



# INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

A Global Overview of Trends  
and Developments in 2003



Global IDP  
PROJECT



**Internal Displacement:  
A Global Overview of Trends and  
Developments in 2003**

**Geneva, February 2004**

## **The Global IDP Project**

The Global IDP Project, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council at the request of the United Nations, monitors conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

The Geneva-based Project runs an online database providing comprehensive and regularly updated information and analysis on internal displacement in over 50 countries.

This global and regional overview is based on country profiles featured by the database. For more in-depth country information and analysis, please visit the online database at

**[www.idpproject.org](http://www.idpproject.org)**

Cover photo: A family internally displaced by ethnic violence in Katanga, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, April 2003 (photo by Greta Zeender, Global IDP Project)

Inside cover: World map of internal displacement 2003

Cover design by Damla Sürar, Geneva, [info@damlasuear.ch](mailto:info@damlasuear.ch)

Printed by Nove Impression et Conseil, Route de Champ-Colin 2, 1260 Nyon

Published by the  
**Global IDP Project**  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
59, Moïse-Duboule  
1209 Geneva  
Switzerland  
Tel.: +41 22 799 07 00  
[www.idpproject.org](http://www.idpproject.org)

# Contents

**Global Trends and Developments..... 4**

**Regional Overviews**

Africa..... 12

Americas..... 16

Asia-Pacific..... 20

Europe..... 26

Middle East..... 30

# Global Trends and Developments

*With nearly 25 million people uprooted within their own country by conflicts and human rights violations\*, internal displacement is one of the great human tragedies of our time. Yet the global crisis of internal displacement, which affects 52 countries across all continents, has unfolded largely unnoticed by the general public. International public attention continues to focus on refugees, i.e. people who crossed international borders after fleeing their homes. In comparison, internally displaced people (IDPs) have received much less attention, although their number is nearly twice as high, and their plight is often even worse than that of refugees.*

*Among the millions of people newly displaced in 2003, many were deliberately targeted by their own governments. In several cases, the protection of displaced people was undermined in the context of counter-insurgency campaigns intensified under the guise of the “war on terror”. Others became victims of attacks by rebel groups or were forced to flee communal violence.*

*Little tangible progress was made in 2003 with regard to the provision of protection and assistance to internally displaced people. With few exceptions, national authorities continued to be unable or unwilling to fully meet their obligation under international law to protect and assist people displaced within their countries. Neither has the international humanitarian community made the necessary resources available to*

---

\* As national authorities often do not properly register internally displaced people on their territory, many of the figures included in this Overview are based on estimates by available public sources. Most estimates were reported during the second half of 2003. In some countries, available figures vary significantly, often due to limited access to internally displaced populations. In most of these instances, a median figure was used, calculated on the basis of the highest and lowest available estimates.

*address the needs of IDPs; nearly a third of IDPs are fully or partially ignored by the UN. The UN system has yet to create the capacity needed for the effective coordination of its response to internal displacement.*

## Millions of newly displaced people

In 2003, more than three million people were newly displaced, the majority by civil wars and inter-communal violence in Africa. Some 700,000 people were uprooted in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) alone, following a flare-up of violence in the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of foreign occupation troops from neighbouring countries. Intensified fighting in Uganda’s civil war forced an equally high number of people to flee their homes. And as Sudan was heading towards a peace agreement between the government and the rebel-controlled south, a new conflict broke out in the western Darfur region, displacing more than half a million people. Other countries with major new displacements include Liberia, Colombia, the Central African Republic, the Philippines and Indonesia.

At the end of 2003, Sudan was the country hosting the largest internally displaced population, some 4 million people. The Democratic Republic of Congo (3 million), Colombia (2.9 million), Uganda (1.2 million), Iraq (1.1 million) and Burma (up to one million) are also among the countries with the highest numbers of internally displaced people.

## Peace processes raise hope for return

On the positive side, some three million people were able to return to their homes during 2003, most of them in Angola (1.9 million) and Indonesia (500,000). Thus, the large number of new displacements in 2003

coincided with a similarly high number of returns. These figures do not reflect, however, that many returnees faced enormous difficulties when resettling or returning to their place of origin, including continued serious violations of their human rights, as well as economic destitution.

A growing number of peace processes raised hope for an improvement of the IDP situation in a number of countries during 2003, including in Liberia, Sudan, Burundi, the DRC, the Balkans, Angola, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and several other countries. In some countries, however, progress in the settlement of conflicts was overshadowed by the outbreak or intensification of other crises which led to new displacement. This was, for example, the case in Darfur in western Sudan, in the Ituri province in eastern DRC, and in Indonesia's Aceh province. In a total of twelve countries, return movements and new displacements took place in parallel.

It was widely feared that the conflict in Iraq, which dominated the internal agenda in 2003, would cause the displacement of several hundred thousand people. This fear, as it turned out, was exaggerated. With some 80,000 people forced to flee, the number of displacements in connection with the military intervention by the United States did not reach such dramatic proportions. In addition, many of those previously displaced under Saddam Hussein's regime were able to return to their homes. Continued insecurity and limited humanitarian access, however, made it difficult to create conditions for durable reintegration.

Apart from the war in Iraq, no new major armed conflict erupted in 2003. But while international attention remained focus on Iraq, numerous other conflicts continued around the world – many with far worse humanitarian consequences.

## Regional developments

While all world regions share similar patterns of internal displacement, they also show certain distinctive features.

In **Africa**, which is the continent worst-affected with nearly 13 million IDPs, rebel activities and inter-communal violence were key factors in the displacement of civilians; although in several countries government armies or proxy forces also forced people to flee. The ongoing peace processes in several countries raised hopes that the plight of some of Africa's worst-off internally displaced people may come to an end. But although fighting subsided in a number of countries, this did not necessarily lead to the return of IDPs, nor – in several cases – even to an improvement in their humanitarian situation. The inclusion of durable solutions for IDPs in peace agreements will be essential for the success of these initiatives.

**Table 1: Number of IDPs (estimates; as of end-2003)**

| Region        | Countries | IDPs        |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|
| Africa        | 20        | 12.7        |
| Asia-Pacific  | 11        | 3.6         |
| Americas      | 4         | 3.3         |
| Europe        | 12        | 3.0         |
| Middle East   | 5         | 2.0         |
| <b>Global</b> | <b>52</b> | <b>24.6</b> |

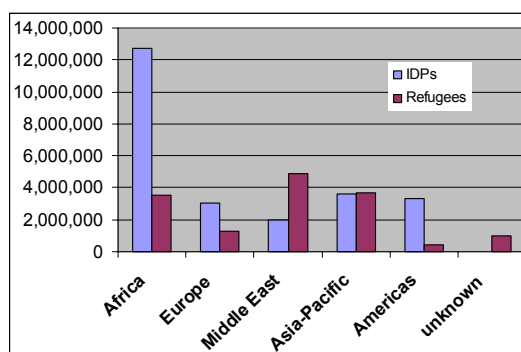
In **Latin America**, the bloody conflict in Colombia with its complex displacement patterns still accounted for nearly all new displacements. The region also continued to struggle to find durable solutions for people uprooted in conflicts that had long ended. In Peru and Guatemala, the return and reintegration of the displaced was agreed in the mid-1990s, but these agreements have never been fully implemented.

Military campaigns launched by governments to quash insurgencies were a major cause of new displacement in the **Asia-Pacific** region, notably in Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines. Return movements took place as well, particularly in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, albeit at a much slower pace than in the previous year. Lack of assistance and livelihood opportunities; land and property disputes; continued hostility from local populations; and continued fighting meant that many IDPs preferred to wait before returning, or opted to resettle in their area of displacement.

and many of them are thought to have partly or fully integrated into their new places of residence. For others, there is little prospect of return as long as the region's entrenched conflicts are not settled. In Iraq, the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 created opportunities for the return of the internally displaced, but ethnic tensions and the unstable security situation prevented large-scale return movements.

### Displacement caused by governments and rebels alike

**Table 2: Regional distribution of IDPs (2003) and refugees (2002)**



Sources: Global IDP Database, UNHCR, USCR, UNWRA

In **Europe**, the number of internally displaced people further decreased as many IDPs were able to return, mainly in south-eastern Europe. At the same time, many IDPs, particularly in the southern Caucasus and parts of the Balkans, continued to live in long-term displacement as there was still no solution in sight to the conflicts that once forced them to flee. Against the background of waning international attention, finding durable solutions for these long-term IDPs remains a major challenge. The Russian Federation (Chechnya) was the only country in Europe where people were still at risk of being forcibly displaced by ongoing fighting in 2003.

Across all world regions, fighting between government forces or government-backed militias and rebel groups – often along the routes of troop advances or retreats – continued to be one of the main causes of displacement. In Colombia, Sudan, the Russian Federation (Chechnya), Nepal, the Philippines, Burundi, Indonesia, Liberia and many other countries, civilians were forced to flee their homes in 2003 as a result of such internal conflicts and the disregard of warring forces for their responsibility to protect civilians. In some countries, government forces, militias or insurgent groups deliberately targeted civilians and actively expelled them from their homes. Often such acts were accompanied by arbitrary killings, looting, destruction of houses and other serious human rights violations such as torture and rape.

More than half of the IDPs in the **Middle East** – in Israel, Syria and Lebanon – have been displaced for two decades or longer,

In recent years, national security forces and government-backed militias have deliberately displaced large numbers of people in Burma, Zimbabwe and Côte d'Ivoire, among others. In Sudan, more than half a million people had to flee their homes in the western state of Darfur in 2003, mainly as a result of attacks by government troops and raids by militias reportedly backed by the government. In Turkmenistan, forced displacement was used by the government as a tool of repression against its citizens, particularly against members of national minorities and dissidents and their families.



Armed rebel groups, privately financed militias or armies commanded by war lords also committed horrendous atrocities and accounted for more than half the world's new displacement during 2003. In Colombia, both guerrillas and paramilitaries continued to depopulate rural areas for political and economic gains and to control or regain strategic territories. The displacement situation in northern Uganda reached an all time peak in mid-2003 when more than one million people were uprooted in a failed counter-insurgency operation by government forces which then triggered a spree of armed raids by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army. And in the DRC, competing rebel groups – who were in the midst of negotiating their role in a new transitional government – continued to fight over the control of territory and natural resources during 2003, causing the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

### **Internal displacement and the “war on terror”**

There were growing concerns that the US-led “war on terror”, which expanded on several fronts during 2003, may have had a worsening effect on the worldwide displacement crisis by encouraging governments to seek military solutions to conflicts and undermining respect for international humanitarian and human rights standards, including those relating to the protection of IDPs.

The international anti-terrorism campaign clearly changed the dynamics of several internal conflicts. A number of governments faced with armed opposition movements were quick to label their opponents “terrorists” and to present their counter-insurgency operations as part of the international “war on terror”. This allowed some of these governments to attract substantial military support, mainly from the US, and to escape international scrutiny with regard to how they conducted their military operations and complied with human rights standards. Many of the recipients of military assistance

for local anti-terrorist campaigns are non-democratic regimes and have a long history of instability, military coups and human rights violations. Yet the delivery of military support was generally not accompanied by an increase in assistance aimed at strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights. And once military aid was provided, there often were limited opportunities to control how it was used.

**Table 3: Countries where the “war on terror” affected the protection of IDPs**

|  |
|--|
| Afghanistan<br>Colombia<br>Indonesia<br>Iraq<br>Nepal<br>Israel/Palestinian Territories<br>Philippines<br>Russian Federation<br>Uganda |
|--|

(Non-exhaustive list of countries where intensified counter-insurgency operations were justified as antiterrorism measures.)

In several cases, including for example Uganda and Nepal, these developments appeared to have encouraged governments to opt for military solutions to conflicts, rather than political settlements. In the case of the Russian Federation, which claims to contribute to the “war on terror” through its fight against Chechen rebels, international criticism of the conduct of the war in Chechnya and the forced displacement it has caused has largely abated since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. In Indonesia and the Philippines, tens of thousands of people were displaced in 2003 as a direct result of counter-insurgency operations conducted under the banner of the “war on terror”. These campaigns were not necessarily caused by the increased international focus on fighting terrorism; some of them were launched well before. But in several cases these operations – supposedly aimed at combating terrorism and increasing security

– have, ironically, undermined the protection of civilians. Although the military interventions in Afghanistan and, more recently, Iraq opened up opportunities for the return of IDPs, the fragile security situation in both countries largely prevented the sustainable reintegration of previously displaced populations.

In 2003, the global trend towards tightening immigration and asylum rules continued, partly as a result of measures to prevent terrorism. This was illustrated, for example, by the dramatic drop in refugee admissions in the US, which used to accept large numbers of refugees who had fled from conflicts into neighbouring countries. As opportunities for third-country resettlement shrink, states bordering conflict areas are likely to become even less willing to accept refugees. It is feared that a general decrease in cross-border refugee will force a growing number of victims of conflict to seek internal refuge within the countries in which their lives are under threat.

### The world's worst displacement situations

More than a third of the world's internally displaced – some nine million people – found themselves in situations where their lives were in constant danger. In Burma, Liberia and Somalia, IDPs had virtually nowhere to go to escape attacks and find safe shelter. As a result, many were killed or died of hunger and disease. IDPs unable to flee areas of fighting in Colombia, Burundi, Indonesia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Russian Federation (Chechnya) were in similarly miserable situations.

Many IDPs in these countries struggled to survive without proper shelter and with little food, often in close proximity to active fighting. This continuously exposed them to assaults by rebel groups or national security forces, and many were forced to repeatedly flee. IDPs caught in these situations mostly did not receive any humanitarian assistance,

as their governments were unwilling or unable to help and international aid agencies had no access due to security risks. Moreover, in several cases, governments or rebel groups deliberately blocked humanitarian access to IDPs in need of assistance.

**Table 4: The world's ten worst displacement situations in 2003**

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| Burma                         |
| Burundi                       |
| Colombia                      |
| Côte d'Ivoire                 |
| Democratic Republic of Congo  |
| Indonesia (Aceh)              |
| Liberia                       |
| Russian Federation (Chechnya) |
| Somalia                       |
| Sudan                         |

(Based on the analysis of factors including type of displacement, number of IDPs, physical security, humanitarian conditions and access, and government response)

Even where IDPs managed to find shelter in camps or private accommodation away from the most dangerous areas, they remained vulnerable to physical violence. IDP camps were targets of attacks, for example in Uganda, and there were reports of widespread sexual abuse of women and children, who in most cases make up the majority of internally displaced populations. In nearly half the countries affected by internal displacement, IDPs were exposed to forced recruitment and forced labour. Internally displaced people often have no adequate access to food, shelter and health care, and many suffer from psychological stress. To make things worse, the majority of IDPs live in countries facing numerous other challenges such as poverty, natural disasters, and epidemics like HIV/AIDS.

## **No protection**

In 13 of the 52 countries affected by internal displacement, IDPs could not count on their government for protection at all. This meant that more than ten million internally displaced people were confronted with hostile or, at best, indifferent authorities who made no effort to protect them. In two cases – Liberia and Somalia – the collapse of state structures prevented any effective government response, but in all other cases there was no justification for the inaction by governments. Another nine million people in 22 countries were left with only occasional and fragmentary protection. A mere third of the governments really made an effort to protect the IDPs on their territory.

In 2003, Burma again was the country with the worst record with regard to the treatment of IDPs. Up to one million people remained displaced within the country as a result of the military regime's brutal targeting of national minorities suspected of supporting rebel groups operating along the country's eastern borders. Without any internal or external protection, Burma's IDPs were exposed to ongoing violence and systematic human rights abuses at the hands of government troops.

## **Limited opportunities for self-reliance**

Faced with governments unwilling or unable to help, millions of internally displaced are – at least initially – forced to find food and safe shelter on their own, without any assistance from national authorities or international humanitarian agencies. Often overlooked, many IDPs themselves develop first responses and coping mechanisms to deal with situations of increased violence and displacement. In many cases, people move to neighbouring villages for short periods when they feel threatened by fighting or the presence of armed groups, and take shelter with family or friends until it is safe to return. In some of these situations, they even remain able to work their fields. In other

cases, they congregate in camps nearby seeking temporary safety, food and shelter; and only when violence and threats reach chronic levels, do they make more dramatic and permanent moves to an urban centre, distant camp or settlement. In some cases, displaced people hide in forests, jungles and other inhospitable terrain.

During displacement, opportunities for self-reliance are extremely limited. Forced away from their properties and livelihoods, most internally displaced people are dependent on occasional humanitarian assistance and struggle to survive. There are generally very little prospects of any form of income-generating activity, all the more so as displacement usually occurs in developing countries which have weak economies and limited infrastructure. Long-term displacement causes loss of traditional livelihood skills, and disintegration of family and community structures. In most IDP situations, children lack access to education; in many cases because school buildings have been damaged or teachers have fled.

In nearly one third of the countries affected by internal displacement, access to land and favourable weather conditions would have allowed a substantial number of internally displaced people to grow their own food and thus become less dependent on outside humanitarian assistance. But in all these cases, lack of security prevented any form of subsistence farming. In some countries, including Burma and Zimbabwe, governments deliberately obstructed farming activities by the internally displaced for political reasons.

## **Trapped in long-term displacement**

Although most of the world's IDPs were in need of physical protection and humanitarian assistance during 2003, in nearly half the countries the threats and violence that caused people to flee in the first place no longer constituted the major obstacle to their return. Almost six million people were trapped in such situations where an end of

active fighting and lawlessness would allow for durable solutions if only sufficient political will were mobilised to create the necessary conditions. Many people – in south-eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East or Latin America for example – have been internally displaced for a decade or longer, and there is little hope that many of them will return any time soon. In some extreme cases, including Cyprus and Israel, displacement has spanned generations. The long-term nature of many displacement situations underscores the importance of efforts aimed at helping IDPs out of the poverty, property disputes, unemployment and legal limbo that often characterises their situation.

### **Insufficient national responses**

Under international law, national governments have the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting their internally displaced citizens. In reality, only one third of the governments really made an effort to comply with this obligation at a level adequate to the resources at their disposal. In the majority of cases, national authorities were either unable or unwilling to respond adequately to the needs of internally displaced populations. Nearly 18 million IDPs received no humanitarian assistance from the authorities in their country, or only on an occasional basis. Some governments did not have enough resources at their disposal. In countries ravaged by war, the disruption of public services and destruction of infrastructure often severely hampered the provision of any form of assistance to vulnerable populations. In some countries, state structures collapsed completely, forcing the civilian population to rely on their own resources. Apart from these extreme cases, however, the level of protection and assistance afforded to IDPs was often a question of priority. Governments at war, in particular, generally saw IDPs as a low priority, preferring to channel resources into the military. Even where specific IDP policies and legislation had been developed, governments generally failed to implement them.

The support of the Angolan government in the reintegration of returned or resettled IDPs, for example, was far from adequate, particularly in light of the country's vast oil wealth. The dismal protection situation faced by the internally displaced in Colombia, a country with the world's most developed IDP legislation, is another example.

### **Filling the gap: the role of the international community**

International humanitarian assistance succeeded in filling the gaps left by inadequate national responses only to a limited extent. Lack of funding remained a serious constraint, in particular for the many "forgotten" humanitarian crises that received little or no international attention during the year. Aid flows to sub-Saharan Africa, for example, have shrunk significantly in recent years. By the end of 2003, donors provided only 44 per cent of the US\$ 220 million the UN had requested to meet the massive humanitarian needs in the DRC. By contrast, the amount requested for Iraq, though ten times as high, was covered almost entirely.

Another concern was the limited humanitarian access to internally displaced populations. In 2003, insecurity prevented international agencies from reaching IDPs in nearly half of the countries affected by internal displacement. Most international organisations left Iraq by the end of 2003 because of the dramatically worsening security situation in the country and the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers. Other inaccessible countries and regions included Burma, western Sudan, Chechnya, northern Uganda, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and areas of ongoing conflict in Colombia, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. In nine countries, governments or rebel forces added bureaucratic obstacles or completely denied access to internally displaced populations for political reasons. In 2003, Burma continued to be the worst case in this regard.

## Nearly a third of IDPs largely excluded from UN assistance

In general, the UN is the main international provider of assistance and protection for internally displaced persons. However, in 21 countries affected by internal displacement, UN agencies were not engaged in addressing the specific humanitarian needs of IDPs. In eight other countries, the UN provided only occasional assistance on an ad hoc basis, mainly food aid. This meant that some seven million IDPs, nearly a third of the world's internally displaced population, were partly or fully excluded from the assistance and monitoring provided by the UN system. In cases where the UN was not engaged on internal displacement issues – be it due to security concerns or political considerations – national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) played a crucial role in assisting IDPs.

In some twenty countries, the UN made efforts to address the needs of IDPs more comprehensively. Of the 17 Consolidated Appeals (CAPs) developed for countries affected by internal displacement, thirteen included an assessment of the IDP situation, although many of these did not include IDP figures or descriptions of UN coordination mechanisms.

At the headquarters level, debates continued in 2003 on how to improve the UN's response to internal displacement. The IDP Unit, established in 2002 under the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator to help strengthen the UN's response capacity, in 2003 commissioned two surveys, the "Protection Survey" and the "IDP Response Matrix", which revealed major weaknesses in the UN's approach to internal displacement at the country level. The studies suggested that in many countries the "collaborative approach", designed to ensure a coordinated response by the international community to situations of internal displacement, does not work as envisaged. The UN's approach to internal displacement at the country level was often marked by ad hoc activities and depended on personalities rather than insti-

tutionalised structures and practices. The studies revealed that there was a general lack of awareness of IDP-related responsibilities among senior field staff charged with coordinating the UN's activities, and identified major gaps in the assistance and protection work done by UN agencies.

**Table 5: Countries without UN involvement in IDP assistance**

|                 |
|-----------------|
| Algeria         |
| Armenia         |
| Bangladesh      |
| Burma           |
| Croatia         |
| India           |
| Israel          |
| Kenya           |
| Lebanon         |
| Mexico          |
| Moldova         |
| Nepal           |
| Nigeria         |
| Pakistan        |
| Peru            |
| Rwanda          |
| Solomon Islands |
| Syria           |
| Turkey          |
| Turkmenistan    |
| Uzbekistan      |

As there appears to be general agreement that the present collaborative approach in principle remains the best available option for addressing the needs of IDPs, serious efforts will have to be made to improve its effectiveness. In most cases this means the establishment or strengthening of coordination mechanisms, regular monitoring of and reporting on internal displacement, negotiating humanitarian access, and the development of IDP response strategies clearly defining the IDP-related responsibilities of each of the UN agencies involved.

# Africa

*More people are internally displaced on the African continent than in the rest of the world put together. At the end of 2003, Africa was home to an estimated 13 million of the world's 25 million IDPs. In contrast, Africa's refugee population was estimated at approximately 3.5 million (2002).*

*Although the continent again saw massive population movements during 2003, the total number of IDPs has remained almost unchanged from the previous year. Large-scale return movements, particularly in Angola where close to two million people were able to go back to their homes, coincided with the new displacement of a similar number of people by conflicts elsewhere, mainly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda, Sudan, Liberia, and in the Central African Republic. With a total of four million, Sudan still hosts the largest IDP population in Africa, followed by the DRC with three million. In Uganda, the number of IDPs nearly doubled during 2003 to reach 1.2 million by the end of the year.*

## **Peace processes fail to improve IDP situation**

In a positive development, promising peace processes have begun or continued during 2003 in several African countries long-plagued by civil wars. In Sudan, successful talks between the government and the SPLA rebels controlling the south of the country, raised hopes that Africa's longest lasting internal conflict which has displaced millions of people would soon come to an end. In Liberia, a peace accord signed in August 2003 ended months of intensified fighting which had displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Similarly, prospects for stability increased in the DRC with the signing of a peace deal and the formation in June 2003 of a transitional government. Peace processes are underway in other countries with internally displaced populations as well, although some of these – for example in Côte

d'Ivoire or Somalia – were close to breaking down in 2003.

Yet even though this has meant there has been an end to active fighting in several African countries, and progress has been made in finding political solutions to conflicts, these positive developments have generally failed to lead to an improvement in the humanitarian situation of IDPs or return conditions. In some cases, the suffering of IDPs and other vulnerable populations actually increased. Despite the peace agreement in Liberia, most IDPs were still unable to return to their homes and remained exposed to serious human rights violations. The new transitional government in the DRC was not able to establish effective control over the east of the country, where displacements dramatically worsened in spring 2003 and was still plagued by lawlessness and ethnic clashes during the rest of the year. In Sudan over half a million people were uprooted by intensified fighting in the western Darfur region which remained excluded from the emerging peace deal. Even where IDPs were able to go back to their towns and villages, such as in Angola following the 2002 peace agreement, they continued to face grim humanitarian conditions and human rights abuses.

In Sudan, Liberia, the DRC, Congo-Brazzaville and other countries with a well-advanced peace process, the relative stabilisation of the security situation enabled humanitarian agencies to reach previously inaccessible areas and step up assistance provided to internally displaced people. But continued insecurity in many areas across the continent, poor road conditions and lack of funding meant that the massive humanitarian needs in countries devastated by years of civil war often remained largely unaddressed by the international community. In the DRC, for example, several regions are not covered by international aid agencies at all, although the UN in 2003 began to strengthen its presence through the estab-

ishment of several regional offices. The overwhelming majority of the large numbers of newly displaced people in Sudan's Darfur region were inaccessible to humanitarian organisations, mainly due to the ongoing fighting in this area. Banditry and the virtual absence of law enforcement agencies in some areas hindered access to the 200,000 people who were displaced in the Central African Republic during the year.

Faltering peace processes led to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation and hampered humanitarian access in Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire, while in Uganda, which saw one of the continent's worst displacement crises in 2003, there is little hope of a political solution that may improve the protection of the country's IDPs.

### **Patterns of displacement**

Internal displacement in Africa is caused by conflicts often resulting from struggles for political and economic power or control over natural resources between rival groups. Often there is an ethnic dimension to the conflict, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan or Burundi. Rebel movements find it easy to operate and gain support within weak states that are dominated by small elites and lack functioning democratic institutions, public services and law enforcement structures. In the civil wars plaguing the continent both governments and rebel groups forcibly displace populations as a tool to increase control over them, or deprive an adversary of a support base. In Burundi the government in 1998-99 forced large numbers of Hutus into camps guarded by government forces, allegedly to protect them from attacking rebel groups. Similarly the Ugandan government in 1996 ordered significant parts of the population of the northern districts into camps at a 48-hour notice as part of a strategy to separate them from the rebels operating in that area.

These patterns are replicated at the regional and the local level, where smaller-scale, often migration-related conflicts over scarce land or water are among the additional

causes of displacement. In some African countries, including Sudan, Angola, Congo-Brazzaville and Nigeria, internal displacement can be directly or indirectly linked to the exploration and extraction of oil resources. In Sudan, for example, government-backed militias have forcibly depopulated oil-rich areas.

Many of the continent's conflicts causing internal displacement also have a regional dimension and are sustained or fuelled by external factors, particularly in countries with rich natural resources. This includes cross-border support for armed groups or rebel movements by hostile neighbouring governments. The conflicts in the West African states of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and – more recently – Côte d'Ivoire have all been intertwined, with the rebels in each of these countries at some point having been backed by one or more neighbouring states. In a similarly complex situation, the war in the DRC was not only fought by numerous internal actors, but also directly involved at least five other countries in the region. Plunder of the DRC's rich natural resources was among the main factors that started the war, further attracting external actors, and thus fuelling the conflict.

### **Protection concerns**

Uprooted from their habitual environment, the internally displaced remain among the most vulnerable groups in most conflict situations and are often deliberately targeted by government forces or rebel groups. Arbitrary killings and other grave human rights violations such as torture, mutilation and rape – inflicted on civilians both by rebels or government troops – have been documented in recent years in nearly every African country monitored by the Global IDP Project. In most cases, such abuses accompany or directly cause displacement. In Uganda, for example, IDP camps, which were poorly protected by the government, were frequently attacked and looted by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army during 2003. Despite the ongoing peace process in Sudan,

IDPs have regularly been exposed to gross violations of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law by the warring parties. This included helicopter gunship attacks, gang rape, destruction of relief sites, and the burning of villages. In Burundi, too, the peace process has not led to an improvement in the protection of IDPs who continued to be subject to torture, rape, arbitrary arrests and repeated displacement. Internally displaced people, including many children, are often forcibly recruited for compulsory labour and military service. Sexual violence is a recurrent feature of assaults on IDPs in many countries. In the DRC, hundreds of thousands of girls and women, many of them internally displaced, have been raped since the beginning of the conflict 1998, and the UN in 2003 reported cases of sexual mutilation and even cannibalism, particularly targeting Pygmy women.

### **Little aid for massive needs**

Insecurity and poor transport infrastructure seriously hampered humanitarian access to IDPs. In many cases, these people were not able to find shelter in organised camps or protected areas. Their only option was to seek refuge in host communities who were already exhausted by the effects of war, or to hide in the bush. There have been numerous examples in recent years of humanitarian catastrophes unfolding beyond the reach of aid organisations. In the DRC, more than three million people have lost their lives since the beginning of the war in 1998; most of them died as a result of disease and malnutrition. Access to the starving population in the Central African Republic was severely hampered by marauding soldiers in the aftermath of the coup d'état that ended months of fighting in March 2003. In Somalia, where malnutrition rates have been consistently alarming, chronic insecurity has rendered large areas of the country off-limits to humanitarian organisations, and the limited movement they have enjoyed has been under the protection of heavily-armed militia. And in Uganda, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people live in congested

camps which are largely unattended by humanitarian actors because of frequent attacks by the rebels.

### **Landmines hamper flight and return**

Landmines have remained a major impediment both to the ability of civilians to flee, as well as to their ability to return. It appears that landmines have increasingly been used to terrorise civilian populations and channel their movements. Moreover, the presence of mines in agricultural fields renders large tracts of fertile soil unusable and entails grave economic losses for their owners. In Angola, mine contamination and the destruction of infrastructure continued to prevent economic recovery, endanger lives, and impede the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance in most provinces. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which ended in 2000, left a legacy of landmines that has hampered the return process in both countries. Landmines also pose a great challenge to the planning of the return process in Sudan, which is among the ten countries worldwide most affected by mines.

### **Insufficient national responses**

A common problem in many African countries has continued to be the lack of good governance, transparency and accountability. In extreme cases, such as Somalia, there has been no functioning central government at all. As a result, there has been a lack of recognition by governments regarding their obligations to provide internally displaced persons with the necessary protection and assistance. In some cases a government's response has actually exacerbated the plight of IDPs. For example, in Rwanda the government "villagisation" process, which started in 1996, aimed to move the entire rural population into grouped settlements, supposedly to better provide basic services and access to land. Instead, living conditions in some of the resettlement sites were substantially worse than in the pre-war era. And



in Uganda, the government's controversial policy of moving populations into "protected villages" in some cases made IDPs even more vulnerable to rebel attacks.

Unlike in other regions of the world, most notably perhaps Latin America, war-torn African countries generally lack an established civil society that can bring international attention to situations of internal displacement in their countries.

Regionally, while bodies such as the African Union (previously the Organisation of African Unity) and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights have, at various times, called for an improved response to internally displaced persons, little has actually been done about it. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a sub-regional organisation comprising seven east African countries, in September 2003 acknowledged the Guiding Principles as a "useful tool" for policymaking and called upon the IGAD secretariat to establish a unit to deal with issues of forced displacement, including IDPs.

### **Keeping the peace?**

The impact of UN peacekeeping operations on situations of internal displacement in Africa has been mixed, with general scepticism about their effectiveness remaining high in the wake of the debacles in Somalia and Rwanda in the 1990s. This scepticism was nourished by the way several hundred UN peace-keepers failed to intervene during massacres that took place in the DRC's Ituri province in spring 2003. But a number of other UN missions and interventions by individual states, with or without UN mandate, have contributed to ending hostilities and settling conflicts, which in turn has prevented further displacements or improved conditions for return. In Sierra Leone, UN peace-keepers have helped improve the security situation throughout most of the country, which prompted the return of large numbers of IDPs. Other examples include the French-led UN intervention in the east-

ern DRC and the presence of French troops in Côte d'Ivoire.

Regional and sub-regional forces have also been deployed to help restore peace and facilitate humanitarian assistance – sometimes in collaboration with the UN – but with limited success. The regional peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, for example, failed to stabilise the security situation in north-western districts where raids of bandit groups, mainly comprising former soldiers, cut internally displaced people off from humanitarian assistance.

### **Lack of funding**

International humanitarian operations have been hampered not only by the limited access to internally displaced populations, but also by an overall shortage of donor funding. Aid flows to sub-Saharan Africa on the whole have shrunk in recent years. By the end of 2003, donors provided only 44 per cent of the US\$ 220 million the UN requested to meet the massive humanitarian needs in the DRC during the year. By contrast, the amount requested for Iraq, though ten times as high, was covered almost entirely. Even appeals for African countries which attracted considerable international attention during the course of the year, did not really result in more donor generosity. Liberia with its immense post-conflict rehabilitation needs, for example, attracted a meagre 39 per cent of the US\$ 47 million requested. Moreover, a flash emergency appeal issued by the UN in response to an emerging food crisis in the Central African Republic in spring 2003 was largely ignored by the donor community.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the international humanitarian response is severely limited by a lack of coordination and leadership among the UN agencies and other organisations on the ground. As a result, international efforts to address the assistance and protection needs of the internally displaced are often characterised by a piecemeal approach and a lack of strategy.

# Americas

*Some 3.3 million people<sup>†</sup> are internally displaced in Latin America, nearly six times the number of refugees originating from the region. Although displacement remains a problem in Mexico, Guatemala and Peru, most international focus is on Colombia, one of the worst internal displacement crises in the world. The conflict in Colombia has forced an increasing number of people to seek protection abroad. But following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks many states have further tightened visa regimes and asylum policies. This particularly affects Colombians, who often find themselves stigmatised as sympathisers of groups labelled as terrorists.*

*With the exception of Colombia, military conflicts have largely abated in the Americas. While civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti and Peru displaced about 2 million people during the 1980s and early 1990s, the restoration of peace has been accompanied by large waves of returns.*

*Despite successful peace processes in many parts of the Americas, the total number of displaced persons in the region has almost tripled since 1996, due entirely to the acute escalation of violence in Colombia. The conflict has spilled over Colombia's borders, posing a growing threat to regional stability and straining relations with neighbouring countries. Although the Colombian government initiated a peace dialogue with the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), the negotiations with its main opponent, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) have been stalled for nearly two years.*

---

<sup>†</sup> This is only a rough estimate as the figure for Colombia, which totals over three million, has been accumulated since 1985 and does not reflect returns, multiple displacements and demographic changes in the displaced population.

## Causes of displacement

Conflicts and forced displacement in Latin America are mainly rooted in growing economic disparities and unequal access to land affecting poor rural indigenous communities. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian villagers, Maya communities in Mexico and Guatemala, and Quechua-speaking people in Peru have suffered disproportionately from displacement.

Violence related to insurgency and counter-insurgency operations has caused large-scale displacement in the region. Latin American society has often been polarised between indigenous under-classes and large landowners. In response to economic inequalities, landless farmers and indigenous communities have struggled to gain respect for their cultures, and rights to their ancestral lands. In order to safeguard the economic interests of national elites and foreign capital, governments have often used military means to “solve” socio-political problems and land disputes. This approach has resulted in repression and mass displacement of people.

Sometimes, displacement has been an end in itself rather than a by-product of war: people have been displaced by warring parties trying to seize control of territories rich in natural resources or oil. In Colombia, both guerrillas and paramilitaries continue to depopulate rural areas for political and economic gains and to control or regain strategic territories. Armed actors have commonly accused civilians of supporting the “enemy”, before uprooting or killing them to appropriate their lands for illicit crop cultivation or to serve the interests of large landholders.

The proliferation of drug cartels in Colombia and Peru considerably complicates displacement patterns. People are often caught between guerrillas, who have, since the end of the Cold War, financed their armed ac-

tivities with profits from the narcotics trade; and networks allying security forces, drug traffickers and paramilitaries, financed by wealthy landowners. In turn, the indiscriminate fumigation of food as well as illicit crops has also forced tens of thousands of farmers to flee their homes in Colombia.

## **Human rights and living conditions**

The human rights situation in Latin America remains a cause for concern. Landless indigenous populations have often been forced to flee brutal political violence. Stigmatised as subversive, these populations have been the target of violent counter-insurgency reprisals by military and paramilitary groups, in violation of human rights and humanitarian principles. In Guatemala, members of the Maya population were forced from their homes into camps controlled by the army, or coerced into joining counter-insurgency defence patrols in response to their linkages to the guerrilla movement in the 1980s. Similarly, in Peru the displaced were obliged to join defence patrols or face prison sentences for suspected ties with the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). Since Alvaro Uribe Velez took office as President of Colombia in August 2002, he has pursued, under the slogan of “democratic security”, a policy of intensified civil counter-insurgency activities. This has blurred the distinction between combatants and civilians, and in doing so, undermines international humanitarian law principles.

In response to the lack of government protection, and in order to resist being drawn into the conflict, IDPs in the Americas have formed so-called resistance or peace communities. In Guatemala, for example, some 50,000 displaced people formed a group called the Communities of People in Resistance. In Colombia, the formation of peace communities has failed to prevent continued attacks, food blockades and restrictions on freedom of movement.

In both Guatemala and Colombia attacks against human rights defenders continued throughout 2003. In Colombia, a climate of increased social polarisation and generalised violence has forced leaders of internally displaced organisations and indigenous communities, human rights advocates, social workers, teachers, trade unionists and church leaders from their homes. These groups have been the targets of armed actors who consider them agents of the “other side”. Moreover, since the breakdown of dialogue between the government and the FARC, violent actions against civilians have multiplied, including attacks using explosives and kidnappings.

Many IDPs are denied civil and socio-economic rights. Fearing further attacks or the stigma of being displaced, many IDPs in Latin America do not register with the authorities. Without official registration and proper identity documents, IDPs face difficulties in accessing government assistance, employment, health care and education, and their right to own or reclaim their property is restricted.

The vast majority of IDPs in Latin America are dispersed rather than living in organised camps. People of indigenous origin have often fled to isolated regions with little food or medical supplies. Many IDPs in Guatemala, Colombia and Peru have been forced to find minimal shelter in urban slums with impoverished populations. There they live in abject poverty, and often face intense discrimination. Blacks, Indians and non-Spanish speakers in particular are often considered unwelcome neighbours by resident populations and the authorities. In Colombia’s big-city slums, IDPs continue to be victims of “social cleansing” by paramilitary groups. Increasingly across cities, large sections of the populations are being drawn into gang warfare which replicates war allegiances and divisions at the national level.

The administration of justice is still weak in the region. Internal displacement in Latin America has often been carried out by paramilitary forces with near impunity, alleg-

edly with the acquiescence and collaboration of law enforcement personnel and land-owning elites. While some Colombian combatants have started to demobilise in 2003, the government's plan to reintegrate paramilitary troops into the national army may leave crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law unpunished. This could deny the victims of displacement their right to justice and reparation.

### **Durable solutions**

Many internally displaced people in Latin America are still struggling to find durable solutions to their plight. Agreements made in Guatemala and Peru in the mid-1990s included provisions relating to the return and reintegration of the displaced, but they have never been fully implemented. As a result, it is unclear how many IDPs have returned or reintegrated locally and how many still require assistance and reparation. In the case of Guatemala, return programmes for displaced communities did not include IDPs who had taken refuge in cities or were dispersed across rural areas. In Mexico, thousands have returned, but many still live under threat of the paramilitaries and have not been compensated for the land and property lost. Durable solutions for displaced Colombians will be hard to achieve until a peaceful solution to the conflict is found. Nevertheless, returns promoted by the government are ongoing, but they are often prompted by the lack of assistance available to IDPs, and take place in spite of the continued presence of armed actors fighting over territorial control in areas of return. The demands of displaced people in the region to have their land rights legalised; to regain their properties; and to have better access to health and education in order to rebuild sustainable livelihoods, remain a challenge to their governments.

### **National, regional and international responses**

Governments in the Americas have increasingly acknowledged the problem of internal displacement and have taken some steps to address it. In Colombia, national legislation on IDPs is more advanced than anywhere else in the world. Important parts of it, however, remain to be implemented. Humanitarian assistance remains insufficient and measures to prevent displacement are lacking. Moreover, reforms initiated by President Uribe are undermining the existing normative framework of protection for IDPs. In Peru, the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report in 2003 exposed the human rights abuses and displacements that occurred during the war and recommended reparation. Its impact on the lives of IDPs remains to be seen. Neither in Colombia nor in Mexico concrete steps have been taken to comply with the recommendations made by the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons following his visit to these countries in 1999 and 2002, respectively. Similarly, many of the provisions pertaining to the return and reintegration of IDPs, which were part of the peace agreements of countries in the region, have been ignored. For example, in Guatemala the government has failed to fulfil its land allocation commitments to the dispersed displaced so that many thousands are still waiting to go home. In the case of Peru, the government established the Project in Support of Repopulation (PAR) in 1993 to facilitate the resettlement of IDPs, but has not established any programmes to integrate those people wishing to stay in urban centres.

More than anywhere else in the world, civil society in the Americas has shown resilience and the displaced have organised into self-help and advocacy groups. Supported by a vast solidarity network of church associations and human rights organisations, IDPs have been able to articulate their demands, bring their governments to the negotiating table, and draw international attention to their plight. Among the organisations that

have been most successful in assisting displaced people to recover identification papers and reclaim their land and property are the National Council of the Displaced in Guatemala (CONDEG) and the Reconstruction and Development Association of the Andean Communities in Peru, as well as a number of influential NGOs in Colombia. IDPs in both Peru and Colombia have formed national coordination bodies. However, the work of organisations defending IDP demands in Latin America has been seriously undermined by the assassination of some of their members, intimidation and under-funding. Government officials in Colombia and Peru have at times accused NGOs working with IDPs of linkages with “terrorist” groups, thus further endangering their safety.

Regionally, there are various noteworthy initiatives aimed at tackling the problem of internal displacement. The 1989 International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) and the UN multi-agency Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America (PRODERE) both focused on the return and reintegration of uprooted populations. In addition, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organisation of American States (OAS) appointed a Special Rapporteur for IDPs in 1996. The OAS was the first regional body to endorse the UN Guiding Principles and apply them to its work. Although under-funding seriously limits its impact, the Commission has initiated preventive action for Colombian IDPs.

Over time, governments and international actors in Peru and Guatemala have increasingly targeted IDPs alongside other poor and vulnerable populations. IDPs indeed have similar needs as other homeless and landless local populations, but the blurring of categories threatens to deny the displaced people protection, restitution and compensation rights. Among international humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has often been the most active in providing for the displaced. The

agency’s perceived neutrality, impartiality and mandate to safeguard international humanitarian law, places it in the best position to gain access to affected IDPs on all sides of conflict zones. In Colombia and Mexico, the ICRC is one of the few international organisations working directly with the IDPs. UN agencies including UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, IOM and WFP have also been directly involved with national authorities in support of their response to IDPs. In Colombia, a Humanitarian Plan of Action was launched in late 2002, designed by the Thematic Group on Displacement led by UNHCR. The plan is the first effort to adopt a coordinated response to the needs of displaced people and to foster more effective application of national laws for IDPs.

Internal displacement is still a major concern in Latin America, and unless governments, donors and international actors give it more attention, the needs of IDPs will remain largely unaddressed. The recent waves of protest and violence in Peru and Guatemala highlighted the risk of return to violence unless popular demands and social inequalities are properly addressed.

## Asia-Pacific

*With some 3.6 million IDPs, Asia-Pacific is the region second most affected by conflict-induced displacement in the world. In addition, the region is also by far the most affected by natural disasters which leaves hundreds of thousands homeless and displaced, with their livelihoods destroyed, every year. Large-scale infrastructure projects also cause displacement, forcing many to leave their homes, often without appropriate measures to mitigate their plight and assistance to restart their lives. The number of IDPs in Asia-Pacific equals that of refugees from the region.*

*Although the stabilisation of some conflict situations in the region has allowed major return movements to take place in the course of 2003, hundreds of thousands were also forced out of their homes during the year. In addition, large numbers of people remain unable to return after many years away from their homes. Return and resettlement continued during 2003 in Indonesia, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, albeit at a slower pace than during 2002. Countries where people were newly displaced by conflict and fighting during 2003 include the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia (Aceh), India, Burma and to a lesser extent Afghanistan. In Bangladesh, Indonesia (Central Kalimantan), the Solomon Islands, Pakistan and Uzbekistan no new significant displacement has taken place but tensions and unresolved issues still prevent return.*

*The “war on terror” now entering its third year continues to have an impact on the plight of internally displaced people in Asia. Tighter asylum regulations and refugee barriers erected in many western countries, including Australia, have meant that people fleeing conflict have often been left with no other option than to seek protection within the borders of their native countries. Furthermore, several governments in 2003 continued or intensified what they refer to as “counter-terrorist” operations. In some cases this has undermined opportunities for*

*peaceful settlements of secessionist or revolutionary struggles, namely in Indonesia’s Aceh province, in the Philippines’ southern island of Mindanao and in Nepal. Human rights observers are concerned that such operations are often accompanied by human rights violations, with vulnerable groups, like the internally displaced, being particularly at risk.*

### **Conflict patterns and main causes of displacement**

Across the region, conflicts causing internal displacement display some common patterns such as the legacy of colonial rule and incomplete state-building processes. Although seemingly ethnic or religious in nature, many conflicts in Asia are rooted in poverty and the exclusion of certain regions or social groups from the economic development process. These socio-economic cleavages express themselves as political tensions and the stigmatisation of certain ethnic or religious groups – often manipulated by local elites. The inter-religious conflict in the Maluku province of Indonesia, which has since 1999 caused the displacement of over a quarter of a million people, is a good illustration of a situation where economic disparities, and their exploitation by politicians and the military, have fuelled religious polarisation and conflict.

Transmigration policies have often been at the root of conflicts in the region, especially in Indonesia and the Solomon Islands where violence has been linked to growing ethnic or religious differences and land disputes. The economic success and political predominance of migrant groups in an overall depressed economic landscape has created deep resentment among local populations. Transmigration programmes in Indonesia undertaken by President Suharto during the 1960s planted the seeds of present conflicts in that country. Likewise, in the Solomon

Islands, migrant Malaitans who dominated the capital Honiara were forced from their homes in June 1999 by local Guadalcanalese militias frustrated by the lack, as they saw it, of economic opportunities left for indigenous people.

Fighting between secessionist or rebel movements and the ruling state has been a main cause for displacement in Burma, Sri Lanka, the Philippines (southern island of Mindanao), Nepal and in western Indonesia (Aceh). In many cases it has become a strategy of government troops to forcibly displace civilians as a means of weakening the resource base of insurgents. The brutal displacement of ethnic minorities by the Burmese military regime, in an attempt to control the country's border areas, has forced hundreds of thousands out of their homes. In addition, thousands more have been displaced in schemes to resettle the urban poor and in the building of large-scale infrastructure projects. Displacement in north-east India reflects a situation where ethnic tensions arising from migrant influxes, land disputes and limited access to political or economic power, has led to the emergence of secessionist movements. These groups have often used violent means to force certain populations out of their homes.

Other causes of displacement in Asia include the low intensity war waged by India and Pakistan for the disputed Kashmir region; persecution against ethnic Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan; and the assimilation policies and disputed land issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the eastern part of Bangladesh. Incursions by Islamic extremists from neighbouring Tajikistan prompted the government of Uzbekistan to forcibly displace several thousand ethnic Tajiks from the border region. In Turkmenistan, the government uses forced displacement to punish dissidents and their families, and increase control over national minorities.

## **New displacements during 2003**

The main cause for conflict-induced displacement in Asia during 2003 was an intensification of fighting between government security forces and rebel groups, often labelled as "terrorists".

In the Philippines, fighting between the security forces and the rebel MILF in the southern island of Mindanao displaced some 400,000 people in early 2003. Although most have been able to return after the fighting subsided, more than 100,000 people remained displaced towards the end of the year, waiting for peace and security to return before going back. Military operations against other groups in the south of Mindanao, directly supported by United States as part of the "war on terror", have also caused new displacement during the year.

In Nepal, a ceasefire agreement signed between the government and Maoist rebels at the start of 2003 crumbled after peace talks broke down in August and fighting resumed. Since the conflict started in the mid-1990s, hundreds of thousands of people have been uprooted across the country. No reliable figures exist on the total number of people displaced, but the most realistic estimates put their number between 100,000 and 200,000 by end-2003. Most of the displaced have either flocked to the main cities or fled the conflict to India.

Although most of Indonesia's former hot spots are now in a post-conflict recovery phase, in May 2003 the government launched a huge military operation in the western province of Aceh where a rebel group has been operating for more than 25 years. Martial law was imposed and the security forces forcibly displaced more than 100,000 people. The international community has been denied access to the affected population. While many have been able to

return in other areas of the country during 2003, some 600,000 people remain displaced (not including those uprooted in Aceh).

In India, attacks by separatist militants in Kashmir continued to create new displacement and prevent the return of an estimated 350,000 IDPs who fled the Kashmir Valley in 1989. Civilians living on both sides of the Line of Control dividing Indian and Pakistani controlled Kashmir continued to be displaced because of shelling by both sides. Both the Pakistani and Indian governments claimed that fighting in Kashmir was part of the global “war on terror”.

In north-east India, armed conflicts between numerous local insurgent groups may have displaced more than 250,000 people in recent years. Towards the end of 2003, ethnic violence in the state of Assam led more than 20,000 people to flee and settle in relief camps. An unknown number of people also remain displaced in the state of Gujarat after an outbreak of religiously motivated communal violence in February 2002.

In Afghanistan, tensions and fighting in the north between rival warlords have continued to displace people to the south and prevented their return. Many refugees and IDPs who had returned since 2002 have found their homes or land taken by other displaced persons or local commanders and have been forced into a new cycle of displacement. Most have chosen to head for the main cities of Kabul, Jalalabad or Kandahar where they mingle with urban and economic migrants while others have sought refuge with their relatives, making it in both cases very difficult to assess their number. UNHCR puts the current number of IDPs at 185,000, the vast majority living in camps in the south.

### **Human rights and humanitarian needs**

IDPs throughout Asia are exposed to a number of human right violations, including indiscriminate bombing of civilians, forced

labour, forced recruitment, landmines, and limited freedom of movement.

In Afghanistan, the ethnic Pashtuns have, since the end of 2001, been targeted for their real or perceived association with the former Taliban, as well as for their control of scarce resources. Some 60,000 have been forced to leave their homes since the end of 2001. Many have been unable to return and remain in camps, mainly in the south but also in the west. In 2002, Human Rights Watch documented widespread abuses against Pashtun IDPs in camps in the north, including forcible relocations and sexual violence. Assistance in the camps near Herat in the west was gradually phased out during 2003.

In the Indonesian western province of Aceh, the military operation launched in May 2003 has caused concerns among the international community that a major humanitarian crisis was in the making. Prior to the latest offensive, livelihood assessments in the province had shown that years of conflict had disrupted the livelihoods of all civilians in Aceh with the displaced particularly affected. Fighting since May 2003 has further aggravated the living conditions of an already fragile population, disrupting food supplies, electricity, water, schooling and access to healthcare for hundreds of thousands. After having been denied access to the affected population during the first six months of the offensive, a few UN agencies, as well as the ICRC were given authorization to re-establish a presence at the end of 2003.

In Sri Lanka, critics contend that the cease-fire agreement and ongoing negotiations between the government and the rebel LTTE have paid little attention to human rights, with both parties reluctant to examine the abuses of the past. This may foster a climate of impunity and injustice unlikely to help reconciliation. Some 100,000 displaced people interned for years in state-run welfare centres face destitution. As the conflict dragged on, welfare centres designed as a temporary solution became semi-permanent with some IDPs spending a decade living in



squalid, overcrowded conditions. In addition to frequent food shortages caused by the inability of the state to mobilise resources to assist these vulnerable groups, displaced people also face serious psycho-social problems stemming from long-term stays in welfare centres. These include high rates of suicide, dependency attitudes, loss of self-esteem, alcoholism and depression.

### **Obstacles to safe and dignified return**

Although in 2002 there were large-scale return movements in the three countries most affected by displacement in Asia in recent years – Afghanistan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka –, the same positive developments were not maintained during 2003. Lack of assistance and self-reliance opportunities; land and property disputes; continued hostility from local populations; and continued fighting meant that many IDPs preferred to wait before returning, or instead chose to be resettled or integrated in their area of displacement.

In Afghanistan, only 70,000 IDPs returned during 2003 as compared to some 400,000 IDPs during 2002. Many of those who returned in 2002, including the refugees, were not properly informed of the conditions in areas of return and of the assistance they would get. In 2003, many chose to wait and see before returning. The scaling down of humanitarian operations since mid-2003, following a significant deterioration in the security situation in many areas of the country and repeated attacks on aid workers, has affected reconstruction and assistance programmes. This has put into question the sustainability of the return of IDPs and the approximately two million refugees. Apart from insecurity, the main problem faced by returnees and displaced people are issues related to land and property.

Landmines and episodes of shelling and insurgency also obstructed safe return for IDPs from Indian controlled Kashmir. Landmines are also a major cause of concern

in Sri Lanka where more than 300,000 people have returned home since a ceasefire ended 20 years of hostilities in 2002. Despite the ceasefire, however, many remain displaced, and many of those who have been able to return have not done so in safety and dignity. Apart from landmines, returning IDPs face safety threats, property dispossession, landlessness and a lack of basic infrastructure and basic services. Over 600,000 are still displaced in the country. The political crisis between the President and the government in late 2003 raised concern that the peace and return process could be jeopardised.

Apart from Aceh, no new significant incidents of displacement have occurred in Indonesia during 2003. This relative stability has allowed for major return movements, and many displaced people lost IDP status after receiving a termination grant from the government. Areas where return has been possible during 2003 include central Sulawesi, north Maluku, and – to a lesser extent – the Maluku province and central Kalimantan. Local hostility continued to hamper return in many areas.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the majority of people who had to flee during a two decade long armed-conflict between local insurgent groups and the Bangladeshi government remain displaced because of unresolved land disputes with Bengali settlers.

### **National and international response**

The response provided by national authorities to the crisis of internal displacement in the Asia-Pacific region varies greatly from one country to the other. Few governments have the capacity or the political will to comprehensively address the concerns and needs of their uprooted population, let alone the root causes of the conflicts leading to such displacement.

Countries where an IDP strategy has been devised to assist in the protection and assistance given to the displaced and their return to their homes include Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Indonesia.

In Sri Lanka, the government and the LTTE, with the help of the international community, are in the process of settling the 25-year long civil war and assisting with the return of the close to one million people displaced over the years. The government and the UN have jointly devised an IDP return and resettlement strategy, and the LTTE has been closely associated with it. Although many issues need to be settled before all can return, there is hope that the commitment shown by all parties will eventually pave the way for the safe return of all the displaced.

In Afghanistan, the government in close collaboration with the UN is now focusing its efforts on finding solutions for the estimated 200,000 IDPs still living in camps in the south and unable to return due to the continued drought and the persistence of ethnic tensions in the north. The operation plan for the south will seek to identify long-term solutions within a time frame of three years. Another operation plan is expected to be drawn up for the estimated 20,000 IDPs living in the west.

Aceh apart, the government of Indonesia has generally acknowledged its responsibility vis-à-vis IDPs and shown commitment to assisting them at the various stages of displacement. In September 2001, it formulated a national policy to address the problem of internal displacement in the country. Assistance was stopped for some IDPs at the end of 2002, but extended for others until the end of 2003, at which point the government expected the IDP problem to be “solved”.

It is a recurrent feature that Asian countries consider any external intervention from the international community as a violation of their sovereignty and interference in their domestic affairs. The ongoing “war on terror” and the war in Iraq during 2003 appear to have encouraged some governments to

step up their own “anti-terrorist” operations against insurgent and rebel groups. Linking such operations to the “war on terror” has enabled governments to escape international involvement and criticism, and thus broadened the spectrum of pursuing military solutions to conflicts.

The Indonesian government, for example, denied international access to the population affected by the military offensive launched in Aceh in May 2003 on the grounds that it considers the fight against the “GAM terrorists” an “internal problem”.

Similarly, the only international assistance welcomed by the Nepalese government, in the context of the ongoing conflict, is the provision of military equipment and training to its armed forces. The government has not issued any IDP-specific strategy and has so far not taken any steps to acknowledge the displacement crisis caused by the fighting and its impact on the already exhausted coping mechanisms of the population. Limited assistance has been provided to those displaced by the Maoists, but those displaced by the actions of the security forces are not recognised as IDPs, nor do they qualify for any assistance from the authorities. The vast majority of aid agencies are implementing development programmes. None of them are specifically addressing the emergency assistance needs of IDPs.

Similar to Nepal, some countries refuse to acknowledge any displacement problem and consequently often deny access to this vulnerable group. In Burma, the military regime continues to harass the country’s internally displaced population and many are forced to survive by their own means, in the jungle or with relatives. International humanitarian actors are denied access to more than 500,000 IDPs in the border areas towards Thailand.

In India, where IDPs often live under precarious conditions in relief camps, there is no national IDP policy and the government systematically refers to IDPs as “migrants”. The Indian government also frequently de-

nies international access to the affected populations.

It should also be noted that in some countries, the problem of internal displacement is largely ignored by the international community. International organisations and donor countries have for example done little to address or even monitor the situation of those internally displaced by conflict in India and Bangladesh. The effect of the Iraq war has seemingly diverted the donors' attention away from other displacement situations where financial assistance is urgently needed. Availability of funding is particularly important in countries where large numbers of IDPs are now returning home and are in need of assistance to restart their lives. Towards the end of 2003 only half of the amount required to assist IDPs and other vulnerable populations in Indonesia had been forthcoming. In Afghanistan, the deteriorating security situation has apparently discouraged many donors from funding programmes targeting the residual caseload of IDPs and assisting the return of refugees and displaced persons, thereby undermining the sustainability of their return.

## **Absence of regional mechanisms**

Asia has no dedicated regional mechanisms to deal with problems of internal displacement. Most regional efforts to coordinate and improve the response to internal displacement in Asia come from non-governmental organisations, national human rights commissions and academic researchers, including within the framework of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

## Europe

*A quarter of Europe's 45 states – eleven countries in all – are affected by internal displacement. By the end of 2003 at least three million people across Europe were internally displaced, more than twice the number of refugees originating from the continent. The main wave of these displacements followed the end of the Cold War with the outbreak of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. More than a decade later many of these people remain displaced. In more recent years, further displacements have taken place in Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo), Macedonia, Turkey and the Russian Federation (Chechnya). Over the past three years, the number of internally displaced people in Europe has decreased by more than half a million as large numbers of IDPs have been able to return in several countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and the Russian Federation.*

*With the overall improvement in the IDP situation has come the inevitable decline in interest in the plight of those millions of people who remain unable to go home. There has been a shifting of responsibility for IDPs among international agencies as humanitarian agencies have reduced their IDP activities in the expectation that development actors will start providing long-term responses. In particular, one of the main IDP advocates, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has reduced its IDP activities in Europe. Apart from the direct support given to IDPs, this has also affected the IDP protection expertise provided to national authorities. In the wake of this, other organisations, notably the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), are signalling to step up their involvement in the IDP issue. In the longer term it is hoped that the prospect of joining the European Union, which requires compliance with human rights standards, will be a powerful incentive for many countries to find durable solutions for their internally displaced.*

### Durable return?

South-eastern Europe has seen the bulk of the return movements of IDPs and refugees in recent years, notably in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This major achievement can be largely attributed to the involvement of the international community and its determination to overcome resistance of nationalist forces and reverse the ethnic cleansing they had carried out during the war. The return process has been sustained by the enforcement of property rights, a principle written into the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 1995. As a result, a significant number of IDPs have been able to go back to areas dominated by other ethnic groups (minority returns).

However, the return of IDPs in south-eastern Europe remains a fragile process, and its completion will take more time. In Bosnia and Croatia, return areas are severely hit by economic depression and offer little opportunities for returnees to sustain their own life. The situation is worse for minority returnees, who often face discrimination with regard to access to public services, reconstruction assistance, and jobs. Observers on the ground report that many returnees have chosen to sell their properties and relocate permanently elsewhere in their country. Durable solutions for those still internally displaced largely depend on the provision of reconstruction and housing assistance and sustained advocacy efforts on the part of the international community. The remaining IDPs in Macedonia and Moldova, although much smaller in numbers, face similar constraints on their return.

In the Russian Federation, federal authorities have been keen on accelerating the return of IDPs to Chechnya despite the worrying security conditions in the war-torn republic. Intimidation, de-registration from aid lists and the closure of tent camps have all been used to exert pressure on IDPs to return to

Chechnya. As a result, the number of IDPs registered by international agencies in the northern Caucasus decreased from an estimated 200,000 in 2000 to 70,000 at the end of 2003. This decrease is misleading, however, as in many cases it does not reflect the finding of durable solutions. Most returnees have found themselves in very precarious living conditions after going back; some were even forced to move into collective centres because their own homes had been destroyed.

International organisations generally face no constraints accessing victims of internal displacement in the region and monitor their return, with the notable exception of the Russian Federation and Turkey. In these two countries, UN agencies and NGOs have long been unable to maintain an international presence in areas affected by internal displacement because of insecurity or political obstruction. The recent visits of the UN Representative on Internally Displaced Persons to Turkey in 2002 and the Russian Federation in 2003 signaled growing openness on the issue by the two governments, and were seen as first steps towards acknowledging the problem and implementing durable solutions in line with international standards.

### **Protracted displacement**

As a whole, the return of IDPs to their places of origin remains the exception in Europe. In several countries, the number of IDPs has hardly changed for years, despite the fighting which caused the displacement, having ended a long time ago. A total of 2.2 million IDPs are caught in such long-term displacement situations in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey and Cyprus.

In Azerbaijan and Georgia, the internally displaced have become hostages of conflicts that have been “frozen” for more than a decade, and prospects for their return in the near future are extremely limited. In Serbia and Montenegro, the return of Serb Kosovars is

on the agenda of the UN administration in Kosovo, but the violence overshadowing inter-ethnic relations in the province has prevented any substantial return movements. In Turkey, the government has launched a return and resettlement programme for people evicted from their villages during the conflict in the south-eastern part of the country. However, there are concerns that the programme may not adequately take into account IDPs’ needs, and that only a small fraction of the displaced population has been able to benefit from this initiative. In Cyprus, people have been displaced for three decades, since the invasion by Turkish troops and the island’s division in 1974. Prospects of ending displacement in Cyprus have been closely connected to ongoing efforts to settle the long-standing conflict before the accession of Greek Cyprus to the European Union in 2004.

With the exception of Cyprus, IDPs are waiting for durable solutions in squalid conditions, packed into sub-standard shelters, with poor access to water and other utilities, and with very little possibility of generating income. As a result, their physical and mental health deteriorates, and reports show they suffer from nutritional deficiencies, epidemics and social marginalisation. In some countries, discriminatory practices and policies have made IDPs second-class citizens, with restrictions on their voting rights, access to documentation, freedom of movement, and access to public services.

Despite the long-term nature of many displacement situations, governments are often reluctant to consider resettlement and integration of IDPs in other areas of the country, in particular in cases where IDPs were displaced from secessionist or occupied territories no longer under the control of the government. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, for example, the governments have long kept IDPs deliberately in difficult humanitarian conditions and in legal limbo as they feared that resettlement and integration would amount to an implicit acknowledgement of the status quo and thus weaken their claim on the lost territories. It was only in 2002

that the government of Azerbaijan, for example, started to allocate more substantial resources to the provision of alternative accommodation for IDPs in rural areas, with the objective of closing down all camps by 2004. At the same time, as the case of Cyprus shows, displaced communities may be unwilling to renounce their identity of “displaced persons” as long as they remain unable to return home or recover their lost property.

### **Protection in transition**

With the exception of the Russian Federation, the immediate emergency phase in all situations of internal displacement in the region has now ended and governments have progressively modified their approach to the problem of IDPs. They have moved away from humanitarian assistance, and instead made efforts to mainstream their response to the protection and assistance needs of IDPs into development strategies and poverty reduction plans. In several countries, this means the phasing-out of direct assistance to IDPs, as it is expected that IDPs will take advantage of the benefits provided by the regular social welfare system as other citizens do. The Russian Federation remains the only situation of internal displacement in the region considered a humanitarian emergency by UN agencies.

In this delicate transition period for IDPs, a process of shifting responsibility for IDPs among international agencies has also been going on. Humanitarian agencies have reduced their activities on behalf of IDPs, as they expect development actors to step in and provide long-term responses. In particular, IDPs have progressively lost some of the attention given to them by one of their main advocates, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. IDPs have been of concern to the UN refugee agency in eight of the eleven situations of internal displacement in the region. But the UNHCR’s provision of assistance and protection of IDPs in the region has decreased in all countries during recent years. This has also affected the expertise

and capacity support provided to national authorities with regard to the protection of IDPs in several countries.

### **A role for regional organisations**

Regional political or human rights organisations in Europe have therefore a considerable role to play with regard to internal displacement. Their own mandate and capacity have already allowed them to complement or take over some of the protection and advocacy functions, which were being done until now by UN agencies for IDPs in the region. But much remains to be done to ensure that these contributions are consistent throughout the region.

Thanks to its comprehensive approach to security and its large field presence, the OSCE has made a valuable contribution to the search of durable solutions to internal displacement. In Bosnia and Croatia, OSCE field missions have promoted and closely monitored the process of restitution of properties to pre-war owners. In the south Caucasus, the OSCE, in 2000-2002, sponsored a legal survey, jointly with the Brookings Institution, on the compliance of national legislation with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. By explicitly confirming the usefulness of the Guiding Principles for the work of the organisation and its member states in a decision adopted in December 2003, OSCE foreign ministers signalled support for a stronger role of the OSCE on IDPs.

The various institutions of the Council of Europe have also been increasingly involved in the issue of internal displacement. The Parliamentary Assembly has long monitored displacement situations in Europe through the appointment of ad-hoc rapporteurs. On 25 November 2003, the Assembly recommended the organisation’s Committee of Ministers to examine the situation of IDPs more systematically and to contribute to the promotion of the Guiding Principles at the European level. The Council of Europe’s

Commissioner for Human Rights has visited countries affected by internal displacement, and issued recommendations to the relevant national authorities with regard to their treatment of IDPs. Finally, the European Court of Human Rights has passed several landmark judgments about violations of the right to respect for home and property in situations of internal displacement, such as Cyprus and Turkey. Numerous applications in relation to displacement in Chechnya have also been lodged to the Court.

The prospect of joining the European Union has been a strong incentive for European countries to implement durable solutions for IDPs, as compliance with European human rights standards, particularly with regard to the protection of minorities, is one of the key criteria to be fulfilled by candidates for EU membership. The EU Commission regularly monitors the applicants' human rights progress, including its record on the treatment of IDPs, as in the case of Turkey.

The situation of IDPs is also expected to influence the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the EU. The imminent accession of southern Cyprus to the EU in May 2004 boosted support for the island's reunification at parliamentary elections in the Turkish part in December 2003. Potentially, this could pave the way for a settlement on the return of IDPs and the restitution of their properties.

## Middle East

*Although the Middle East is home to the world's largest single refugee population – the Palestinians – regionally, it has one of the smallest internally displaced populations. Across the region there are an estimated 1.8 million internally displaced compared to 4.8 million refugees. This estimate should be treated with caution, however, as many IDPs in the region have never been registered. At the same time, the number includes many descendants of IDPs, reflecting the fact that internal displacement in the region has often spanned over several generations. In fact, over half the internally displaced people in the Middle East have been displaced for at least twenty years.*

*The main event affecting IDPs in the Middle East in 2003 was the US-led armed intervention in Iraq followed by the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein's regime. The UN had feared that an additional one million people would become displaced within Iraq as a result of the war. While displacement did not take place on this scale, close to 80,000 people were forced from their homes during the fighting. In the wake of the fall of Saddam Hussein, a number of international humanitarian organisations, including some assisting IDPs, established a presence in Iraq. Many left the country in the second part of the year, however, because of growing insecurity and the direct targeting of humanitarian actors. This reduction in humanitarian operations in Iraq has diminished the likelihood of finding durable solutions for the many Iraqis who remain displaced in the near future.*

*The situation of the internally displaced in other parts of the Middle East did not improve over the past year. The current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has caused additional internal displacement of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and continuing tensions between Israel and Syria have prevented the return of the IDPs displaced from the Golan Heights.*

### Causes and areas of displacement

Internal displacement in the Middle East has resulted from religious and ethnic conflicts which have spanned several decades, as well as competition over land and natural resources. In many cases, conflicts and subsequent displacement have led to the resettlement of populations along ethnic or religious lines. In Iraq, the regime of Saddam Hussein, dominated by Sunni Muslim Arabs, for decades killed or displaced hundreds of thousands of members of the ethnic Kurdish minority, culminating in the 1988 Anfal campaign during which more than 100,000 Kurds lost their lives. Until the eve of the US-led intervention in Iraq, the regime pursued a policy of "Arabisation", expelling the non-Arab population – Kurds, Assyrians and Turkomans – from the oil-rich region of Kirkuk and replacing them with ethnic Arabs from the south in an attempt to increase control over the region's natural resources by changing its ethnic character. The government also uprooted large numbers of Shia Muslim Arabs in the southern marshlands in retaliation for their alleged support of the uprising against the regime in the wake of the end of the first Gulf War in 1991.

Hundreds of thousands of people were internally displaced by the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. Some 300,000 IDPs remain unable to return because of continued instability in the southern part of the country, which despite the withdrawal of the Israeli army in 2000 is still plagued by clashes between the Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah and Israeli forces. The wars between Israel and its neighbours after 1948 caused large-scale displacement, including the internal displacement of Arabs within Israel and of inhabitants of the Golan Heights within Syria. These IDP populations, each of whom now totals several hundred thousand, have been displaced for decades and there is little prospect for return any time soon.



The current Israeli-Palestinian conflict has led to the demolition of the homes of several thousand Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The construction of a “security barrier” by the Israeli government, which could incorporate up to ten per cent of the West Bank, has also displaced people, and cut others off from their land.

### **Human rights and humanitarian situation**

The human rights situation in the Middle East generally remains poor. Violence against IDPs has been particularly severe in the Palestinian Territories and in Iraq. The humanitarian situation of people in the Palestinian Territories, whether displaced or not, worsened in 2002 and 2003. Human rights organisations have reported violations committed by the Israeli Defence Forces, such as unlawful killings and the destruction of civilian property, since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000. In Iraq, extra-judicial killings, torture, forced evictions of minorities and political opponents were widespread under the previous regime.

Internally displaced people are often among the poorest and most vulnerable, as in the case of Iraq and the Palestinian Territories. In other cases, IDPs do not have significant humanitarian needs over and above those of the rest of the population. The repossession of land and properties is generally their most pressing concern. In Israel, IDPs have been trying to return to their villages of origin for over 50 years, but so far the Israeli government has not allowed them to do so. People displaced within Syria still seek restitution of their lands in the Golan Heights, an area taken by Israel in 1967.

### **Durable solutions**

Over half the IDPs in the Middle East have been displaced for at least twenty years. It is difficult to assess whether these long-term IDPs have in fact integrated into their new locations and even whether they should still be considered IDPs. This is particularly the case for many displaced villagers in Lebanon and in northern Iraq, who have been resettled in urban areas for decades and have little incentive to return to their areas of origin where their villages were destroyed or, at best, still lack infrastructure and employment opportunities. Registration of property claims and the return process itself have been delayed in Iraq due to the growing insecurity in the second half of 2003.

Another factor slowing or preventing return, particularly in Lebanon, is that children whose parents were displaced years ago generally lack strong childhood ties with their family’s place of origin. In the case of Israel and Syria, however, where the absence of political solutions has prevented the return of IDPs for decades, children are still said to want to return to their parents’ original homes. It remains to be seen if they will indeed go back if and when the political situation allows.

### **National and international response**

Governments in the region have provided little protection and assistance to the people displaced within their countries. In Lebanon, however, the government has identified the return of the displaced as a key priority, yet factors such as corruption, political rivalry and budgetary problems have delayed the process.

In the Middle East, governments generally impose severe restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly and the region lacks a strong civil society to draw attention to the plight of IDPs. The exception is Israel, where numerous associations have been formed since the early 1990s to campaign for the rights of displaced Israeli Arabs.

The response to internal displacement at the regional level has been weak as the Middle East does not have an organisation representing all the states in the region. The League of Arab States is the only body which does fulfil some kind of a regional function, but it, of course, excludes Israel and Iran, and has limited itself to the issue of displaced Palestinians exclusively.

UN and NGO humanitarian assistance concentrates on vulnerable populations in Iraq and in the Palestinian Territories, including internally displaced people. Humanitarian access to IDPs in both areas has, however, been severely restricted. In Iraq, current insecurity prevents humanitarian agencies from assessing the needs of IDPs and responding to them. According to several UN reports, Israeli authorities have been blocking delivery of basic food items, medicines and fuel to the Gaza Strip, and UN humanitarian access to the West Bank has been impeded by bureaucratic procedures. UN agencies and NGOs active in the Palestinian Territories are increasingly reorienting resources from development to relief to meet the growing humanitarian needs of the population. In the rest of the region, long-term IDPs are generally neglected.

**Global IDP Project**

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin Moise-Duboule 59

1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 799 07 00, Fax: +41 22 799 07 01

[www.idproject.org](http://www.idproject.org)