



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

STATEMENT

BY
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AND CLIMATE CHANGE: The Gender Perspective

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Honorable Ministers, distinguished participants,

I am honoured to have been given this opportunity to greet you and address you at this round table. The subject we will be discussing is one I find to be of particular relevance, as the international community has become increasingly aware of the gender perspective of climate change and environment degradation. Indeed, this topic is both extremely significant, in light of the results of recent research which suggest that women are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, and timely, as we can see every day the growing number of violent meteorological events as well as the effects of long term environmental degradation.

I wish to thank our partner organisations' representatives Ms. Mayanja, the Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Ms. Simonen, Director of the UN Population Fund for co-organizing this meeting with IOM.

As Deputy Director General of the International Organization for Migration, I would like to emphasize the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on population displacement and the need to consider women's specific needs in this context.

As I am sure you are all aware, the effects of climate change globally, such as rising sea levels, altered patterns of desertification and dry lands degradation, and the growing number of sudden and extreme environmental events are placing the lives and livelihoods of large populations at risk and have an increasing impact on the movement of people. Estimates of the number of people who could be displaced or migrate by 2050 as a result of climate change and environmental degradation vary from 25 million to up to 1 billion. This broad range of displacement & migration figures indicates the need for further evidence-based and policy oriented research.

IOM's approach to environmentally-induced migration considers the cases of populations who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment, that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, leave their habitual homes, either temporarily or permanently. These migrants include those who have moved voluntarily as well as involuntarily, and who have either moved within their country or abroad.

This broad approach encompasses different scenarios such as migration as a coping strategy for medium to advanced stages of gradual environmental change (for example rural populations farmers, pastoralists and fishermen whose livelihood is seriously affected by environmental change) or forced migration as a survival strategy reacting to extreme and sudden environmental events. This wide range of situations from sudden humanitarian internal- or cross-borders migration to long term, structural migration patterns will have to be envisaged and planned at the national, regional and international levels. Within those different hypotheses, special attention needs to be paid to the different experience and vulnerabilities of men and women.

In addition to the dramatic human casualties, as we have seen only recently in China and Myanmar, meteorological disasters cause considerable damage and destroy basic infrastructure and services, often generating population displacement and making return, at least in the short term, unfeasible in many cases. In these kinds of situations of forced migration, as in any crisis and emergency situation, women and girls and men and boys are exposed to different types of risks and trauma, in particular gender-based violence, human trafficking for sexual purposes or for labour exploitation and involvement in criminal activities. Those elements, if already well-known, are sometimes overlooked in the sense of urgency in relief operations.

Women's greater vulnerability and higher exposure to risks and hazards has been widely documented. In many communities around the world, women's vulnerability is heightened by their socio-economic status, care-giving roles and relative lack of power. This has been seen in particular in the context of the Asian Tsunami in 2004, where women represented nearly 80% of the victims in some regions of India. More recently, the study "The Gendered Nature of Disasters" provided statistical evidence to suggest that natural disasters kill more women than men or kill women at a younger age than men, and that this gendered difference in effects only increases with the intensity of the disaster. Moreover, it found that the higher mortality rate among women depends not only on disaster strength itself but is also determined by the socio-economic status of women in the affected country's society. This can be explained by different factors, such as women's role as the main care givers in many communities, which means that they would tend to look to their children's safety before their own, as well as the fact that, in many countries, women

are rarely taught to swim, have a lower literacy rate and have little control over household decision-making.

I previously mentioned the need for national, regional and international planning to prevent and cope with the dramatic consequences of climate change and environmental degradation. This planning needs to consider the specific role that women play in vulnerable communities, and involve them in strategies to mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation and to reduce their vulnerability to the effects of such phenomena. In particular, the diffusion of prevention information and the establishment of early warning systems need to consider men and women's role and status in society: the low literacy rate among women, for instance, can prevent them from being autonomously informed of an alert; meanwhile, other examples have shown that women can be excellent awareness-raisers within their communities. Therefore involving women in disaster and environmental degradation prevention campaigns is likely to increase the preparedness and adaptation of a large population.

More generally, a gender approach should be integrated in the range of practices that can be used to adapt to climate change, in particular, changes in behaviour (e.g. in water use or farming practices), structural changes (e.g. in the design specification of bridges and roads), policy-based responses (e.g. integrating risk management and adaptation into development policy), technological responses (e.g. increased sea defenses, improved forecasting) or managerial responses (e.g. improved forest management and biodiversity conservation). In certain cases, such measures can reduce mass migration and the negative repercussions for human well-being, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

I would like to make three brief recommendations for our discussions:

First, for decision makers to be able to design appropriate prevention and mitigation policies and programmes, there is a need **for further research on environmentally induced migration from a gender perspective.**

Second, to better cope with environmental migration, States and their partners should consider intervention at the earliest stage possible and **promote cooperation with diasporas to further channel the human and financial**

resources of migrants toward targeted efforts to prevent further environmental degradation in the migrant-sending area.

Finally, it is worth repeating, the debate on mitigation of climate change shows that states and other actors should dedicate more efforts towards the **achievement of MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment**; as we have heard again today, empowered, autonomous and strong women are instrumental in better preventing, adapting to, mitigating and recovering from the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

I am glad to have the opportunity to explore this issue with such a diverse and high-quality audience and I am convinced that our conclusions will bring some positive insights into the need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to any strategy, plan and action aiming at mitigating the effect of climate change and environmental degradation in order to better reduce vulnerability and build communities' resilience.