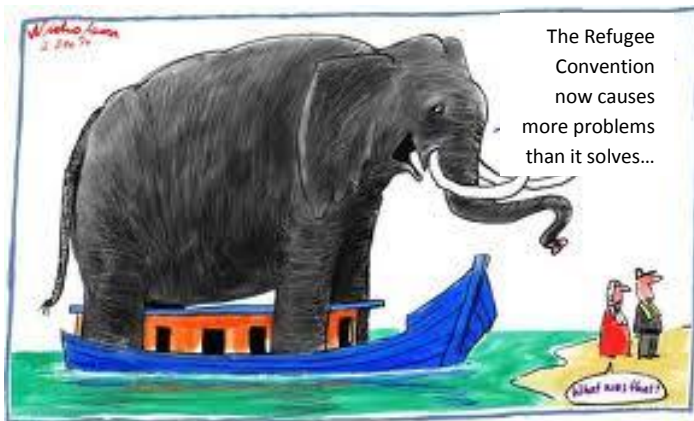


Advocacy in action: Pacific Conference of Churches' initiative with the Nansen Initiative

*If you had to move abroad, where would you go - to stay with family
or friends perhaps?*

*But if you had to move because of climate change, where would you
go, when no-one wants to take you?*



Did you know that people fleeing natural disasters and climate change are not protected by international law? Legally, they are not refugees under the Refugee Convention (1951) because they are not in fear of persecution from *someone*. Therefore, climate-induced displaced people are afforded none of the rights refugees are entitled to when seeking entry into a new country. There's no provision regarding status, admission nor standards of treatment.

Now where is the justice in that...?

While much of the work of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) involves climate change and relocation advocacy at the local or regional level, by working with affected communities, churches and government in the Pacific, on occasion accompaniment can also take the form of wider international collaboration.

“Cross-border displacement is not happening now, but there is a need to plan, anticipate and avoid a crisis in the future...”

**THE
NANSEN
INITIATIVE**

DISASTER-INDUCED CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT

The Nansen Initiative

The Nansen Initiative is a Geneva-based, state-led project initiated by the Governments of Norway and Switzerland. Recognising that there is a gap in international law, the Nansen Initiative is attempting to build consensus among relevant stakeholders on the development of a 'protection agenda' to care for the needs of internationally-displaced people fleeing natural disasters, including climate change.

The Initiative takes a bottom-up approach to the issue, and wishes to collect practical learnings from people already affected by disasters

and climate change on the ground. Over the three-year period of the project, government and civil-society consultations across five different, selected regions (the Pacific, Central America, Horn of Africa, South Asia and South-East Asia) will be undertaken, and the findings from each regional consultation will feed into a Global Summit to be held sometime towards the end of 2015, to which over 100 states will be invited.



“The Pacific was selected as the first region for a consultation among governments,” said Nansen Initiative researcher and policy advocate, Hannah Entwisle Chapuisat, “as climate change is very much at the forefront of news in the Pacific, and those in the media frequently make reference to climate *refugees* from the region”.

She added: “Leaders, however, have never talked about this topic [cross-border displacement] before – it’s taboo – yet displacement is already a reality and we need to be prepared, especially as the planning process will take some time”.

In partnership with the Pacific Conference of Churches

As the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) is the only non-government organisation in the Pacific working on climate change and relocation, the PCC received an invitation to attend the first Nansen Initiative governmental consultation in the Cook Islands in May 2013.



This invite was followed by the Nansen Initiative accompanying the PCC at a PCC-organised climate-change and relocation side-event (*madang*), at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea in November 2013.

And the Nansen Initiative has continued its relationship with the PCC this year with two further Pacific-based events:

- a joint PCC and Nansen Initiative civil-society organisations (CSO) workshop on climate change and disasters on human mobility, held in Fiji (August, 2014); and,
- a UN Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) side-event on cross-border displacement, Samoa (September 2014) to which the PCC was invited to be part of the panel.

Civil-society organisations (CSO) workshop, August 2014



Over twenty civil-society and other organisations attended the three-day workshop entitled: *Impacts of climate change and disasters on human mobility in the Pacific: Challenges and opportunities.*

The general secretary of the PCC, Revd. Francois Pihaatae said: “We were delighted to convene the first regional civil-society organisations workshop with the Nansen Initiative, and hope that together civil-society organisations in the Pacific can advise and grow the much-needed body of knowledge that will assist leaders to make informed policy recommendations and actions at the national and regional levels”.

Key recommendations from the workshop included to:

- ensure that disaster-risk reduction and climate-change adaptation planning is integrated at the local level, and that it addresses human mobility considerations, particularly land-tenure issues;
- improve the gathering and coordination of quality baseline data on human mobility in the context of disasters and climate change;
- re-image Pacific identity in light of the challenges posed by climate change, and to work to build a common Pacific voice in response.

UN Small Island Developing States, Samoa, September 2014

“To fail to plan is to plan to fail”

Advocacy and awareness raising needs to be undertaken at all levels, from the local, grass-roots, as in the case of the Fiji-based CSO workshop, to high-level meetings, such as those initiated by the United Nations (UN). Every opportunity needs to be seized...

Prayer Points:

- Pray for all who live in fear of displacement because of natural disasters and climate change, especially bringing to mind those in Kashmir who have lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods in the recent floods.
- Give thanks for the work of the secretariat of the Nansen Initiative, its committee members and associated 'friends', as they strive to highlight the protection gaps in international law for disaster and climate-displaced peoples.
- Pray that state governments will be receptive to the urgency of the task to prepare for cross-border displacement, and open to welcoming future displaced peoples.
- Pray for the on-going engagement of the civil-society sector in the Pacific as they continue their commitment to ensuring the dignity and rights of displaced peoples.
- Pray that international law will be amended to give refugee status and protection to those displaced by natural disasters and climate change.

UN Small Island Developing States (SIDS) conferences are only held once every ten years, and the Pacific region was able to be well represented at the Third SIDS Conference in Samoa this September. Previous meetings had been held in Barbados (1994) and Mauritius (2005).

In addition to the main plenary sessions of the UN SIDS, a number of complementary side events take place over the course of the week-long meeting. The PCC was privileged to have been invited to present on the accompaniment role of churches at a high-level panel discussion on cross-border displacement in the context of disasters and the effects of climate change, organised by the Nansen Initiative.

“Good preparedness and sound management of human mobility is important already at this stage if we are to successfully adapt to climate change and ensure sustainable development for SIDS,” said panelist, Norwegian State Secretary, Hans Brattskar at the outset of the event.

Other panel members included representatives of the Governments of Kiribati and Costa Rica, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Pacific Regional Office, the Kiribati Red Cross, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP).

The Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative, Prof. Walter Kaelin said in conclusion: “We need a protection agenda and a toolkit that focuses on climate-change adaptation and disaster-risk-reduction measures to help people stay on their islands.

The toolkit should provide for effective protection and assistance for internally-displaced persons as well as those seeking refuge abroad”.

