

Press Release

Embargoed until Monday, 28 November 2011, 12:30 GMT

North-East India: People displaced by ethnic violence “forgotten”

Nearly a million people have been forced to flee their homes by ethnic violence in north-east India over the past 20 years, but their government has failed in its duty to protect them, according to a report published today.

LONDON, 28 November 2011 – From the 1990s to the start of 2011, over 800,000 people were forced to flee their homes in episodes of inter-ethnic violence in western Assam, along the border between Assam and Meghalaya, and in Tripura. According to conservative estimates, more than 76,000 of them are still living in displacement in November 2011, but in the absence of proper monitoring it is not known how many of the rest have been able to rebuild their lives.

These internally displaced people (IDPs) are not receiving the protection and assistance they need, according to a new report launched today by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

“Most of the people displaced by this violence have been forgotten,” said NRC Secretary General Elisabeth Rasmusson. “State governments and district authorities have provided different levels of assistance. However, this has generally been insufficient to make IDPs’ recovery possible and ensure their continuing access to basic necessities. For example, camps are often closed prematurely to push people to return home, in spite of ongoing threats to their security.”

Meanwhile, the central government has not done enough to protect IDPs’ rights or to prevent further ethnic violence and displacement. While the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India gives some of the hundreds of indigenous groups in the north-east greater control over the areas they live in, the autonomy which it offers has encouraged waves of inter-ethnic violence as groups seek to establish a local majority in order to qualify. Indigenous and non-indigenous groups have both been affected by violence and displacement.

“The Government of India must take urgent steps to ensure that all people in the north-east are safe, regardless of their ethnic identity, and to protect IDPs there,” said Rasmusson. “The Government should pass an IDP law or draw up a national IDP policy in order to hold state and district authorities accountable with regard to protecting and supporting IDPs in their efforts to rebuild their lives, either in their places of origin, or elsewhere in the country.”

“The Government of India should specifically target IDPs and make sure they are not excluded from pro-poor schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme for universal free primary education, or programmes under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act,” Rasmusson added.

Notes for Editors:

Full and summary versions of the report, entitled “*This is our land*”: *Ethnic violence and internal displacement in north-east India*, can be downloaded at www.internal-displacement.org/countries/india.

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), established by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide. For more information contact Anne-Kathrin Glatz, IDMC Country Analyst, on 0041 (0)22 799 07 07 or at ak.glatz@nrc.ch.