemination of knowledge fundamental to the full development of the human person and societies through the study of all matters relating to peace."

Created over 40 years ago, UPEACE has forged generations of leaders for sustainable development, peace building and the promotion of human rights. In so doing we encourage innovative thinking to reconcile poverty alleviation with environmental protection, and to generate more and better knowledge regarding the growing impact of climate change and disasters on human mobility.

Both the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary-General have recognized climate change to be a threat to peace. That is why UPEACE launched the Latin American Observatory on Human Mobility, Climate Change and Disasters or MOVE-LAM. We are on the Advisory Committee of the State-led Platform on Disaster Displacement, now chaired by the EU.

Latin America and the Caribbean, along with South East Asia, is one of the regions most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and disasters, and is one of the most active migration corridors on the planet. Human mobility motivated by environmental factors is already a stark and worrisome reality.

In an innovative partnership with UNHCR's Americas Bureau, we are trying to understand better how other drivers, such as socioeconomic and environmental vulnerabilities, and violence in the case of El Salvador and Honduras, impact upon such movements. There is absolutely no doubt that the effects of climate change have intensified forced displacement and migration flows in the Americas. Populations exposed to environmental risk factors have been forced to migrate within their countries or to emigrate, become forcibly displaced or be relocated to safer locations, generating new challenges for the States of the region and States in North America.

The primary focus of the Observatory's work is on increasing data, knowledge, analysis, and networks of Latin American universities and think tanks working in this area. Through evidence, we wish to raise awareness amongst a wide public and Latin American opinion leaders and policymakers, and document their different realities, challenges and perspectives, especially of those who are the most affected.

Through the Observatory we want to fill two important gaps. On the one hand, it is urgent to generate scientifically supported evidence and data to visualize, qualify, quantify and monitor human mobility dynamics triggered by climate change and environmental degradation. The goal is to inform public policy and concrete action for affected individuals and communities. On the other, it is even more urgent to place the needs and rights of affected groups and communities at the very center of building public norms, policies, and good practices that deliver the effective protection of their human rights.

The University for Peace looks forward to building further our innovative academic-UNHCR partnership, continuing our work with UNHCR's Americas Bureau, being a proactive member of the GLOBE alliance of universities supporting the Global Compact on Refugees, and creating a Sérgio Vieira de Mello Chair on protection of forced migrants, in close cooperation with the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

