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133rd IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 17-21.10.2015

Open Session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law

The humanitarian dimension of forced migration – asylum-seekers and refugees: From emergency responses to comprehensive approaches

Tuesday, 20 October 2015
14:30 - 16:30, Rooms 3 & 4, level 0, CICG

Concept note

Migration and refugee movements have been a feature of the human condition for millennia and will remain so in the future. Over the past months, we have witnessed unprecedented movements of both refugees and migrants to Western Europe. Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety elsewhere than at any other time since the Second World War.

The number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 had risen to a staggering 59.5 million. This compares to 51.2 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago. This year, the numbers may go even higher. Globally, one in every 122 people is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th biggest.

Since early 2011, the main reason for the acceleration in migration has been the war in Syria: it is now the world's single largest driver of displacement. Displacement has also been caused in the past five years by at least 15 conflicts which have either begun or been reignited.

One of the most highly visible consequences of the world's conflicts and the terrible suffering they cause is the dramatic growth in the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees seeking safety through dangerous land and sea journeys, including in the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and seas in Southeast Asia. Mixed movements of both refugees and migrants in insecure circumstances who are at increased risk of being exposed to abuse and exploitation have become a global challenge. This phenomenon generates specific dynamics at the regional level and has multidimensional implications for origin, transit and destination countries. These new patterns of migration and forced displacement require immediate humanitarian responses as well as long-term comprehensive approaches.

The open session will focus primarily on the humanitarian dimension of current forced migration flows. Panellists will present an overview of the present situation. The session will then discuss how to ensure that asylum-seekers are protected, particularly when exposed to heightened risks, and more particularly when at sea. It will discuss the roles and responsibilities of States in protecting and saving the lives of asylum-seekers. It will also explore elements of comprehensive responses to such situations, which call for more long-term approaches.

How should States respond to large flows of asylum-seekers? What should be done to reduce risks faced by asylum-seekers? Is 'offshore processing' of claims a solution? What are the long-term solutions for the resettlement or return of refugees?

