
Press Release

Global internal displacement crisis remains alarming - report

GENEVA, 22 March 2006 – Although the number of people internally displaced within their own countries by conflict decreased slightly during 2005, the global internal displacement crisis remained at an alarming level, according to a new report published by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

“The report clearly shows that most governments in countries affected by conflict fail to live up to their responsibility to prevent arbitrary displacement and ensure the safety and well-being of their displaced citizens”, said Elisabeth Rasmusson, head of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. “Even worse, the very governments that have committed themselves under international law to protect and assist their citizens are in many cases among the main perpetrators of arbitrary displacement.”

Internally displaced people – or IDPs – are among the most vulnerable victims of conflict. They are different from refugees in that they have not crossed a state border to seek international protection. Instead, they try to find refuge within their own country, where many of them remain exposed to attacks, rape, looting and a multitude of other human rights abuses. IDPs outnumber refugees by almost two to one.

Some 23.7 million people were internally displaced at the end of 2005 (down from 25.3 million in the previous year), more than half of them in Africa. Over two million people were driven from their homes in 2005 alone, nearly 600,000 of them as a result of the Zimbabwean government's crackdown on urban shanty dwellings. Hundreds of thousands of others were uprooted by the conflicts in Colombia, DR Congo, Iraq and Sudan.

With over 5 million IDPs, Sudan remained at the top of the list of the countries with the largest internal displacement situations, followed by Colombia (up to 3.7 million), Uganda (2 million), DR Congo (1.7 million) and Iraq (1.3 million).

A quarter of the world's IDP population – some six million people – receive no protection from their governments, according to the report. A similarly high number of IDPs cannot turn to their own authorities for humanitarian assistance. In 16 of the 50 countries affected by conflict-related internal displacement – including Zimbabwe, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire and Colombia – governments or government proxies were responsible for arbitrarily uprooting people on the territory under their control.

Donor governments and the United Nations have largely failed to close the gap, the report finds. Not nearly enough was done to put political pressure on governments, fund IDP programmes, and set up a functioning system to assist and protect IDPs.

The report's findings underline the urgent need to carry on with the reform of the current humanitarian response system. Stepping up efforts to protect IDPs from human rights abuses and provide them with food, shelter and health care so that they can survive and rebuild their lives must remain an urgent priority, the report says. However, humanitarian assistance cannot be a substitute for genuine political efforts – at both the national and international levels – to end the conflicts leading to displacement and address their root causes. “Ultimately, only sustained and concerted investments in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict recovery in affected countries will lead to a tangible reduction of the scope of the worldwide internal displacement crisis”, concludes the report.

The 83-page report, titled “Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2005” is available at www.internal-displacement.org.

For more information, please contact Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer, NRC Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Geneva, +41-22-799 07 03, or 41-79 79 79 439.

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.