

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this report, *The Year that Shook the Rich: A Review of Natural Disasters in 2011*, by the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement.

Since the devastation of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Project has played a leading role in highlighting the human rights of communities affected by natural disasters and this report is intended to deepen understanding of current trends in both disasters and international disaster response.

As the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, during my missions to the Maldives and Kenya in 2011, I have witnessed the terrible consequences of disasters as well as the looming threat that climate change poses to many countries. My first report to the UN General Assembly highlighted the relationship between climate change, displacement and human rights and this is an issue which I intend to prioritize during my mandate. Disasters pose unique challenges to our societies and to international response mechanisms. Governments, humanitarian actors and communities must strive to respond to disasters in ways that do not discriminate against the weak and vulnerable members of society and that uphold the full continuum of human rights of all those affected.

This *Review* provides a general overview of natural disasters which occurred last year and of the international humanitarian community's responses to them. In accordance with the title, the *Review* looks at the experience of developed countries with natural disasters in 2011. It was a particularly bad year for developed countries as evidenced by the Japanese earthquake/tsunami/nuclear accident, the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, floods in Australia, and tornadoes, hurricanes and drought in the United States. These (and other) disasters remind us that natural hazards affect all regions of the world and even rich countries have much to learn about both disaster risk reduction and disaster response. The *Review* then looks at the intersection of drought, famine and conflict, with a particular focus on the Horn of Africa in 2011. Finally the report closes with a contribution about the impact of natural disasters on one particularly vulnerable – and resourceful – sector of society: the elderly.

Over the past decade, there has been increased awareness of the human rights dimensions of natural disaster response. Notably the *Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters* adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee offers concrete guidance to agencies involved in disaster response. The revision of those *Guidelines* in 2009 further strengthens this guidance by, among other things, highlighting the need to adopt disaster risk reduction strategies which take human rights issues into consideration.

I hope that better understanding of natural disasters and their effects on our societies will help us to design more effective policies to address needs and uphold rights of all of those affected by natural disasters. In a warming world in which we will most likely see more frequent and intense natural disasters this is of upmost importance.

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