

TELEPHONES: 233176/258741
254307/345955//254252
TELEX: 61378 OPM
TELEFAX: 233176 / 341139



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER,
POSTEL BUILDING
PLOT 67-75 YUSUF LULE ROAD.
P.O. BOX 341, KAMPALA, UGANDA

In any correspondence on
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**A PAPER ON UGANDA'S EXPERIENCE IN INCORPORATING THE
GUIDING PRINCIPLES INTO THE NATIONAL LAW AND THE
MANAGEMENT OF THE IDP SITUATION.**

**AT A CONFERENCE, "TEN YEARS OF GUIDNG PRINCIPLES IN
INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT-ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE
CHALLENGES", IN OSLO-NORWAY.**

16th –17th October 2008

By Hon. Tarsis Bazana Kabwegyere,
**MINISTER FOR RELIEF, DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & REFUGEES,
KAMPALA-UGANDA.**

Background

Uganda has experienced internal displacement for over 3 decades, as a result of political conflict, cattle rustling or theft as well as natural disasters like land slides, floods, etc. Conflicts that have led to major displacement started in 1979 with the Amin coup.

The Northern Region in particular has experienced displacement for over twenty years as a result of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) rebellion. At the peak of this conflict, two million people were displaced and were living under harsh conditions, with inadequate basic services. Around 200,000 people were also displaced in the neighboring districts of Karamoja as a result of cattle thefts and related insecurity.

In 2001, the Government started to develop an IDP policy. It was approved in 2004 and launched in 2005. It was developed through very wide consultations. A number of human rights instruments were consulted which included the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the International Humanitarian Law, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, etc. The Policy was built on existing international human rights instruments, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and relevant national laws.

The policy established the principles that served as a guide to Government institutions, humanitarian and development agencies while providing assistance and protection to internally displaced persons. It specified the roles and responsibilities of Government, humanitarian and development partners, donors and the displaced community as well as other stakeholders. It played a significant role in raising awareness of the needs and rights of IDPs and mobilized support within the country and among partners abroad.

The Government committed itself;

- ❑ To protect the citizens against arbitrary displacement.
- ❑ To promote the search for durable solutions to causes of displacement
- ❑ To facilitate the voluntary return, resettlement and re-integration of the IDPs.
- ❑ To ensure that every person, internally displaced or otherwise received information relating to this policy, in order for the people to know their rights and obligations.

All this was geared to ensuring that all Ugandans enjoyed the same rights and freedoms under the Constitution so that the effects of displacement were minimized.

Uganda's successes in addressing the problem of IDPs

The policy was widely disseminated, through the media, etc. Over 100,000 copies were printed and distributed. It was translated into three local languages, namely, Ateso, Lango and Acholi, covering the sub-regions most affected by displacement.

Government has taken a lead in provision of assistance and protection to the displaced in all phases of displacement. Government has welcomed and facilitated safe passage to humanitarian actors even at the height of insecurity.

An institutional framework within which IDPs are supported and protected was put into place, involving humanitarian partners, Central Government and Local Governments actors and civil society organizations.

In 2005, an Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) was developed and overseen by a Joint Monitoring Committee. It was multi-sectoral, since IDPs have cross cutting needs, and was coordinated by Office of the Prime Minister.

In July 2006, peace negotiations started in Juba between the Government of Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army. A cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed between the two parties in August 2006 and since then, no LRA attacks have been experienced in the region.

As a result of the prevailing peace, a big percentage of the displaced persons have gone home. So far, close to 1.4 million people have returned.

Deployment of anti stock theft units along the border with Karamoja has been done and disarmament is still in progress.

Police presence has been increased in the region with the establishment of police posts in every sub-county and recruitment of more police (Police constables) throughout the country.

Judicial process through the court system has been re-established by positioning judges and magistrates in Northern Uganda.

The Amnesty Commission and Amnesty Law were put into place to grant ex-rebels amnesty and to help their reintegration into their communities.

Traditional mechanisms of cleansing and forgiveness were promoted.

A number of recovery and development programmes have been ongoing. A major plan, "Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP)" has been developed for the North, and was launched in September 2007. It addresses identified gaps in all sectors. It is monitored by the PRDP Joint Monitoring

Committee, a composite committee on the same principles as the Joint Monitoring Committee previously.

Government and partners have supported the Voluntary return of IDPs home, with information, resettlement packages, etc.

The vulnerable groups like women, widows, orphans, the disabled, etc. have been profiled and given special attention.

A Mine Action Programme is in place to ensure IDPs return home in safety.

Formal structures of Governance have been reinstated and their capacity built, to manage provision of services in the areas of return.

Challenges.

There are challenges that the Government continues to face.

- a) The Lord's Resistance Army rebel group continues to elude signing the peace agreement and still hides in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) intermittently carries out raids and kidnaps children and women both in Sudan and DRC.
- b) The area that has been affected by the rebel activities continues to lag behind, necessitating massive and coherent colossal amounts of money. The rehabilitation of the social and economic infrastructure is urgent.
- c) Tracing the mines and unexploded ordinances continue to engage the resettlement programme.
- d) On return, resettlement and re-integration, land wrangles have set in, requiring urgent attention and resolution.
- e) Absence of a body similar to UNHCR, focusing on internal displacement is a challenge the international community has to address. The African Union (AU) is trying to address this issue during an AU special Summit on Displacement that Uganda is hosting beginning of April 2009, in Kampala.

The above notwithstanding, Uganda is determined to see an end to internal displacement and the mechanisms that have been put in place, if well supported by the international community are estimated to be adequate.

In the area of refugees, Uganda is globally known for its refugee settlement policy, which includes a comprehensive Refugee Law and refugees accessing land for production. Uganda has welcomed refugees from DRC, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya recently, etc, who voluntarily return when conditions improve back home. We are still hosting just over 180,000 refugees.

Conclusion:

The AU Special Summit we are glad to host next year, as already indicated, intends to come out with a Convention on Internal Displacement, a new milestone in the humanitarian field. Financial support to enable Uganda do a good job of this Summit is a request we are making to all of good will. We wait to be enabled to do a historic job.

Lastly, I appreciate the invitation that made it possible for me to participate in this meeting and to come to Oslo, a city I last visited in 1972, thirty six years ago, having come just in 1968 to the Summer School at the University of Oslo.

Thank you for your attention.