
Press release

In Need of Durable Solutions: the Revolving Door of Internal Displacement in West Africa – report

GENEVA, 26 April 2006 – While conservative estimates put the current number of people internally displaced by conflict within their own countries in West Africa at a total of around one million, concerted efforts are urgently needed to address the sub-region’s acute potential for spiralling instability and massive population movements, according to a new report launched in the Nigerian capital Abuja today by the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

“The report emphasises that despite the enormity of the challenge and the often daunting constraints, national governments in West Africa can – and must – do more to live up to their responsibilities to their displaced citizens during all phases of displacement, from prevention right through to finding durable solutions for their return or resettlement”, said Elisabeth Rasmusson, head of the IDMC. “The international community must also improve its efforts to prevent or end conflicts in West Africa, as well as to establish a credible humanitarian response system to address the needs of internally displaced people (IDPs), who often suffer particular neglect despite their extreme vulnerability.”

When civil war broke out in Liberia at the end of 1989 it triggered an intractable cycle of conflict and displacement that directly affected three other countries and indirectly affected several more. The violence that has ebbed and flowed between Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d’Ivoire – added to the separate conflicts in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Togo – has created an extremely complex situation of displacement, both internally and across borders. While data is scarce, some estimates suggest that a cumulative total of more than ten million civilians have been internally displaced.

The chronic humanitarian and protection crisis affecting the sub-region has been largely hidden from – and neglected by – the outside world, according to the report. IDPs have consistently been identified as one of the most vulnerable groups to often horrific human rights abuses by government forces, militia, rebels and armed bandits, yet adequate protection has rarely, if ever, been provided. Reasons for this include weak or non-existent national response capacities, endemic insecurity, limited humanitarian access, lack of donor funding, and in many cases poor coordination and short-term commitment at the international level.

While large-scale IDP return in both Sierra Leone and Liberia has contributed to a mood of optimism that both countries are firmly on the road to recovery, peace remains fragile, warns the report. The extreme volatility of the political situations in Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea, the inequitable distribution of rich natural resources amidst crushing poverty, incomplete disarmament and reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the widespread availability of both weapons and mercenary fighters are just some of the factors that threaten renewed conflict and massive levels of internal displacement across the sub-region.

The 32-page report is available at www.internal-displacement.org

For more information, please contact Claudia McGoldrick, NRC Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Geneva, +41-76 446 0196, or +41 78 821 8331, or Elisabeth Rasmusson, Head of IDMC, NRC Resident Representative Geneva, +41 22 799 07 04

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