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Climate Change And Climate Migration Issues In The African Sahel: Human Rights Are At Stake.

Admam Chahrazed

University of Jijel, (Algeria), chahrazed.admam@univ-jijel.dz

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Abstract:

This research aims to understand the relationship between climate migration and human rights, by answering the following question: How can the negative effects of climate change on human rights be a major driver of climate migration in the African Sahel? To conclude that the African Sahel, which is considered one of the most vulnerable regions to the repercussions of climate change in the world, is witnessing high rates of mobility as a way to adapt to the difficult climatic conditions in the region, and also as the only way for millions of people to escape due to the impact of harsh conditions related to climate change on their lives their livelihoods and their access to rights, so that the effects of this migration turn into a flagrant violation of human rights that requires the activation of effective international governance to address these issues.

Keywords: African Sahel; climate migration; climate change; displacement; human rights

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is defined as the occurrence of a change in climate conditions caused directly or indirectly by human activity that leads to a change in the composition of the global atmosphere that results in imbalances and a tangible and long-lasting change in climatic factors such as precipitation rates, temperatures and wind conditions, and in this context numerous studies agree that people in countries whose economies are based on agriculture and pastoralism such as African countries are among the most vulnerable to the negative effects of climatic change; Where the last decade showed a remarkable increase in storms and floods, not to mention the scarcity of water and the manifestations of desertification and drought, in a way that showed the size of the danger and its impact on human life and its cause of forced climate migration, both internal and external.

The African Sahel¹ region is one of the regions most vulnerable to these risks of climate change in the world, which has known -and still has- high levels of mobility as a way to adapt to the difficult climatic conditions in the region, but also as the only outlet for the escape of millions of people driven by the impact of harsh conditions associated with climate change in particular given the impact of the latter on their livelihood or access to rights.

The interaction of these factors with fragility and insecurity in the African Sahel highlights the increasingly complex and interrelated drivers of mobility with direct and devastating impacts on livelihoods and on human rights, especially the right to life. In this context, this study aims to examine the relationship between migration associated with climate change and human rights, by answering the following question:

- How can the negative impacts of climate change on human rights be a major driver of climate migration in the Sahel region?

To answer this question, we proceed from the following hypothesis:

- The consequences of climate change on the lifestyle of people lead to the deterioration of their rights (such as the right to life, decent living and security), which pushes them to migrate.

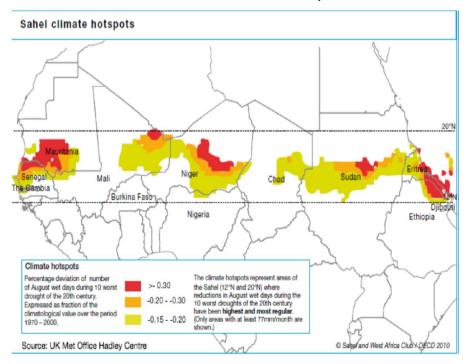
In order to answer the question, and to test the hypothesis we relied on the following guiding axes:

- 1- African Sahel climate and the manifestations of change.
- 2- Voluntary climate migration as an adaptation tool

- 3- State of the climate migration in the Sahel
- 4- Impact of climate change on food security, political and social stability in the Sahel
 - 5- Climate change and its impact on fueling conflicts and security chaos.
 - 6- Climate change, human rights and migration...the complex relationship
 - 7- Climate migration governance: challenges and prospects.
 - 8- Recommendations.

2. African Sahel climate and the manifestations of change:

The prevailing climate in the Sahel region is classified within the semi-arid tropical climate. Its most prominent feature is high temperatures, where the annual average ranges between 28 and 30 degrees Celsius, although it may reach much higher rates during dry periods that last most of the year, as it exceeds 45 degrees Celsius due to the influence of winds (Elysees) (dry and hot sandy winds) that usually come from the northeast or south and southwest.²



MAP.1. Sahal Climate Hotspots

Source:

*P. Heinrigs Security Implications of Climate Change in the Sahel Region: Policy considerations. (2010) OECD Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat. Available at https://www.oecd.org/swac/publications/47234320.pdf

On the other hand, the climate of the Sahel region is characterized by the different precipitation rates between its regions, as they range between 100 and 200 millimeters per year in the north and between 500 and 800 millimeters in the south. However, they are similar in terms of the limited period of precipitation (three months). In general, the climatic phenomena (rain, floods, winds, drought) in this region are characterized by intensity.³

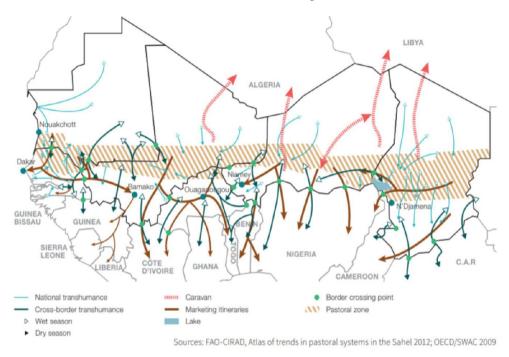
In fact, the harsh climate of the Sahel region and its volatile manifestations have made the region one of the most vulnerable regions of the world to the effects of climate change. Temperatures are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, and precipitation is erratic and fluctuates as the wet seasons diminish, despite the prevalence of floods. These conditions together lead to a decrease in agricultural productivity, pastures, damage to forests and shrinkage of water bodies⁴ (such as the Chad River, whose area shrank by 90%, i.e. from 23500 km2 in 1960 to 1700 km2, as well as a decrease of 40% to 60% of the total waters of the large basins of Niger and Lake Senegal)⁵.

The Sahel region witnessed prolonged and repeated droughts, the worst of which was the 1969 drought, which was repeated in 1974 and then during the years 1984-1985 with more intensity, and this led to the evaporation of 90% of the rain water due to the high temperature of the sand and the weather in general. This is in addition to monitoring the progress of precipitation towards the south of the Sahel region, which produced the phenomenon of desertification (the desert advanced by 100 km to the south during the past forty years).

3. Voluntary climate migration as an adaptation tool:

Throughout history, Africa in general and the African Sahel region in particular have known migration movements, both voluntary and forced, that have worked to shape its contemporary demographic landscape. The latter is characterized by the spread of its societies in two or three countries, and the movement is often not limited to political borders, but rather goes beyond borders, thus forming an important strategy for earning a living and obtaining pasture for livestock, which is the activity on which the economic life of the inhabitants of the African Sahel is based. This migration is an important means of adaptation in times of ecological and economic scarcity. Over the past decades, the process of globalization has facilitated the movement of people across different regions of Africa, and to other regions outside the continent, as the number of migrants continues to increase.

It is known that in the Sahel, the nomadic pastoral life is one of the sustainable livelihood methods that communities have long practiced, as it allows livestock owners to move around and manage risks in marginal areas, where livestock and poultry transform limited environmental production into a basic way to continue living. However, pastoral life is subject day after day to environmental and social forces represented by climate change, government policies restricting movement, and other practices⁷, to add to this traditional migration another migration resulting from the increasing effects of climate change.



MAP.2.Pastoral Seasonal Migration In The West Sahel

Source: OECD (2018). Transhumance and nomadism. Maps and Facts. No. 65. February 2018. Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC). Available at http://www.oecd.org/swac/maps/65-transhumance-nomadism.pdf

4. State of the climate migration in the Sahel:

Migration associated with climate change may occur on a scale ranging from migration between continents to internal displacement locally⁸. However, statistics confirm that most of the movements associated with climate change (and are expected to be) within the same country and at the local level as well, which is predominant in the African and the Sahal case in particular.

Due to the multiplicity of factors that include poor social and economic conditions, political instability, conflict and civil strife, migration has increased in the African continent and has become, for some societies, a survival strategy as well as a way to cope with the climate change whose effects the region is witnessing day after day. In this context, Africa has known, in recent years, multiple migration patterns, to which climate migration has been added, a phenomenon that has become dynamic and extremely complex.

The concept of climate change-related relocation includes two parts: readjustment and resettlement; as for the first, it often occurs in developed countries and is represented in moving societies away from areas threatened by climate change and restricting development in those areas of danger. In less developed countries, the process is often referred to as relocation or resettlement, which is the facilitated movement of populations from an area of high environmental risk to another area of lower risk⁹. This is the case that the societies of the African coast are accustomed to, as an attempt to deal with either phenomena that occur slowly as a result of climate change (high temperature, sea level rise, or river drying) or even those that occur suddenly and quickly (such as floods).

In view of the reality of the climate of this region, access to migration is an important option to mitigate the negative economic, social and health effects of climate change, especially what was reflected in the abundance of water, soil quality, availability of pastures, abundance of fish and ways of spreading diseases..

Although mobility is considered an important strategy for economic diversification in the African Sahel, climate change could lead to more "forced" migration, increased displacement from the countryside to the city and even intensification of regional migration, thus migration towards other African countries will far exceed migration towards Europe. In parallel with the besieging of significant population groups because they lack the capabilities that allow them to move far away.¹⁰

Of the 5,135,000 forcibly displaced people counted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in six countries in Central and West Africa, 4% or approximately 180,700 people have been displaced due to natural disasters. In its 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) reported that 649,448 new displacements resulting from disasters in West and Central Africa, mainly due to floods.. According to the (IOM), 66,800 people have been displaced in Nigeria, for example, as a result of the disasters in January 2020, and they represent 3% of a total of 2,600,000 displaced people. 11

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In general, longer dry seasons increase pressure on water and land, causing shifts in the routes used by pastoralists, forcing them to travel farther south in search of more productive pastures. As is the case in agricultural areas, parallel to this, we find that in some coastal areas where fish stocks are declining due to a combination of climate change, overfishing and other environmental, economic, social and political factors, fishermen migrate to areas where stocks are more robust.

At a time when the need for migration is increasing in response to the reduced availability of resources in the Sahel region, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the accompanying border closures and other restrictions on movement have restricted access to these forms of migration, clearly increasing the pressure of climate change impacts on Region.¹²

However, the Sahel received great attention from UNHCR in 2020 due to the Corona pandemic, which made it sign, on July 23, 2020, with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the G5 Sahel Group (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) an agreement to allocate 20 million dollars for the area. More than 81,000 displaced people have been provided with emergency shelter, and more than 338,000 people have been assisted in receiving basic healthcare services in the central Sahel region. And with the closure of schools, 12,000 children from the displaced and their host communities have been ensured through distance learning. 13

5. Impact of climate change on food security, political and social stability in the Sahel:

The environment is one of the main drivers of migration dynamics, whether because of the direct impact of environmental degradation or environmental disasters on human mobility or because of their impact on socio-economic conditions. Although it is difficult to isolate the actual impact of climate change on migration and rely on it alone to measure this impact, most observers agree that it would affect the lives and human rights of people, especially vulnerable groups, whether in terms of livelihoods, employment, or services health.¹⁴

In this context, the effects of climate change-related migration on human rights were the focus of a report prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was issued at the end of 2021 within the framework of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change. The report focused on the Sahel region, and highlighted some of the main human rights challenges that this region faces due to the close interrelationship between climate change and migration, explaining some of the many, multifaceted and complex

impacts of climate change on human rights in the region, such as the right to life, Health, housing, food, water and sanitation, at risk of undermining and sudden disasters.

In this context, the report stresses that the majority of people's livelihoods in the Sahel depend on agriculture, grazing and fishing, and are highly affected by climate change. For example, climate change in Mali is projected to cause a decline in agricultural capacity of between 30% and 40%. Fish stocks off the coast of Senegal fell by 80% in 2017 alone. Thus, climate change will have severe impacts on the right to life and health. Rising sea levels in coastal areas exacerbate the risk of death, injury, and physical and mental illness. Floods and heavy rains may increase exposure to waterborne diseases and insects, while dry seasons may increase the likelihood that people will consume unsafe water. ¹⁵

While conflict remains the main cause of food insecurity in Central Africa, flood-related damage has exacerbated the situation in the affected areas. As these factors have led to the disruption of agricultural activities, and to an increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs, which has affected livelihoods and restricted access to food and prompted many of residents to migrate in search of better livelihoods.¹⁶

Drought, for example, has led to the destruction of a large amount of livestock and the destruction of the economies of the African Sahel countries. Where the drought periods that the region experienced in the seventies wiped out 95% of the livestock, forcing their owners to flee and migrate outside their countries, or even to resort to a life of stability and urbanization. In this context, the annual rate of environmental degradation losses in the Sahel region is estimated at 67.0 billion US dollars annually. As for the percentage of the region's population classified below the poverty line, it is close to 54%, as environmental degradation led to a decline in agricultural productivity, which was reflected in the achievement of food security and resulted in widespread poverty, weak health systems, social unrest and even internal conflicts. In the Sahel, according to the reports of the United Nations, the number of people suffering from food insecurity increased to more than three times (1.2 million people during the summer of 2020, and it was 680 thousand people for the same period in 2019). In addition to this, reports indicate that 45 million people are threatened with starvation, and malnutrition is the main cause of death for children under the age of five.¹⁷

In general, the phenomenon of climate change will affect food security in its four dimensions: the availability of food supplies, access to them, their stability and their use, especially in some of the most fragile and sensitive areas where most

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people's livelihoods depend on nature, through reliance on agriculture, grazing or Fishing which is particularly sensitive to climate.

In 2012, for example, Burkina Faso lost 20% of its grain production as a result of drought and environmental degradation. Scientists predict that climate change in Mali could cause a decrease of 40% in agricultural capacity. In addition, pastoralists in the Sahel are increasingly unable to obtain enough water or grazing land to support their flocks. As for the coast of Senegal, fish stocks decreased by 80% in 2017 alone, a depletion that has been attributed to a combination of factors including climate change as well as overfishing.¹⁸

Indirectly, the effects of climate change exacerbate conflicts between communities in many African Sahel countries, such as Mali and Niger, which leads to the spread of poverty, the decline of public services, and the disruption of traditional means of living. In fact, the violence and challenges facing the region are directly related to the conflicts, and the latter are linked in large part to the decline in usable lands under the weight of drought, climate change and the unpredictability of the availability of water resources. In this context, climate change is adding to the complexity of the landscape in a region suffering from underdevelopment, chronic poverty, rampant criminal activity and violence that lead to fragile living conditions.¹⁹

On the other hand, the impacts of climate change drive the realization of the rights to water and sanitation in the Sahel region. According to reports, as climate change worsens, groundwater reserves in the Sahel are likely to be depleted and not replenished, leading to depletion of aquifers. Water and sanitation infrastructure may also come under pressure in urban areas, creating risks for those migrating to cities due to the harmful effects of climate change. Decreased access to water and sanitation can be associated with severe health impacts, including the spread of diseases and epidemics, and is an important factor in obtaining the right to food and livelihood. In this context, women who are often responsible for obtaining water for families may face increased risks of violence (sexual and gender-based violence) and the negative health consequences of having to travel long distances to fetch water with diminishing supplies, which may force girls to abandon their educational opportunities due to commuting to fetch water.²⁰

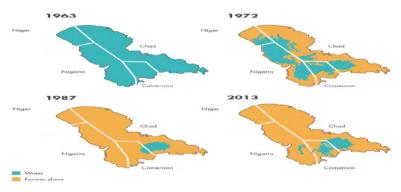
6.Climate change and its impact on fueling conflicts and security chaos:

Climate change affects human systems on an increasing scale, doubly affecting peace and security. The Armed Conflict Survey published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2019 for the first time included climate

change in its overview of global trends affecting conflict, stating that "climate change is a high-probability, high-impact security threat that will continue to accelerate over the coming decades." along with a wide range of impacts on the geostrategic environment."

In this context, it has been emphasized that a changing climate affects peace and security in different ways and to varying degrees. While a few experts claim that climate change causes conflict, there is a growing consensus that it acts as a "threat multiplier," which interacts with a host of other factors that exacerbate Conflict risks and this is by multiplying existing stresses and tensions, so that climate change can drive already fragile contexts over the edge.²¹

The Sahel is a clear example of the effects of climate change on fueling conflicts. Many areas in Nigeria, for example - where communities have suffered from the effects of climate change - are associated with violent conflicts, poverty and lack of access to economic and social rights; Research in this context indicates that conflicts between "Fulani herders" and "Hausa farmers" in the states of northwestern Nigeria led to the displacement of approximately 178,000 people in 2019. This is in addition to many indicators adopted by studies to say that there are possible links between the effects of Climate change in the Sahel, especially related to the shrinking of Lake Chad and the rise of armed groups (such as Boko Haram) in the region, as the results of these studies indicate that the lack of alternative livelihoods and frustration with government inaction in the face of environmental degradation increases the possibility of joining these groups.²²



Map.3. The Shrinking Of Lake Chad

Source: in the chapter Confronting Climate Change in Foresight Africa, 2017, Brooking Institute available at:https://www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/global_20170109_foresight_africa_chapter-5.pdf

7. Climate change, human rights and migration... a complex relationship?

The United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, announced that: "Throughout human history, individuals, families and societies have used migration as a strategy to adapt to changing environmental conditions, but the rapidly warming climate requires new solutions that ensure that this migration remains an available option without becoming necessary." These and other shifts in the ways people migrate (under the influence of climate change) in the Sahel pose particular human rights challenges. Understanding these challenges is essential to addressing the negative effects of climate change on human rights in the region. Accordingly, the pressure exerted on people as a result of climate change and its direct impact on people is a clear violation of many of their rights, as previously explained.²³

Although all human rights are affected by climate change, certain rights are more vulnerable to being affected, and it mainly relates to the right to life, the right to adequate food, the right to water, the right to education along with the right to health, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to housing. and the right to self-determination, as follows:

-The right to life: Climate fluctuations and changes, and the accompanying rise in temperature, floods, droughts, fires and storms, constitute a serious threat to people's right to life, as they lead to an increase in the number of deaths directly or through diseases, hunger and malnutrition. (Where the matter is more difficult with vulnerable groups such as the sick, the disabled, the elderly, and women).

-The right to adequate food: Hunger is the biggest threat to people's health and personal security, as it affects the physical, mental and cognitive development of children in particular, and the deterioration of human health in general.

The right to water: Water is closely related to the human right to life, as it is the basis for the survival and development of all living things. Without it, there would be no life.²⁴

The right to education: Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of everyone to education. Components of this right include free and compulsory primary education available to all and access to secondary and higher education.²⁵ It is a right that becomes difficult to achieve in deteriorating living conditions and constant security chaos, not to mention the conditions of movement and migration associated with difficult climatic conditions.

In fact, the deterioration of human rights is due to the consequences of climate change on the lifestyle of people, which pushes them to migrate. However, the suffering does not stop here, but rather extends to the conditions of migrants and the methods of their migration and reception, which are conditions that often reflect other forms of infringement of their rights and their continuous suffering.

The impacts of climate change on human rights in the Sahel are numerous, multifaceted and complex, as they have equally important and intertwined interactions with migration; In some cases, migration is an important coping strategy to avoid potentially harmful impacts on human rights, but in many cases migration produces severe impacts on these rights, exacerbating vulnerabilities, which may multiply as people move across borders due to the human rights risks that push them or accompany their movement, as well as the patterns of discrimination or marginalization they encounter in host areas.

In general, disasters, climate change, environmental degradation, as well as extreme poverty, gender inequality, and other conditions often force people to move because they are unable to obtain their rights. In parallel, however, migrants who are forced to move are more vulnerable to human rights violations throughout their migration period.²⁶.

In some circumstances, these motives may lead to the need for protection under international human rights, and in other circumstances they may require adaptation according to refugee protection needs. In both cases, international and local jurisprudence remains in constant debate on this issue.

8. Climate migration governance: challenges and prospects.

Human movements are rarely adequately explained as a result of environmental and climatic factors. Thus, the impetus for the development of new emergency response laws lies in the gaps that exist in the scope and application of current international law, and in the application of existing international standards.

In fact, acknowledging the phenomenon of climate change and the consequent climate migration and its clear effects on human rights prompts an urgent discussion of how and to what extent the effects of climate change are described as violations of human rights in a purely legal sense, especially since the law does not explicitly refer to the term "climate refugee". Despite the great use of it in many literatures²⁷. These are the discussions that have often disturbed field work in cases of climate migration, but at the same time they push each time to find solutions and to seek governance in this field.

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In this context, the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (2012) (Kampala Convention) is the only instrument that explicitly addresses disasters resulting from climate change.²⁸

As for the UN, for many years its responses to climate-induced migration issues have emerged; it has often expressed its concern on every occasion that climate change could lead to increased displacement and migration in the Sahel region of Africa. In this context, the UNHCR issued in 2020 its legal considerations related to international protection claims submitted in cases of negative effects of climate change and disasters, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention for Refugees in Africa, stressing that international protection It is also necessary on the basis of human rights law, including the principle of non-refoulement.²⁹

On the other hand, the "Nansen" advisory initiative was launched in 2012 on the grounds that this displacement leads to problems of legal protection and practical, institutional and financial challenges, given the absence of an international organization authorized to handle the problems of this group. In Africa, the African Union launched the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in 2007, which seeks to address many threats, on top of which are climate change, drought, famine, and the resulting conflicts and migration.³⁰

In general, there are many regional mechanisms at the level of the AU that seek to achieve environmental security in the African continent, (such as the African Resilient Landscape Initiative, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative AFR100), the Great Green Type for Deserts and Sahel Initiative, the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, the Forests in Central Africa, the African Union Program on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Land Degradation, and the Lakes Basin Integrated Management Initiative (LBMI)³¹.

These initiatives, along with the Paris Agreement, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are interlinked commitments that provide a mutually reinforcing framework.

9. Recommendations: Despite all these initiatives, addressing the reality of climate migration and its impact on human rights in the Sahel region of Africa requires concerted field work. In this context, the Global Migration Panel recommends, in its report, the following:

- The need to adopt measures that take into account gender, human rights and human development to improve the livelihoods of those vulnerable to the effects of climate change and increase their resilience.
- It is mandatory to pay special attention to the human rights situation of those affected.
- Discovering the complex interrelationships between climate change and human mobility, with the aim of collecting data, developing expertise and building capabilities to address such a challenge, and achieving close cooperation between the communities concerned with climate science and social sciences to reach this end.

Addressing the effects of migration resulting from the sudden and gradual effects of climate change.

- Acknowledging that migration is a strategy for adapting to environmental risks and working to make it an option, not a coercion, and providing new opportunities for legal migration by including migration and mobility in national adaptation plans.³²

Some recommendations can be commended as follows: the need to develop and devote integrated and comprehensive plans aimed at adapting to climate change and reducing its effects on local communities, with a focus on the importance of involving those affected by disasters and the repercussions of climate change and environmental degradation in planning and implementing response measures, while supporting their effective participation in Relevant decision-making processes, facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration by protecting, promoting and implementing the rights of migrants and regular migration pathways, ensuring services and systems for migrants, especially with regard to basic services after disasters, all of this is very important, along with prioritizing the availability of sustainable financial resources.

10. CONCLUSION:

Indeed, given the deteriorating climate migration situation in the African Sahel, major and urgent political efforts aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change are of paramount importance to avoid catastrophic consequences in the region. In addition to global climate-related actions, there are specific actions that may include: the need to create partnerships and long-term planning in addition to investing in innovative financial models, in light of the work of donors, humanitarian organizations, local organizations and scientists with local communities to implement long-term and sustainable solutions, and for this

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Concerned organizations should work to prevent people's suffering rather than respond to it after it has happened, which seems very appropriate solutions to the problems posed by climate migration issues.

11. Nots:

1- The Sahel is the term used to refer to the region of Africa lying between the Sahara Desert in the north and the Sudanese savannah in the south. OHCHR's work on climate change and migration in the Sahel focuses on the 10 countries included in the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal).

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