

II. FORCED DISPLACEMENT AS A CONTEMPORARY FEATURE OF HUMAN HISTORY.

Social tensions and disharmony in the forms of persecution, human rights violations and conflict are at the origin of forced displacement, affecting refugees and other uprooted populations (i.e. internally displaced populations and returnees).

While everybody is entitled to basic human rights under international law, people are still being targeted, harassed and severely discriminated against because of having a different political opinion, religion, race, and nationality or because of belonging to a particular social group. In some cases, the various forms of persecution affecting the life, freedom or security of a person might even emanate from the perception, belief or imputation by a State, a non-state actor or sectors of the population that the individual has a certain political opinion or a given religion (or lack of it).

Refugees are like you and I, human beings, with aspirations, goals and wishes, strengths and weaknesses but unlike us, they do not have the national protection of their own States, either because they cannot provide this protection or because they are unwilling to do it (i.e. failure or lack of national protection).

Persecution might be also linked to age (i.e. forced recruitment of children), gender (sexual and gender-based violence, including trafficking in persons) and diversity (i.e. Afro-descendants, indigenous populations, sexual orientation and gender identity).

While the actual exercise and enjoyment of basic human rights allow all of us to grow and develop in a society, in a given country, in many parts of the world intolerance, discrimination, and xenophobia still lead to persecution, conflict and human rights violations rendering life unbearable for many. As you can imagine, in the XXI century, persecution remains unfortunately a contemporary feature and in many places around the world, those who dare to think and act differently might become displaced persons and might need to flee to save their life, freedom and security and those of their loved ones.

According to UNHCR statistics, 800,000 persons became new refugees at the end of 2011 bringing the total figure of refugees to more than 14 million around the world (including some 4 million Palestinian refugees under the UN Work