

Leadership-in-Action (LiA) Project Report

Supporting the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs)

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Note: This project report specifically addresses the activities conducted within the standard six-week duration of LiA projects. Please note that the report's details are intentionally limited due to the confidential nature of the work conducted, in strict adherence to the confidentiality agreement signed with the Special Rapporteur.

Project overview: The project's objective was to serve as a full-time, around-the-clock aide to the newly appointed United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In this role, I internally supported the Special Rapporteur in fulfilling her mandate during her first summer in office. This support consisted of internal and confidential contributions to research and analysis; report drafting; country visits planning; and strategic engagement with stakeholders worldwide. Through my involvement in advancing the Special Rapporteur's mandate, I put my 'grain of sand' in enhancing the global human rights landscape for IDPs by engaging in advocacy, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, generating new insights, and formulating policy recommendations. This project thus provided an opportunity to develop leadership skills by carrying significant individual responsibility and being accountable for critical tasks; engaging in strategic planning for the mandate; honing the ability to rapidly gather, analyze, and synthesize information for the Special Rapporteur and effectively communicating with stakeholders; gaining a global and intersectional perspective; and taking initiative constantly while becoming highly flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and needs.

Why this project was needed: The world should be deeply disturbed by the alarmingly large number of IDPs, which reached an all-time high of 71.1 million people across 110 countries at the end of 2022.¹ These people have been forcibly displaced within their countries because of human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, armed conflict, persecution, generalized violence, natural disasters, and the adverse effects of climate change. Women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons belonging to minorities and Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon, with most receiving inadequate protection and assistance, and lacking access to durable solutions.² For many IDPs, the prospect of rebuilding their lives remains elusive for years or even generations. Today, large-scale protracted displacement is imperiling progress towards development, peace, and prosperity.

IDPs face persistent threats, in particular the risk of extreme poverty and socioeconomic exclusion; limited access to humanitarian and long-term development assistance; heightened risk of

¹ See the 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), prepared by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2023/>

² As per the IASC Framework, a durable solution is achieved when IDPs no longer have any displacement-related vulnerabilities and protection needs, and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination deriving from displacement.

exposure to violations of international law, especially human rights law and international humanitarian law; heightened risk of women and girls being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence; human trafficking, forced recruitment, and abduction; lack of protection, food, shelter, access to education, justice, health-care services and psychosocial support; disruption to family links; loss of essential documents that may result in a violation of their human rights; and issues pertinent to their (re)integration, including obstacles to the exercise of housing, land, and property rights.

Failure to address the needs of IDPs can undermine efforts by countries to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Risk-informed sustainable development is essential for reducing displacement risk, facilitating durable solutions, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, and ensuring that no one is left behind, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda.

Engaging with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur: The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs is an independent human rights expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The first Special Rapporteur was appointed in September 2010, with the same functions as the former Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons (1992-2010). The mandate was most recently renewed in 2022—for a period of three years—through Resolution [A/HRC/RES/50/6](#). The HRC appointed Paula Gaviria Betancur of Colombia as the new Special Rapporteur (2022-2025). She assumed her mandate on 1 November 2022, becoming the first Latin American woman to hold this position. She was a member (2019–2021) of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, mandated to identify specific recommendations on how to better respond to internal displacement. Throughout high school and university, and as a fellow Colombian, I have been deeply inspired by the work of Ms. Gaviria Betancur, which is why I approached her in November 2022 to conduct my LiA project.

During my LiA project, I witnessed how the mandate of the Special Rapporteur is uniquely important in the UN architecture: it is the only one focused on strengthening international responses to the ongoing internal displacement crisis by mainstreaming the human rights of IDPs in the UN system, coordinating international advocacy and action, and maintaining a continuous dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, including Governments and intergovernmental, regional, and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs is the only mandate holder, out of 59, to be part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum of the UN system.

The Special Rapporteur has at her disposal six (6) tools to advocate for the prevention, protection, and assistance to IDPs, as well as the pursuit of durable solutions to IDPs: (1) annual thematic reports to the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the General Assembly (GA); (2) interactive dialogues with UN agencies, UN Member States, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders after presenting annual reports; (3) country visits to States with the most critical, challenging, and persistent displacement situations; (4) working visits, at the invitation of a variety of stakeholders, to consider internal displacement issues and to engage informally with a range of

actors, including national authorities; (5) communications to receive information from different sources, solicit further information from Governments, and act on credible information in relation to any actual or anticipated human rights violations affecting IDPs; and (6) the IDP Protection Expert Group (IPEG) to mobilize high-level interventions and collaboration for the protection of IDPs, including through technical missions and support, capacity-building for government officials and UN country teams, and facilitation of national and regional dialogues on IDP protection.

Moreover, in supporting the Special Rapporteur, I became highly familiar with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement³, the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons⁴, the Interagency Durable Solutions Indicator Library⁵, the Durable Solutions Analysis Guide to measure progress towards durable solutions for IDPs⁶, the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement⁷, and the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.⁸ These key documents informed and shaped my work on a daily basis.

Delving into thematic priorities: I accompanied and supported the Special Rapporteur in defining, developing, and delving into the mandate's four thematic priorities, namely, generalized violence; mediation, peace processes, peace agreements, and peacebuilding; climate change; and (re)integration. This process required collecting and analyzing existing and ongoing research in these fields, holding consultations with thematic experts, and agreeing on the Special Rapporteur's approach to each theme, as well as her commitments for the next three years.

Deliverables and impact: Throughout my LiA project, I was able to support the Special Rapporteur in leveraging each of the above-mentioned tools and employing the mandate's foundational documents. As it was mutually agreed upon, I contributed to (A) research and analysis; (B) assisted in the drafting of reports; (C) collaborated in the preparation of country visits; (D) aided in stakeholder engagement; and (E) provided administrative support.

³ The Guiding Principles are 30 standards that outline the protections available to IDPs, available [here](#). They detail the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of IDPs from forced displacement to their protection and assistance during displacement up to the achievement of durable solutions. The Guiding Principles are consistent with and reflect international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as refugee law by analogy. The principles interpret and apply these existing norms to the situation of displaced persons.

⁴ The Framework, available [here](#), addresses durable solutions following conflict and natural disasters. It describes the key human rights-based principles that should guide the search for durable solutions and establishes the criteria that determine to what extent a durable solution has been achieved.

⁵ The Interagency Durable Solutions Indicator Library, available [here](#), operationalizes the IASC Framework into a set of agreed-upon, measurable and statistically sound indicators that can be used for durable solutions analysis and monitoring. The indicators may be used for various quantitative data collection approaches, including profiling, needs assessments, programmatic assessments, displacement tracking, as well as to inform local or national level monitoring frameworks.

⁶ The Durable Solutions Analysis Guide, available [here](#), outlines principles and steps to implement a systematic and collaborative durable solutions analysis process that includes the engagement of displaced communities. The analysis guide offers a comprehensive analytical framework for the application of the indicator library to different displacement contexts.

⁷ The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel issued ten (10) concrete and practical macro recommendations, available [here](#), to Member States, the UN system and other relevant stakeholders on how to better respond to internal displacement, in particular where it is protracted, and achieve Government-led durable solutions to internal displacement.

⁸ The Action Agenda, available [here](#), is the UN Secretary-General's vision to better resolve, prevent, and address internal displacement crises. It is a direct follow-up to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. The Secretary-General appointed a time-bound Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement help jump-start and drive implementation of this Action Agenda, with a focus on solutions.

- (A) **Research and analysis:** I contributed to the internal and confidential research and analysis of critical developments concerning the human rights situations of IDPs, including those presented during consultations with key stakeholders. While the Special Rapporteur determined the themes and countries to be prioritized on a weekly basis, I also took initiative based on the monitoring system I helped craft and tailor. Throughout the LiA project, I offered my support in analyzing primary and secondary sources, assessing the potential impact of displacement on disproportionately vulnerable groups, and identifying possible violation patterns and protection gaps trends, all per the Special Rapporteur's instructions.
- (B) **Assist in the drafting of reports:** I assisted in the clear, concise, and accurate internal drafting of annual thematic reports in accordance with the Special Rapporteur's thematic priorities and the completion of working and country visits. I contributed to the internal writing, editing, and formatting of these reports following the Special Rapporteur's guidelines. I also offered my support in conducting research, organizing findings, presenting information in various formats, maintaining records of all sources employed, and ensuring that all deadlines were met.
- (C) **Collaborate in the preparation of working and country visits:** I collaborated with the Special Rapporteur to prepare, internally and confidentially, potential visits aimed at assessing the situation of IDPs in different world regions. I contributed to this end by conducting research on the IDP situations in countries prioritized by the Special Rapporteur on topics relevant to the mandate, preparing briefing notes for the Special Rapporteur based on this research, and drafting, editing, and translating remarks for the Special Rapporteur's engagements. For every engagement I also compiled 'who is who' lists and helped the Special Rapporteur follow up with individual actors.
- (D) **Advancing stakeholder engagement:** I supported the Special Rapporteur on her strategic engagement with actors inside and outside of the UN system, including diplomatic, humanitarian, development, and peace actors. My tasks included arranging meetings, serving as a note-taker, and aiding the Special Rapporteur in following up with individual stakeholders on initiatives or topics of particular relevance to the mandate. It also involved building a stakeholder map with nearly a hundred names, including a brief description/biography, key potential contributions to the mandate, and contact information. The strategic engagement also involved drafting a mandate overview and a series of strategic initiatives to pitch to public, private, and non-profit donors based on the Special Rapporteur's strategic planning for 2023, 2024, and 2025.
- (E) **Providing administrative support:** I provided administrative support by keeping records and databases and managing to-do lists, among other tasks assigned by the Special Rapporteur as need be. These additional tasks often involved managing correspondence and liaising with OHCHR and UNHCR staff in Geneva, Switzerland.

By working as an aide to the Special Rapporteur, I sought to gain a holistic understanding of the human rights of IDPs worldwide and develop leadership skills. My LiA project allowed me to explore in-depth the challenges faced by disproportionately marginalized and vulnerable internally displaced communities across the globe, as well as the prospect of durable solutions for displacement phenomena in diverse national and regional contexts. These experiences helped me become a more informed and engaged global citizen committed to promoting and protecting universal human rights, especially for forgotten or overlooked groups. The leadership skills I gained through this project will be put forth in the service of forcibly displaced populations and in the pursuit of a better understanding of the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to the internal displacement crisis.

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