

Keynote Speech

The Global Refugee Crisis

David L. PHILLIPS

**Director, Peace-building and Rights Program, Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR),
Columbia University**

Greetings everyone. Very nice to meet you. Thank you for coming to the conference today. I flew here from New York, which is a long journey, but over the years I've learned that when Tsuneo Nishida makes a request, that I have to always agree. Nishida-san is not only a very learned man, now a professor, but I know him as a world-class diplomat. I interact with many representatives of foreign ministries. It is rare that I have had the chance to meet somebody with the intelligence, humanity, and the leadership that Nishida-san shows, so I'm very honored to be here at your invitation and the Hiroshima University. Thank you very much.

I think the only Japanese official that I have known longer than Tsuneo Nishida is Madame Sadako Ogata. She and I first met in 1992 at the London Conference on the former Yugoslavia. She played such an important role as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. At the London Peace Conference, we discussed how to arrange the return of refugees in Bosnia

who were victims of ethnic cleansing. She is a person of great principle and great talent. At the time, we felt overwhelmed with the global refugee crisis. But the crisis that existed then, though large and significant, is much less than the global refugee crisis that we face today.

Today's problems need a more coherent response from the international community. There are about 65 million people around the world displaced by violent conflict or by persecution. There are another 15 to 20 million displaced by natural disasters and by the implications of climate change. Of those that are displaced, about 20 million are refugees. This means that they have crossed an international border and, having done so, they are subject to the protections of international humanitarian law. The rest are called internally displaced persons or IDPs. Because they are displaced within their own country, they are not subject to the same levels of protection. Often time, it is the government of the country where they reside that is responsible for the conflict

that displaced them in the first place.

These IDPs that have not crossed an international border face a very big challenge. We are all challenged by the size and the scope of this global displacement crisis. The international system as well as donor countries like Japan are overwhelmed trying to meet the needs of refugees, IDPs, and also migrants. Migrants are a new category of displaced person. We hear a lot about them in the context of the European exodus and flight of people. Migrants are those who have left their home country seeking greater economic opportunity. They may not be the direct victims of a conflict, but they are also in need of sanctuary.

The conditions for those displaced are getting worse. More than a dozen conflicts have broken out in the past six years only. The primary producers of displaced people are Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic, but the list goes on. There are other countries that are producing displaced people as well. Since I have the opportunity to work directly on the Syria and Iraq crises, I am going to reflect with you today some of the experience and lessons learned from those conflicts. I am also going to reflect the response of the international community including my own country, the United States. Our discussion will start with an assessment of the architecture with

responsibility for those displaced by conflict and for other reasons.

The United Nations has the primary mandate to address the refugee and IDP issues. The UN High Commissioner for refugees is the primary international official taking the lead on these matters. Given the importance of displacement to world affairs, it is not surprising that the new UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, was until recently the UN High Commissioner for refugees. The UN going forward will face many crises including the crisis of displacement. Mr. Guterres because of his experience, his skill, and his temperament is extremely well placed to play an effective role as the Secretary-General of the world body. In addition to the UNHCR, there other groups like the International Organization for Migration, a related UN organization, which has a specific role to support governments and nongovernmental organizations working on displacement issues.

The responsibility for those displaced often falls to individual countries or to regional bodies. In the case of the Syria crisis, the European Union has been struggling to find a coherent response. Among the EU member states, there is a big difference in the approach. We also see a dramatic difference in how individual member states have responded. Germany welcomed more than 1 million Syrian

refugees, whereas other countries such as Slovakia or Hungary have rejected them. We also see how frontline states respond. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have a particularly large burden. In response to this crisis, the UNHCR has been expanding its responsibilities. It has assumed the leading role for the protection of IDPs adding them to what is called the global protection cluster alongside its work protecting refugees. Development agencies and the UN Peacebuilding Commission and its support office also are playing important roles to help states build their capacity for work in this field and also to create conditions mitigating humanitarian emergencies before they occur. I want to emphasize here that the sanctuary and services provided to refugees needs to go hand-in-hand with a conflict prevention strategy. The way to deal with a refugee crisis is to prevent violent conflict before it arises and then to break the cycle of violence so that those displaced can return to their home.

When we look at the scale of the crisis, there are very big challenges, both operationally and financially to the international system. The UN consolidated appeal process sought \$20 billion from donor countries in 2015. Japan is a generous donor to the consolidated appeal process, but even with the generosity of Japan and contributions

from other countries such as Norway, a small country that punches above its weight in providing assistance, only \$11 billion was raised. Little more than half of the needs to provide for refugees was met financially. Donors are simply exhausted addressing the ongoing displacement crisis.

I talked about the Bosnian crisis of 1992. To donor countries, it seems that year after year there is more crisis. There are greater and greater demands, and the ability of the industrialized wealthier countries to meet those needs is less and less. It is important that we not only provide more aid but that we also provide what we'll call better aid. Better aid can be achieved through innovation in the humanitarian space. Today, I'm going to focus my remarks with some specific recommendations about how the international system can function more effectively by bridging the gap between humanitarian and development activities, mitigating the impact of climate change on displacement, and emphasizing conflict prevention to address the root causes of displacement. I will elaborate some ideas in these three baskets of activity.

Humanitarian aid and development assistance should not be in different silos. They should be conceptually conceived together. This year, 2016, marks the official launch of the agenda for sustainable development goals, which are to be achieved

over the next 15 years. These SDGs succeeded the MDGs, the millennium development goals, that have been in place over the past decade. The new agenda calls on countries to achieve 17 SDGs. It offers 169 target goals to be accomplished over this 15-year period. When you look at the SDGs, only two of the target objectives refer to migrants and none of the targets even mention refugees. To more effectively manage today's refugee and migrant crisis, UN action should be addressed through the prism of the SDGs.

By implementing the SDGs, we will strengthen the resilience factor in humanitarian programming and deal with some of the core questions that create displacement in the first place and help contribute to conditions so that those displaced will be able to go home. Of the 17 SDGs, I will identify those that are relevant to the refugee and migrant issues. SDG-1 addresses poverty. SDG-2 addresses hunger. SDG-5 refers to gender equality. SDG-8 concerns work conditions and economic growth. SDG-10 deals with inequalities. SDG-13 addresses global warming and climate conditions, and SDG-16 refers to peace, justice, and the development of strong institutions. It is important to take these SDGs and adapt them to the requirements of the global refugee crisis. The displaced need durable solutions linking humanitarian aid and

economic development. When one is displaced, the displacement does not exist for a month or two. IDPs are displaced for an average of 23 years, and refugees are displaced for an average of 17 years.

Once one is displaced, it is hard to go home. In 2014, only 1% of refugees were resettled to their original countries of residence. That is why it's important to think about SDGs to enhance stability and promote long-term development in failed and fragile states. These are the states that produce displacement and which would benefit most from institution building and capacity building in order to eliminate the conditions that give rise to displacement. So, being practical and proactive as Professor Nishida knows me to be, I am going to make some specific recommendations. I suggest that the new UN Secretary-General lead an initiative with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees as a focal point and involving IOM to assess and plan the UN's whole-of-system approach. The initiative would adapt SDGs to refugee needs so that they are implemented and mainstreamed through all of the UN's activities, policies, funding, and development of indicators. In addition to sharing this recommendation with you here today, I have also shared it directly with the new UN Secretary-General who is an extremely capable and committed individual. The world body is in very good

hands, and I believe Mr. Guterres will address these crises forthrightly.

The second thematic area of recommendation concerns the issue of climate change. Did everybody notice the beautiful weather that we are having here today? We were talking earlier about the skiing conditions in Japan. I learned that that many of the winter resorts are facing economic difficulties because there is simply no snow on the slopes. Well, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, otherwise known as the Paris Agreement, seeks to combat climate change and to adapt the international community to its effects. It was adopted by 195 countries and so far ratified by 114 countries, enough for the convention to go into effect. We have to be steely eyed in assessing the impact of climate change. Climate change contributes to famines and droughts. It is increasingly the driver of conflict and displacement, particularly in conflict-prone areas in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and also of South Asia. It is a shocking figure, but as many as 200 million people may be displaced as a result of climate change by the year 2050. Building on the Paris Agreement, which in and of itself was a great breakthrough, and I applaud President Obama for his leadership in this area of work, the UN needs to lead an effort to prepare for the impacts of climate change on displacement.

The agreement calls for the creation of a climate displacement task force to recommend measures "to avert, minimize, and address displacement related to the adverse effects of climate change." It is good to make a declaration. It is good to pronounce a goal; collecting and sharing knowledge is a good start. However, findings must be quickly translated into action. It may be my own cultural orientation as an American, but I always ask what can we do in order to solve the problem. Studying it is not enough.

I recommend that the UN Secretary-General lead an effort to engage national and local governments as well as civil society in the development of regional plans on how to deal with displacement risks and hazards. We should consider floods, storms, droughts, sea level rising, the vulnerabilities of different communities. Some will be particularly vulnerable, more vulnerable than others, and then the resilience in affected communities. These recommendations would focus on the UN capacities and propose specific action that UN departments and different UN agencies can take to mitigate the impact of climate change on displacement.

The third recommendation deals with conflict prevention and peacebuilding. More needs to be done to prevent conflicts before they start. If we want to deal with this enormous spiral of the refugee

population, we have to prevent violent conflict at its source. In order to do that, we need to conceptualize conflict prevention not as a piecemeal effort where there are occasional negotiations engaging the UN Department of Political Affairs. The UN should conceptualize as a whole the elements that go into national capacity building to prevent conflicts. This deals with security and justice reform, the promotion of the rule of law. It involves strengthening local governance as well as public administration. Economic development and job creation is another essential tool for preventing conflicts. So is good government. In a democratic system, people become stakeholders. They are less likely to seek redress through violence if they know that their votes matter and that they can achieve reform at the ballot box, not necessarily through violence. Of course, dialogue is important. In my own family when there are differences of opinion, we may want to shout at one another. It is better to sit down, talk things through, develop a better mutual understanding, and act in ways that are consistent with the interests of everyone in the family. I have twin daughters who are 12 years old. I always try to emphasize for them the importance of dialogue. I tell them that yelling and screaming won't achieve their objectives. Convincing me, your father, that their interests are reasonable is the best

way. Dialogue is key.

The UN system has vast experience and capabilities. The United Nations Development Program works on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. There are UNDP offices around the world. Usually the UNDP person is the head of a mission. The UN country team involves other UN agencies like UNICEF or UNFPA. It is important that all these agencies work together in tandem. It is also important that specialized departments of the UN system operate more effectively. The Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office were established some years ago. Frankly, these bodies are pretty morbid and ineffective. They spend money. They employ a lot of people. But they do not have a big impact. These bodies can be revitalized with a more relevant mandate and more proactive leadership. I recommend a mandate deals specifically with conflict prevention. I also propose that the UN Peacebuilding Commission create a working group on displacement. This working group would be responsible for coordinating and operationalizing what is called the interoperability of the different parts of the UN system. It would develop integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery. It would consider the needs of individual countries that are affected by displacement and focus on reconstruction

and institution-building efforts in order to stabilize countries so the displacement stops and people can go home.

I am sure you all been following the tragic news of developments in Aleppo. Aleppo is Syria's second-largest city. It has been divided between government-controlled and rebel-controlled areas. Over the past 4 weeks as a result of a constant bombardment with barrel bombs and sophisticated weapons, 300,000 civilians in Eastern Aleppo have been put at-risk. Targeting hospitals, schools, killing civilians is a war crime. We need to do something about Aleppo. It is not a humanitarian crisis only. It is not about humanitarian corridors. We need a peace settlement for Syria.

We all know what Syria is going to look like at the end of this war. It will have three regions. Those regions will be divided between Alawites in Damascus and up to Lattakia. The northern area will be led by Syrian Kurds. Sunni Arabs, who are the majority, will predominate in other regions of the country. We just need a way of getting from where we are now to stopping the war. Peace can be achieved if the UN provides motivated leadership. Peace can be advanced if the United States is more deeply involved. I hope that the United States can work effectively with Russia and other international stakeholders towards a final agreement on the Syrian

Civil War. It is high time. Almost 500,000 people have been killed in the past five years. More than 13 million have been displaced. This is half of Syria's population. The flight of Syrians has exacerbated regional instability. Turkey has 2.7 million refugees. Syrian refugees comprise twenty percent of Lebanon's population. There are 660,000 Syrians registered as refugees in Jordan. There probably many more in the region who are not counted. Their presence has destabilized host countries. It is usually frontline states that bear the largest burden. They bear the greatest responsibility. They often are those countries that have inadequate means and capacity to deal with the problem.

Let's talk now about sanctuary. Everybody wants to go to Europe. Initially Sweden and Germany rolled out a welcome mat, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem. The European Union tried to manage a coherent response, but has been unable to do that. It is easy to lay blame elsewhere, but I also want to reflect on the response by the United States. My great-grandparents came to New York as refugees from Minsk in 1898, and I remember hearing the story of their arrival in New York and reading the 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.” I am so proud of this inscription because it says so much about America's character, wanting to help others, to do that selflessly. The United States is entirely a country of displaced, of those who came under difficult circumstances.

When we look at the US response to Syrian refugee crisis, it is a source of deep embarrassment to me. Only 10,000 Syrians have been resettled in the United States to date. In 2015, only 85,000 people from around the world were resettled. After 9/11, there is a deep and well-founded concern about security. For sure, everyone has to be carefully vetted and screened. Accepting refugees has become a hotly debated issue in the United States. It was also a topic prevalent in our recent presidential election. The tenor of the debate is something that I disapprove of strongly. People that wanted to come to the United States and find protection and safety were impugned as potential sources of risk.

During the campaign, President-Elect Donald Trump raised questions about the character and intention of refugees looking to come to United States. He said we do not know who they are. They have no documentation. We do not know what they are planning. He called them a ‘Trojan Horse’ for the Islamic State. Well, he

might as well have been referring to my great-grandmother and grandfather who came with no paperwork and who resettled, built a business, and became pillars of the community in New York. Trump’s criticism of the displaced seeking sanctuary does not stop with those words. He has recommended specific policies. Trump has proposed measures to halt all Syrian refugees coming to the United States. He recommended that we suspend immigration from countries and regions that are "compromised by terrorism." He has recommended extreme vetting including ideological certification showing that refugees share American values. He has demanded the congressional approval to reduce the number of legal immigrants from the current level, which is already too low. He proposed tightening security across the immigration system, including families seeking reunification. And he has proposed that we build a wall between the United States and Mexico in order to prevent illegal migrants from coming in. I bet that half of the people working in his hotels and his golf courses are Mexicans who have come into the country illegally, looking for a better life. My great-grandparents also came looking for a better life.

Instead of providing services, Trump proposes to build more centers to detain those arrested. He suggested that cities like New York that act on their own to provide

sanctuary to refugees would be punished by being denied funds from the federal government. So I am hoping that what was said in the campaign and what will be implemented during the administration are different s. I believe that American values are strongly rooted in humanitarianism. Humanitarian action is not just a program or a policy. It is based on a set of beliefs. When one person suffers, we all suffer. The homeless child could be our child. That screaming girl in Aleppo could be my daughter.

We need to safeguard and provide security, but all countries including the

United States must be agents for healing and help. Now more than ever with the enormous demand of humanity, we must answer the call with kindness and compassion.

I am very grateful for the chance to share these views with you. You can see that my approach is both principles but practical. We need to affect policies not only in the United States but in the international community so that we can all work more closely together to address to address problems that we share. So, thank you all very much.