

UN expert urges Maldives to tackle displacement caused by climate change



Special Rapporteur Chaloka Beyani

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An independent United Nations human rights expert has urged Maldives to put in place measures to handle internal displacement caused by climate change and natural disasters – an issue the Indian Ocean nation is all too familiar with having experienced the 2004 tsunami.

“Climate change is very real in the Maldives and its effects on rights, including the right to housing, safe water and livelihoods, are being felt on many islands,” said Chaloka Beyani, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

“The suffering caused by coastal erosion, salination, rising sea levels, and more frequent storms and flooding is all too obvious to be ignored,” he said after a six-day mission to the country.

“It is also essential to put in place climate change induced displacement preparedness measures applying a human rights-based approach, and mechanisms for the participation of affected communities,” he added.

The expert said that addressing the “real and clearly visible” impacts of climate change on the ordinary lives of the people of the Maldives through mitigation and adaptation measures is “necessary and urgent,” and will require partnerships with the international community.

Mr. Beyani also highlighted the need for a law on disaster risk reduction to ensure the implementation of the Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster

Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation 2010-2020. He also called on the Maldivian Parliament to enact the law on disaster management that has been pending for some time.

At the same time, the law professor and Zambian national stressed that legislation and policy should address internal displacement, including that resulting from climate change.

In the event of internal displacement, affected persons will need protection and assistance in finding “durable” solutions, said Mr. Beyani. These could include a return to an affected island if it is still habitable, local integration in the location where they sought refuge or resettlement in another part of the country.

These decisions must be voluntary and informed, and affected communities must be consulted and have the opportunity for meaningful participation in all decisions affecting them.

Mr. Beyani said the lessons learned from the internal displacement caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami should inform and be integrated into future legislation and policies. He also stressed that urgent attention be given to the situation of tsunami victims, 1,600 of whom were still living in very difficult conditions in temporary shelters.

The expert carries out his activities in an independent and unpaid capacity and reports to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council. His full report on the visit to the Maldives will be presented in March 2012.

Fuente: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39111&Cr=displace&Cr1=>