



DISPLACEMENT SOLUTIONS

PRESS RELEASE

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First comprehensive study about the relocation of Colombian town destroyed in 2010 released in Geneva

Geneva – A new report released today by *Displacement Solutions*, a Geneva-based international human rights organization, details the story of the tragedy suffered by the people of Gramalote, a town located in the northeastern part of Colombia, which was completely destroyed during the extreme weather events of “La Niña” in December 2010, leaving thousands homeless.

“*Climate Displacement and Planned Relocation in Colombia: The Case of Gramalote*” outlines a fact-finding mission to Colombia to document what has happened to the around 3,300 climate displaced people from Gramalote who were evacuated after the disaster and moved to nearby municipalities where they have been displaced for almost five years. The report also details the actions and planned relocation process that the Colombian government has implemented to resolve the situation, highlights some lessons learned so far, and makes some recommendations to end the relocation process successfully.

The report notes that while climate displacement is already underway in several countries around the world, planned relocation of displaced populations affected by climate change is still a very new process and there are not many experiences to learn from. Gramalote is one of the first planned relocation processes currently underway and, if its last stages are handled correctly, could serve as a model for the rest of Colombia and the region on how to resolve climate displacement. The findings of the report are timely because of the coming climate change conference (COP21) in Paris in December, which promises to be historical and where it is expected governments will adopt a new legal framework to deal with climate change and its effects, including climate displacement.

At the time of the destruction of Gramalote, the Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, promised to rebuild the town on a new site, and to make it “better than before”. The process of the relocation of Gramalote has gone through a lot of problems, starting with the selection of the best site, which was a complicated decision that took two years to formulate. From the beginning, the Colombian government has been providing assistance to the climate displaced

people of Gramalote, in the form of rent subsidies and food. Since 2012 *Fondo Adaptación*, a new state agency in charge of the major reconstruction projects after the events of La Niña 2010-2011 has been handling the planned relocation process in Gramalote.

“Since the destruction of their town almost five years ago, people from Gramalote have been displaced, and most of them have been living in rented housing in nearby cities and towns, and few in shelters, which has been very challenging for the people of Gramalote to face”, said Scott Leckie, Displacement Solutions’ Executive Director. “However, Displacement Solutions praises the Colombian government for their long-term approach to this planned relocation process, and to date, for allocating enough funds to do it right. Based on our first-hand experiences throughout the world, we already know how long and complicated a planned relocation process can be. We believe that despite the problems and delays that have caused a lot of pain and frustration among the people of Gramalote, the Colombian government is building a very interesting model to deal with climate displacement and planned relocation processes”.

According to Displacement Solutions, the relocation of Gramalote still stands a good chance of success if the remaining states of the process are handled appropriately. At the same time, the report expresses concern that any decisions which seek to impose initiatives without the real participation of all the actors involved – especially the displaced people themselves – will result in further delays and may jeopardize the entire relocation process. “It is important that the current management of the relocation project, now in the hands of *Fondo Adaptación*, make the ongoing process more participatory” said Leckie.

“Displacement Solutions urges the Colombian government to act with haste in bringing the displacement of the people from Gramalote to an end. At the same time, we believe *Fondo Adaptación* should honour the ‘rules of the game’ that have been designed and agreed upon by the main actors in the process, including *Fondo Adaptación* itself. The participatory decision-making process set up with the Working Group of Gramalote, comprised of local, regional and national actors with an interest in the project should be respected and strengthened. We believe this working group has been one of the main reasons why, despite the problems, the reconstruction of Gramalote has been able to move forward, making it one of the main outcomes and lessons learned from this process”, concluded Leckie.

Displacement Solutions’ fact-finding mission used the 2013 *Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement Within States* as a guiding framework for making recommendations as to what actions are required to ensure that the human rights of the people from Gramalote affected by climate displacement are fully protected. *The Peninsula Principles* are the first international legal instrument on the rights of climate displaced persons to be relocated and re-housed and the obligation of the states and the international community toward them. The full report in English and Spanish can be found on Displacement Solutions website at www.displacementsolutions.org

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