

leading to the withdrawal of staff and a reduction in access to displaced populations. By September, the UN could only reach 65 per cent of affected populations. NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent still working in UN “no-go” areas were facing rising levels of banditry and armed confrontation.

IDPs in Darfur faced many threats to their physical security and integrity and to their access to the basic necessities of life and other rights. In August, Sudanese government forces opened fire in Kalma camp, killing 33 civilians and wounding at least 85 people. Women and children in and around IDP camps and settlements were especially vulnerable. Rape and sexual violence continued to be systematic and widespread, while children continued to be recruited and used by all parties to the conflict. Human rights and protection monitors were frequently unable to enter areas due to widespread insecurity and to efforts by the government or armed groups to deny them access.

Some IDPs tried, without success, to prevent the 2008 census from taking place in Darfur, fearing that the results were unlikely to be representative as long as hundreds of thousands of people remained displaced, and that the census would instead legitimise the presence of people who had occupied IDPs’ homes and land. While the census went ahead, the results were yet to be released at the end of the year.

The prospects for Darfur’s IDPs remained grim in 2008. Efforts to obtain a peace agreement for Darfur remained without success, and the government continued to obstruct international relief efforts. UNAMID has hardly provided more effective protection to IDPs than the AU force which preceded it, and is unlikely to do so until the international community commits all the troops and equipment authorised by the UN Security Council.

Southern Sudan and transitional areas

The civil war led to the internal displacement of an estimated four million Southern Sudanese, while half a million fled abroad. The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) estimated that by December 2008, a total of 2.4 million IDPs and refugees had returned to their homes in Southern Sudan. However, the achievement of durable solutions by these returnees was difficult to confirm in a region where access to clean water, basic services and livelihood opportunities were still very limited, and malnutrition widespread. In many cases, members of receiving communities, many of whom had themselves been displaced at some point during the war, were just as vulnerable as the returnees, and had little capacity to help returnees to rebuild their lives. IOM has estimated that ten per cent of returns have not lasted and have led to secondary displacement. At the same time, inter-communal conflicts over land and resources caused significant new displacement in Southern Sudan in 2008.

The authorities in Southern Sudan have so far focused exclusively on return as the only durable solution, but many IDPs would prefer to integrate in the towns they fled to, or to settle in other urban areas. Local authorities, including in the southern capital Juba, demolished some IDPs’ homes, notably where IDPs had been squatting on private land or on land designated



for public use. In some towns, including Yei and Nimule, wives and children of SPLA soldiers were living on land owned by people displaced by the war who now wanted to return. The local authorities tended not to get involved in these cases for fear of displeasing the SPLA.

The South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission has responsibility for the situation of IDPs and returnees, but it has been hampered by a lack of resources and manpower, and has faced allegations of corruption in the distribution of food aid. The Southern Sudan Human Rights Commission could in theory play an important role in protecting the rights of IDPs, but it too is struggling with a lack of manpower and resources.

The UN mission in Southern Sudan, UNMIS, has contributed to improving the situation of IDPs and returnees through its Protection of Civilians section and the Return, Reintegration and Recovery section. However UNMIS has been criticised for not doing enough to protect civilians, and the international response which the UN leads has also faced criticism for an excess of coordination activities at the expense of actual delivery of support.

Tensions have remained high in Abyei and Southern Kordofan, two of the “transitional areas” recognised by the CPA. In May 2008, fighting between northern and southern forces in the town of Abyei, which is close to lucrative oil fields and an important oil pipeline, led to the displacement of between 50,000 and 60,000 people and the almost complete destruction of the town. By December, up to 10,000 residents had returned, but fresh fighting forced almost all of them to flee again. By the end of 2008 it was estimated that over 200,000 people remained internally displaced in Blue Nile State, and more than 100,000 in Southern Kordofan.