

## On Caring for Our Common Home: Who Will Answer?

By Fred O'Brien, Founding Director (1986) and HonVice President (Ireland), International Federation of Environmental Health

### [LAUDATO SI'](#)

I had the honour and privilege of presenting the paper: *Internal Displacement: A Global Environmental Health Challenge* at the meeting of the European Federation of Environmental Health (EFEH), Golden Tulip Vivaldi Hotel, St. Julians, Malta, on October 25, 2008. [See pages 7 to 9](#)

The presentation outlined the story of some 26 million people worldwide – real people – a great many of whom had been denied physical security and integrity, the basic necessities of life, economic, social and cultural needs and lived under environmental conditions destructive to human life. Below is a contemporaneous account of the content and comments and of the feed-back received then, some eight and a half years ago!

Having explored the definition, meaning and extent of *Internally Displaced Persons* (IDPs), categorized in the words of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as “arguably the most significant humanitarian challenge we face”, this challenge was linked to both ‘*environmental health sustainability*’ and the ‘*international organisational response*’. Outlining and exploring a *Model of Healing*, he contrasted the healing process in the human body with the global healing called for in redressing the IDPs challenge, and in promoting environmental health sustainability worldwide. The presentation proposed efforts to develop an international pattern of human relationships, informed by designs disclosed in nature, and based on environmental health science, together with the fundamental principles of human justice.

Recognising that the profession of Environmental Health is, by its very nature *caring* - caring for people and for the environment - reference was made to recent significant developments that have occurred in the UN and its family of organisations. The unanimous adoption of a “*Responsibility to Protect*” doctrine by 170 States at the UN General Assembly of 2005 in relation to state-sponsored or state tolerated atrocities; the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006; and the continuing programme of addressing environmental health human rights crimes against humanity by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, were specifically highlighted.

Referring to the importance of focussing always, first and foremost, on people, the real people who have been deprived of basic environmental health circumstances that support life, the presentation highlighted some key questions and challenges.

In conclusion, I noted that on December 12, 2008 we will celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For the occasion I recommended that an international communique be issued by the Federation supporting the achievement of the noble aims of the Declaration and indicating its willingness to promote environmental health human rights globally through the UN and its family of organisations. The meeting agreed to correspond with the UN Human Rights Council, confirming its support for the Council and for activities that redress violations of the right to basic environmental health conditions for internally displaced persons. [See supporting PowerPoint](#)

[Displaced People Worldwide: A Responsibility to Protect](#)

[http://www.ifeh.org/magazine/ifeh-magazine-2008\\_v10\\_n3.pdf](http://www.ifeh.org/magazine/ifeh-magazine-2008_v10_n3.pdf)

[Internal Displacement: A Global Environmental Health Challenge pps 7-9](#)

Environmental Health, Human Rights and Global Governance pps 4-5 & 27

Bone Break and Healing Analogy: <http://www.iceh.net/index.php?m=201202&paged=8>

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples