

Diverse summer

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Global IDP PROJECT

A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT BY THE END OF 2002

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GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Large numbers of people were moving within countries affected by conflict during 2002, although the overall number of internally displaced people (IDPs) remained at some 25 million. More than three million people were newly displaced during the year by governments, rebels and militias, mostly through violence, threats and arbitrary actions. About the same number of people returned to their homes, but many have yet to rebuild their lives. The overwhelming majority of IDPs – mainly women and children – struggled to survive with little hope of returning home, sometimes years after fighting ended. Many still faced threats to their safety, could not fulfil basic needs and lacked prospects for development. Governments still failed to help IDPs, and international agencies were unable to assist many, although the UN worked to improve the international response. Donors continued to provide unpredictable funding for IDPs.

Significant movement

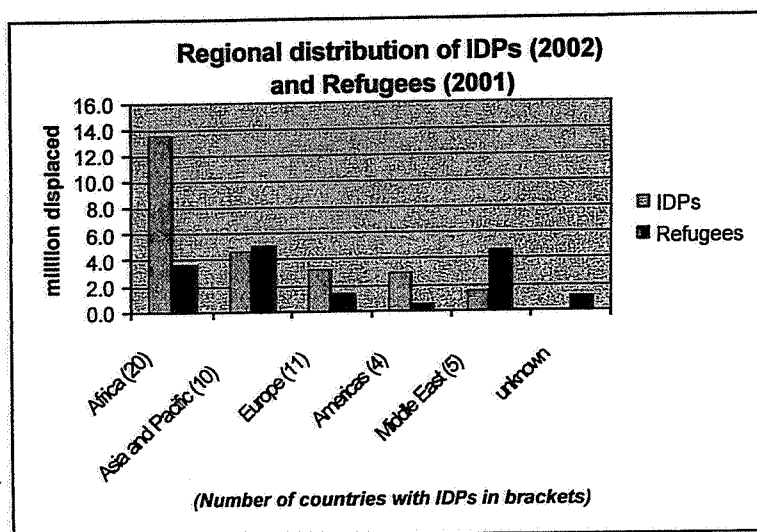
The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) driven from homes by conflict in the world remains at some 25 million people, according to our estimates of displacement in 50 countries affected by conflict.¹ Africa still has more IDPs than the rest of the world put together, with a total of around 13 million. The world's IDPs outnumber conventional refugees (i.e. those who cross international borders) by two-to-one. Up-to-date IDP figures, however, are difficult to obtain because displaced populations are dispersed, authorities do not maintain accurate figures, and estimates are sometimes manipulated for political reasons.

The total global number of IDPs appears to have stabilized during recent years, but this does not imply that the movements of displaced people have subsided in the countries affected by conflict. The reality is rather the opposite as there have been major movements of displaced people in both directions, i.e. while about three million IDPs were able to return during 2002, a similar number of people were newly displaced.

Millions displaced in conflicts

In 2002, about three million people were displaced in new and old conflicts. Many thousands of people were newly displaced in long-running conflicts in Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Philippines, Sudan and Uganda. And intensified conflicts in formerly stable countries also displaced significant numbers in 2002, including 1.1 million in Cote d'Ivoire, and many thousands in Central African Republic, Zimbabwe and Nepal, all of which had to be added to the list of countries monitored by the Global IDP Database.

¹ The estimate of world-wide displacement is based on available figures on conflict-induced internal displacement in 50 countries. The majority of the country figures have been reported during the second half of 2002. The Global IDP Database has not collected the country figures itself, but relies on information made available by different public sources. In some countries, lack of humanitarian access has made it impossible to compile anything but a rough estimate of the possible range of persons internally displaced. The Global IDP Database has in most of these instances calculated a median figure using the highest and lowest available estimates.



Source: Global IDP Database; UNHCR & UNWRA

In many countries, rebels and militias – so-called non-state actors – played the largest role in displacing people. In DRC, for example, a host of armed groups – some of them supported by foreign governments – displaced some 500,000 people during 2002, particularly in northeastern Ituri and eastern Kivu regions, both areas outside government control. In Colombia, over 1,600 were reported fleeing daily by late 2002, largely from attacks by paramilitary groups and rebels. In these cases, the government does not control national territory and appears unable to protect its people.

But in other states, people were directly displaced by their own governments. These are the same governments who are responsible for their protection. In Burma, Sudan, Zimbabwe and in Cote d'Ivoire, civilians appear to have been deliberately displaced by government forces and allied militias. In Burundi, Congo Republic and the Philippines, civilian populations were displaced by government forces waging war against rebel groups. Human rights groups have linked all these displacements to attempts to change ethnic populations, to control natural resources and as an unlawful military strategy. In countries where governments displace people, rebel groups have also displaced large numbers of people.

In most of these conflicts, civilians flee in panic, fearing for their lives and safety. Armed groups using violence, threats and arbitrary actions directly target civilians in warfare, unleash generalized violence, commit widespread violations of human rights and deliberately uproot people. Such violence usually ensures that people stay displaced. Generally, communal conflicts since the Cold War have significantly increased the number of displaced people in the world. Conflicts between ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups have blown into full civil conflicts. These communal conflicts have been fuelled by secessionist demands, regional autonomy drives, government persecution of communities, and by various groups struggling to control territories and natural resources. In a number of these conflicts, external support fuelled and sustained the violence.

The US-led war on terrorism in 2002 has done little to abate IDP crises. The ousting of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan led to the return of large numbers of people, but also resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Pashtuns associated with the Taliban. In the Philippines, some 90,000 people were displaced in Mindanao as US-backed government forces attacked Muslim rebels and suspected terrorists. It remains unclear whether ever-tighter borders and asylum regulations have pushed up IDP numbers.

Millions able to return

Even while conflicts raged, around three million IDPs were able to return during 2002, mostly in Angola, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guinea, Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka.

In several countries, large numbers of displaced people were on the way to finding solutions to their problems in 2002. In Sierra Leone, after 11 years of civil war officially ended in January 2002, large numbers of displaced people and refugees returned home – leaving, officially at least, no more IDPs in the country. In Sri Lanka, more than 230,000 IDPs returned home in 2002 after the government and Tamil rebels negotiated a peace deal after 20 years of civil war. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, about 70,000 IDPs returned home in 2002 thanks to international pressure on national and local authorities. In Indonesia, displaced people continued to return and resettle in North Maluku, central Sulawesi and Aceh after government efforts to resolve communal violence in these areas.

But in some countries, returning IDPs were struggling to find durable solutions to their problems. In Angola, although some 1.1 million people returned to home areas in 2002, many faced rights abuses, grim humanitarian conditions and landmines (Angola is the world's most heavily mined country). In Chechnya, the official number of displaced people decreased as Russian authorities pressed people back to the republic, despite a violent conflict raging there since 1999.

Elsewhere, large numbers of people returned to their homes while people fled violence in other parts of the country. In Afghanistan, about half a million IDPs returned during 2002 after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. And in the Philippines, most of one million people who fled intense fighting during 2000 were able to return during 2001 and 2002. Yet in both these countries, many thousands more were subsequently displaced by new violence. In Nigeria, most of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by ethnic violence in 2001 had returned to their homes by mid-2002, but thousands more were displaced in other parts of the country by periodic ethnic and communal clashes.

Another cause for hope has been the peace talks to resolve several long-standing civil conflicts and displacement crises. Peace processes in Burundi, DRC, parts of Indonesia and Sudan to name a few, have raised hopes that displaced people might finally be able to return. In some of these conflicts, however, peace talks have yet to improve the lives of IDPs and could be contributing to displacement, as warring parties grab land before negotiating.

The overwhelming majority of displaced people continue to live as displaced people in protracted crises. Large numbers of people have been displaced for over a decade in squalid city slums, sharing accommodation with families and friends, or in overcrowded

camps, usually with little chance of returning home. Many do not return because of ongoing violence; nearly half of the world's IDPs live in countries with active ongoing conflicts. Others cannot regain lands and properties, cannot live in home areas due to the breakdown of public services and local economic infrastructure, or simply lack confidence in peace and security conditions.

In some countries, IDP return has been blocked by political impasse years after fighting ended. Azerbaijani and Georgian IDPs have received little or no help to resettle elsewhere since ceasefires in 1994-1995. Displaced Serbs and Roma from Kosovo may end up in a similar predicament given the lack of prospects for return to Kosovo or resettlement in Serbia and Montenegro. Some 265,000 Greek Cypriots, up to 250,000 Arab Israelis and 300,000 Lebanese are among the world's longest-standing displaced populations decades after being forced to flee.

IDPs face multiple threats

Most internally displaced people in conflict situations have faced some kind of threat to their safety. Overall the world's IDPs are a mixed group in differing locations, with distinct histories, causes of flight, levels of assistance and prospects of solutions. They are seen as a 'community' by the international community because they have all fled conflict and violence, and stayed inside their own countries – unlike refugees.

Women and children make up the majority of IDPs. Displaced from their homes and communities, women and children are also particularly vulnerable in conflicts. In nearly half the countries, IDPs reportedly faced sexual violence. In 2002, an important study in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea found that displaced women and girl children in camps were constrained to exchange sex for scarce food and other basic items, even humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, displaced children have been widely recruited in Afghanistan, Angola, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda.

By the end of 2002, more than 10 million IDPs faced multiple threats to their security. IDPs suffer the worst violence and human rights abuses at the height of fighting when perpetrators can more easily act with impunity. But in nearly half of the 50 countries with IDP crises, governments failed to provide protection to civilians sheltered in areas under their control. Improving protection for IDPs has become the focus of human rights and humanitarian organizations working with displaced populations.

And displaced people have not necessarily found safety after being uprooted. IDPs are subject to all forms of harm whether in private accommodation, in organized camps or in makeshift shelters on the outskirts of metropolitan centres. In one-third of IDP crises, displaced people have been used as forced labour, often as porters for armed groups, cooks or forcefully recruited into battle by government and rebel forces. IDPs in nearly every African crisis covered have been particularly vulnerable to direct physical attacks or threats, sexual assault and forced labour.

Displaced people often require help in meeting their basic needs. In the immediate aftermath of displacement, displaced people cannot access shelter, food and health services. In protracted situations, IDPs need education, livelihoods and prospects for the future. In nearly two-thirds of countries covered, including protracted situations, IDPs face malnutrition and require food aid. Many people are displaced in countries already severely affected by poverty, natural disasters, and epidemics like HIV/AIDS.

Displaced people also face poor prospects for development. Many people are displaced in countries that already have low human development indicators, and where armed conflict is undermining fragile development processes. In two-thirds of displacement crises, major damage is reported to physical assets, including houses, public buildings and production. Moreover, displacement undermines subsistence farming, and reduces food security; in almost a third of the crises, people have been displaced from national food basket areas. Long-term displacement causes loss of traditional livelihood skills, and disintegration of family and community structures. In two-thirds of the crises, IDP children lack access to education; in many cases because school buildings have been damaged.

Inadequate response

Often overlooked, the first and main response to violence and displacement comes from displaced people themselves. People sometimes move to a neighbouring village, taking shelter with family or friends for a short period until they feel they return. Sometimes IDPs congregate in camps seeking safety, food and shelter; and perhaps when violence and threats reach chronic levels, people 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. Sometimes, people are displaced more than once, and forced to flee again and again to various locations.

Government responses to the displacement crises have mostly been inadequate. The welfare of internally displaced populations has become the subject of international attention precisely because governments are often unable, or unwilling, to protect them or care for them. Consequently, conditions for IDPs, both during displacement and resettlement, have fallen well below international standards. Primary responsibility for protection and assistance of IDPs rests with national governments under international laws, embodied in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Some governments fail to meet the needs of displaced people due to a lack of resources. In countries affected by war and displacement, state services and infrastructure are often in disrepair and proper assistance and services are not available for vulnerable populations. Collapsed and occupied states like Somalia and DRC have almost no ability to respond to the needs of their civilian populations. And where rebels are 'competent authorities,' they too have been unable or unwilling to assist displaced people adequately.

A main reason for poor responses is that governments see IDPs as a low priority. Governments at war often channel resources into fighting and weapons while failing to assist displaced people. Even governments who have taken legislative or humanitarian initiatives to help IDPs have failed to implement them. Angola, for example, has failed to provide funding for IDPs despite its vast oil wealth. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, national authorities have not supported displaced people to prevent their integration into local communities. In Russia, the government has reduced support in order to press Chechens to return home.

International humanitarian agencies also are not reaching large numbers of displaced people in need of assistance. In about 40 per cent of crises covered by the Global IDP Database, aid agencies have been blocked from reaching IDPs by political and bureaucratic obstacles. In Burma, aid agencies have been unable to assist more than

600,000 IDPs because the government has hindered access. In Chechnya, aid workers trying to help displaced people have been threatened and kidnapped. In Somalia, aid agencies struggle to reach unknown numbers in the insecure and drought-affected southern and south-west.

With access denied, human rights monitors are unable to document abuses against displaced people and ever-less capable of preventing them. In nearly all the IDP crises below humanitarian access remains very limited to large parts of the country, leaving war-affected populations in dire need of protection and assistance.

The UN worked to improve the international community's response to help displaced people in 2002. The representative of the UN Secretary-General on internally displaced persons continued to raise awareness about IDPs and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. And attempting to bridge institutional gaps and standardise responses, the UN established an Internally Displaced Persons Unit at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). During the year, the Unit visited several crises areas, assessed IDP situations and provided technical advice and training.

Donor governments remained unpredictable in their funding for displaced people. While donors have given generously at the height of a crisis – as in Afghanistan in 2002, they have rarely provided sustained assistance. Typically, donors reduced funds after the worst of a humanitarian emergency, without providing enough funding for reintegration and self-support schemes over medium and long terms.

And international donors were still not helping displaced populations on the basis of their needs: IDPs in strategically valued Afghanistan, like southeastern Europe in 2000, received much greater funding per capita than needier African IDPs. IDPs in 'forgotten crises' still received relatively little humanitarian support, and probably far less than refugees from the very same country.

Donors also appeared to be wary of funding IDPs in situations where humanitarian access is poor. This may explain continued donor disinterest in DRC, Burundi, Congo, and Liberia where IDPs cannot be reached. Donors, however, exerted no accompanying political pressure to improve access.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICA

Grim statistics

The African continent has more internally displaced persons (IDPs) than the rest of the world put together – a total of just over 13 million by the end of 2002. In contrast, Africa's refugee population was estimated at approximately 3.6 million in 2002.

Despite the generally bleak statistics, there have been some positive developments. With the official end of Sierra Leone's eleven year civil war in January 2002, large numbers of displaced people and refugees returned home – leaving, officially at least, no more IDPs in the country. In Guinea, thousands of IDPs returned to their home areas in 2002, encouraged by overall improvements in the security situation. And in Nigeria, most of the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by ethnic violence in 2001 had returned to their homes by mid-2002.

Peace brings new problems

The magnitude of internal displacement in Africa reflects a worsening of armed conflicts during the 1990s – mostly internal in nature – that in 2002 affected more than one quarter of the continent's 53 countries.

While several African countries saw political progress toward conflict resolution in 2002, in many cases the humanitarian situation for IDPs and other vulnerable populations actually deteriorated. In Angola, the April 2002 ceasefire agreement between government forces and UNITA rebels ended 27 years of civil war, opening up previously inaccessible areas of the country to reveal a humanitarian crisis on a massive scale. Although approximately 1.1 million Angolan IDPs returned to their areas of origin before the end of 2002, many faced ongoing human rights abuses and grim humanitarian conditions. Peace talks culminating in a power-sharing deal between the major parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) failed to avert intensified violence and a worsening displacement crisis: more than 2.5 million Congolese were internally displaced at the end of 2002. Many thousands of Burundians were displaced by clashes between government and rebel forces, despite a peace agreement signed between the government and one of the main rebel groups at the end of the year. And in both Uganda and Sudan, upsurges in fighting in 2002 caused IDP numbers to increase considerably – notwithstanding ongoing peace talks in both countries. With an estimated 4.5 million IDPs, Sudan alone represents just over one third of internal displacement in the entire continent.

New crises

Formerly stable African countries also suffered unprecedented displacement crises in 2002. Following an attempted coup in Cote d'Ivoire in September 2002, fighting quickly spread across much of the country, creating approximately 1.1 million IDPs in just over three months. In Zimbabwe, land seizures and state-sponsored violence forced a growing number of people to flee their homes in 2002. And in Central African Republic, thousands of people were displaced by fighting between government forces and rebels loyal to a former army chief. Further upsurges in fighting in Liberia and Republic of Congo also displaced thousands in 2002.

Factors fuelling conflict

Many of the conflicts – while intra-state – have a regional dimension and are sustained by external factors, not least cross-border support for armed groups or rebel movements active in resource-rich areas. Liberia's civil war that started in 1989 and eventually engulfed neighbouring Sierra Leone and to a lesser degree Guinea has been fuelled by competition for diamonds, timber and other raw materials. The rebel Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone has been armed and supported by Liberia in return for diamonds. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, one factor that started – and sustained – the civil war that broke out in 1998 was plunder of the country's rich natural resources, including diamonds, gold and precious metals. The war embroiled at least five other countries in the region – Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia supporting the government in Kinshasa, and Rwanda and Uganda supporting rebel movements. Another common factor prolonging these, and many other wars in Africa – and thereby exacerbating situations of internal displacement – is the exceedingly high availability of small arms and light weapons.

The forced displacement of civilians has been a strategy used by both government and opposition forces in various countries to achieve different military and economic ends: for example, in Angola by UNITA rebels in order to procure a workforce, and in turn by government forces in order to isolate UNITA; in Sudan a 'scorched earth' policy pursued by government forces to depopulate oil-rich areas; and in Burundi the government policy of regroupement that relocated the largely Hutu population into camps guarded by government forces, purportedly for protection from attacking rebel groups.

Competition for scarce land and water resources has also triggered conflict, leading in turn to sometimes massive displacement – in Somalia and Rwanda, for example, and to a lesser extent in Kenya. Severe drought conditions in the Horn of Africa in recent years have exacerbated internal displacement throughout the region. In Ethiopia, for example, where the return process had been ongoing since the 2000 peace agreement with Eritrea, an estimated 500,000 people were newly displaced in 2002 by severe drought. Internal displacement in some African countries has, to varying degrees, been linked with oil exploration and extraction – for example in Sudan, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Nigeria

Protection concerns

Internally displaced persons in Africa have often been particularly vulnerable to direct physical attacks or threats, sexual assault and forced labour. Human rights abuses including torture, mutilation and rape – inflicted on civilians by armed combatants – have been documented in recent years in nearly every African country under consideration in this database. However, as illustrated by the case of Guinea in 2000, the spotlight has sometimes been disproportionately focused on human rights abuses committed against refugees rather than on internally displaced persons. In 2002, an assessment by UNHCR and Save the Children (UK) revealed the extent of sexual violence and exploitation of both refugee and IDP children living in camps in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Agency workers from local and international NGOs, as well as UN agencies, were found to be among the prime exploiters.

Little aid for massive needs

Insecurity as well as poor infrastructure have seriously hampered humanitarian access to IDPs, who in many cases have not been able to find shelter in organized camps or protected areas and whose only option has been to seek refuge in host communities 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 organizations. In the DRC, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) estimated that the majority of the 2.5 million war-related deaths between August 1998 and April 2001 could be attributed to disease and malnutrition. Following the upsurge in fighting in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) in 2002, tens of thousands of people who fled into the forests of the Pool region near the capital were for some time completely inaccessible to humanitarian agencies, reminiscent of the height of the 1998–1999 civil war when the Pool region was cut off from outside help and where the principal cause of death was malnutrition. In Somalia, where malnutrition rates have been consistently alarming, chronic insecurity has rendered large areas of the country off-limits to humanitarian organizations, and the limited movement they have enjoyed has been under the protection of heavily-armed militia. And in Angola, when humanitarian organizations finally gained access to many areas of the country following the April 2002 ceasefire, they were unprepared for the scale of suffering and need that was revealed. MSF warned of a severely malnourished "dying population" in newly accessible areas; agencies simply did not have the resources to respond adequately.

Landmines hamper flight, return

A major impediment to the ability of civilians to flee, as well as to their eventual return, has been the abundance of landmines in numerous African countries. Angola is reported to be the most heavily mined country in the world, with an estimated 8-10 million landmines in 2001. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, that ended in 2000, left a legacy of landmines that has hampered the return process in both countries. Landmines used in the conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal have, according to USCR, rendered 80 percent of farmland in the region unusable. Border areas in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau have been similarly mined, adversely affecting the successful reintegration of IDPs in that country into their original communities.

Poor governance

A common problem in many African countries, despite the holding of multiparty elections, 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. Therefore, at the national level, there has in the majority of cases been a lack of recognition by governments regarding their obligations to provide internally displaced persons with the necessary protection and assistance. The Angolan government, for example – despite being one of the first state authorities to adopt and use the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement – has fallen far short of expectations in its level of assistance to the country's massive internally displaced populations, all the more in light of its huge mineral wealth. In some cases government response has actually exacerbated the plight of IDPs, as in Rwanda where the government 'villagization' process starting 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.

Need for more self-help?

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 Organization of African Unity) and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights have at various times called for an improved response towards internally displaced persons, little has been put into action.

Keeping the peace, sometimes

The impact of recent 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. In Sierra Leone, where hundreds of UN peacekeepers were taken hostage in 2000, the eventual full deployment of the UNAMSIL force at the end of 2001 did help to consolidate security throughout most of the country and helped to prompt the return of large numbers of IDPs during 2002. In some cases – such as Angola and the DRC – not all the warring parties have consented to a peacekeeping operation, posing risks to both peacekeepers and humanitarian actors trying to negotiate access and defend humanitarian principles. Regional and sub-regional forces have also been deployed to help restore peace and facilitate humanitarian assistance, sometimes in collaboration with the UN – eg. the ECOMOG peacekeeping force in both Liberia and Sierra Leone – but often with limited success.

Lack of funding

International humanitarian operations have been hampered not only by the limited access to internally displaced populations, but also by an overall dearth of donor funding. Aid flows to sub-Saharan Africa on the whole have shrunk in recent years. Countries that are rich in resources and at the same time have UN sanctions imposed on them appear to attract particularly little donor interest. Liberia is a prime example. Donor antipathy toward the government of Charles Taylor – accused of human rights violations both at home and in neighbouring countries, coupled with allegations of profiteering from diamonds and other natural resources – has ultimately led to a reduction of humanitarian programmes in Liberia. And in Angola – where about US\$ 1 billion in state revenue went missing in 2002, according to a leaked IMF report – lack of funding has been the main constraint affecting humanitarian operations over the past year, forcing agencies to prioritize among acutely vulnerable populations and slowing down emergency response.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN EUROPE

Based on conservative estimates, 3.2 million persons were internally displaced in Europe by the end of 2002. The crisis affects eleven of the forty five countries of the Council of Europe, although the scope of displacement varies considerable from one country to another. Moldova has the smallest IDP population (1,000 persons), while Turkey has an estimated 1 million IDPs. Internal displacement remains larger in scope than the refugee issue in the same area, with 1.3 million refugees originating from Europe as of December 2001, according to UNHCR.

Ethnic divisions behind displacement crisis

With the emergence of political forces seeking the creation of ethnically homogenous states, displacement in Europe is almost exclusively caused by violence perpetrated on an ethnic basis. The displacement often involves eviction, intimidation, attacks and murders, generally degenerating into conflicts between rebel groups and state security forces. The current internal displacement crisis in Europe is mainly a post-Cold War phenomenon resulting from the collapse of multiethnic socialist states like the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1991 and 1992. Both opened a decade of massive population movements both between and within newly independent states. Although less connected to the end of the Cold War, internal displacement in Cyprus and Turkey also follows the pattern of forced displacement triggered by ethnic conflicts.

Gloomy reality behind decreasing figures

Available statistics suggest that internal displacement in Europe is decreasing, as the IDPs population was still 3.6 million end of 2001. This positive trend can be attributed to the implementation of solutions for the victims of displacement in the region. Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered the most encouraging success for the international community, whose pressure on national and local authorities has been decisive in opening the way for ethnic minorities to return to their pre-war homes. About 70,000 IDPs have returned home in 2002, which brings IDP return to more than 500,000 persons since the Dayton Agreement came into force in January 1996. Croatia has also seen its IDP population decreasing significantly as a result of return.

Return or resettlement movements do not necessarily imply that displaced people have found durable solutions to their problems. Statistics for displacement from Chechnya, plagued by a second violent conflict since 1999, show a significant decrease of the population who fled to neighbouring Ingushetia. The return of IDPs to Chechnya is mainly due to intensified Russian pressure on IDPs to force them back to the rebellious north Caucasus republic, where security and living conditions are far from being conducive to return. In Turkey, the government claims that state-sponsored return and resettlement programmes have been initiated. But reports from human rights organizations confirm that these programmes have failed to restore normal life for IDPs, while the government has never published any comprehensive information about the progress of returns.

The majority of IDPs in the region remain trapped in destitution with little realistic prospects for any durable solutions to their plight in any foreseeable future. Caught in displacement by frozen conflicts, IDPs have been unable to return or rebuild a new life elsewhere in their country despite long years away from homes. Despite the impossibility

of durable return to secessionist areas since ceasefires in 1994-1995, the Georgian and Azerbaijani governments have been very reluctant to normalize the situation of IDPs in areas of displacement or offer them a real chance to resettle elsewhere in the country. These governments have maintained IDPs in precarious conditions as a way to keep unsolved conflicts as visible as possible and to attract donors' attention. Although displaced people in Serbia and Montenegro have left their homes more recently, their situation may well evolve along a similar pattern considering the lack of prospects for large-scale return to Kosovo and poor prospects for sustainable resettlement in the rest of the country.

Chances of displaced persons to rebuild a normal life have also been limited by the depressed economic situations prevailing in the countries affected by displacement. Beside the damaging effect of war on their national economy, countries affected by displacement have experienced a painful transition process towards a market oriented economy. Governments are often unable or unwilling to allocate sufficient budgetary resources to keep IDPs above the poverty line, while the depressed economic situation prevailing in these countries seriously restricts opportunities for income generation. IDPs continue to live in very precarious conditions, cramped in dilapidated collective shelters, factories or railway wagons. Health indicators in many countries suggest that IDPs face more problems in accessing medical care than the rest of the population. School attendance is also significantly lower among displaced communities.

IDPs in Europe remain acutely dependent on declining external humanitarian assistance. The vulnerability of IDPs and other groups to poverty, malnutrition and various health risks has obliged international humanitarian agencies to suspend their efforts to pull out from protracted situations of displacement. In Georgia, the ICRC resumed humanitarian delivery to IDPs from Abkhazia in 2002, after a field survey revealed difficulties faced by IDPs in meeting their basic needs. By the end of 2002, WFP reconducted multi-year food distribution programmes for IDPs in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Food aid remains vital to most displaced persons in Northern Caucasus (Russian Federation). However, as humanitarian programmes enter their second decade in most IDP situations in Europe, donor fatigue has forced international agencies to reduce their ambitions: except for Moldova and Azerbaijan, UNHCR funding requirements have decreased in all IDP situations in the region from 2002-2003.

Cyprus appears to be the exception in the region, as IDPs are no longer regarded as people of concern to the humanitarian community. Since both parties to the conflict have resumed talks to end the most long-standing crisis in Europe, the main remaining effect of the division of the island between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots is the limitation to the property rights of displaced persons. The peace plan submitted to both parties by the UN Secretary General in November 2002 includes provisions on property restitution and restoration of freedom of movements throughout the island. Although the circumstances have never seemed so favourable to a settlement, it is unsure whether the parties will be ready to make the necessary compromises.

Regional organisations promote Guiding Principles

The post-Cold War crisis of displacement in Europe has led to the increasing involvement of international and regional organizations in the provision of protection and assistance to the internally displaced and in the search for durable solutions. The regional and sub-regional dimension of the displacement crisis has been acknowledged

widely, as demonstrated by initiatives such as the Conference on Refugees and Migrants in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)(1996-2000) or the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe (from 1999). These processes of consultation and coordination between states and other relevant actors have helped to bring more attention to the issue of internal displacement and to the search of durable solutions.

Much remains to be done to ensure that all relevant state actors in the region use the Guiding Principles on internal displacement in dealing with displaced people. UNHCR and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have disseminated the Guiding Principles in their dialogue with national authorities and other partners. And in a text adopted on 27 January 2003, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommends that the promotion of the Guiding Principles should be enhanced.

One distinctive feature of the protection regime of IDPs in the region is the human right mechanism based on the European Convention for Human Rights and its protocols. This regional instrument obliges state parties to provide protection needs for IDPs. These obligations are monitored and enforced by the European Court for Human Rights, which can impose remedial measures to states infringing their obligations towards individuals. Except for Serbia and Montenegro, all countries affected by internal displacement have accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court. An increasing number of complaints have been submitted in relation to situations of internal displacement, as shown by the admission of six complaints in relation to events in Chechnya by the Court in January 2003.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

By the end of 2002, the Asia and Pacific region was hosting over 4.6 million people internally displaced by conflict. This figure does not include displacement related to man-made or natural disasters, both of which are major causes of displacement in the region. Despite positive developments in several Asian countries during 2002, armed conflicts have continued to periodically cause new population displacements or prevent return movements. According to UNHCR there were about 5 million refugees originating from Asia and the Pacific as of December 2001.

Although a stabilization of the regional conflicts in some areas has allowed for some return during the course of 2002, Indonesia remains one of the worst affected countries, with a displaced population of 1.1 million. Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, both with close to one million IDPs, have now entered a post-conflict phase where large-scale returns have taken place during the year and more is envisaged in the coming year. Several hundred thousand persons remain internally displaced in Bangladesh, Burma, India and the Philippines. Internal displacement is less acute, but still unresolved, in the Solomon Islands and Pakistan. Nepal has been added to the list of countries monitored by the Database as the conflict between the government and the rebels during 2002 has reportedly caused significant displacement. Lack of information has excluded China from this survey, but it is commonly understood that forced resettlement and other violations of human rights have caused internal displacement in this country.

The launch of the global war on terrorism since 11 September 2001 has had a secondary impact on the situation of internally displaced people in Asia. Asylum regulations have been tightened and refugee barriers have been erected in many western countries, including Australia, meaning that people fleeing conflict have often been left with no other option than to seek protection within the borders of their native countries. Furthermore, the toughening of anti-terrorist policies and the subsequent escalated counter-terrorist operations initiated by some Asian countries during 2002 may in some cases have undermined prospects of peaceful settlements of secessionist or independent struggles and have raised concerns among human rights observers that personal and civil liberties may be infringed upon and the protection of vulnerable groups like the internally displaced ultimately undermined.

Conflict patterns and main causes of displacement

Conflicts causing internal displacement in Asia have some common patterns across countries with shared colonial experiences, incomplete state building processes and cultural and religious dimensions. 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 have been translated into political tensions and 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 million people, is a good illustration of a situation where economic disparities and their exploitation by politicians and the military have fuelled religious polarization 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 60s planted the seeds of contemporary conflicts in that country. Recurrent clashes between Madurese migrants and indigenous Dayak in the West and Central Kalimantan have since 1997 forced large numbers of Madurese to flee their homes, and in North Maluku tensions between Muslim Makianese migrants and local Christians escalated into conflict and the mass displacement of people in 1999. Likewise, in the Solomon Islands, migrant Malaitans who dominated the capital Honiara were ultimately forced from their homes in June 1999 by local Guadalcanalese militias frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities left for indigenous people, among other factors.

Fighting between secessionist 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 to weaken the resource base of the insurgents. Displacement in northeast 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, often using violent means to force certain populations on the move.

Other causes of displacement in Asia include the low intensity war waged by India and Pakistan for the disputed Jammu Kashmir region, the civil and international war in Afghanistan and the assimilation policies and disputed land issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the eastern part of Bangladesh. Displacement in Uzbekistan was the result of the conflict between the government and Islamic extremist groups.

Human rights and humanitarian needs

IDPs throughout Asia are exposed to a number of human right violations, including indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, forced labour, forced recruitment, landmines, and limited freedom of movement.

In Afghanistan for example, civilian casualties caused by the U.S.-led bombing campaign – estimated by some to have exceeded 3,400 by early 2002 – are reportedly related to the proximity of military garrisons near heavily populated areas (Marc W. Herold, December 2001). Power struggles between warlords and retaliation against ethnic Pashtuns in the north have created new displacement while preventing return. Ethnic Pashtuns are particularly at risk of abuses due to their perceived or real association with the former Taliban. It was reported that Pashtun IDPs in northern camps were subjected to forcible relocations, compulsory military support work, and sexual violence. In Burma, large numbers of people are forcibly relocated and exposed to forced labour while others hide in the jungle where they are at risk of malnutrition and lack access to health services. In Sri Lanka's government-run welfare centres, home to some 175,000 IDPs as of mid-2002, men were reportedly at risk of 'disappearance' after being taken into custody by the military, while women were exposed to physical abuse and exploitation. Although the suspension of hostilities and the signs of good faith showed by both parties has resulted in a decrease of human right abuses in Sri Lanka, numerous violations of the ceasefire were reported during the year, most of them cases of child recruitment and abduction by LTTE, and harassment by government forces.

The needs and overall conditions of displacement in Asia are far from homogenous and reflect a wide range of circumstances. The difficult situation facing many internally displaced people is compounded by the fact that authorities in most Asian countries lack the political will or the national capacity to respond efficiently to their needs. People fleeing the civil and international war in Afghanistan were particularly at risk as the population as a whole was already facing destitution and poverty, and the authorities lacked the resources and willingness to provide assistance. Some Afghans reportedly walked for weeks in search of assistance only to end up in overcrowded camps where assistance was limited or non-existent.

The psychological impact of war, destruction, death and displacement appears to be an urgent worry in most countries. Prolonged stays in the Sri Lanka welfare centres has resulted in suicide rates three times higher than elsewhere in the country. In central Sulawesi, in Indonesia, a government study of IDPs conducted during 2001 showed that between 55 and 60 percent suffered from psychological troubles associated with the violence, loss of property and forced displacement. In Afghanistan, the overwhelming majority of the IDPs have known nothing else than war and violence during the last 25 years and the psychological rehabilitation of the country is certainly as pressing as its reconstruction.

In many conflict areas displaced and host communities have been equally affected by the wars. This is especially the case of civilians displaced by the fighting on Mindanao Island in the Philippines who were forced to seek shelter in urban centers or in neighbouring villages where the host population was already suffering the hardships of war. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, any distinction of needs between IDPs and the local population living in the Vanni region makes little sense, as the embargo on food and non-food items in force since 1991 has left the whole population in the area without electricity, running water or access to basic health or educational services. The easing of the embargo in early 2002 has improved the flow of essential items to the region, but the humanitarian situation remains worrisome.

Positive developments: Return and resettlement

After 20 years of a civil conflict, which left an estimated 64,000 dead and displaced hundred of thousands persons, the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE have engaged in promising peace negotiations allowing for the return of more than 230,000 IDPs during the year, while many more are expected to follow during 2003. The main obstacles facing returnees are the presence of landmines in areas of return, 'High-Security Zones' maintained by the security forces in civilian areas in the north and security problems faced mainly by non-Tamil IDPs (Muslim and Sinhalese) upon return in Tamil-held areas.

The fall of Taliban in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 has since then allowed for the return of large number of IDPs with close to half a million displaced persons returning during 2002, albeit many had to temporary resettle outside their home areas because of continued conflict. Persisting security problems in the north and ongoing anti-Taliban operations by the US-led coalition continued to displace Afghans during 2002 and prevent return.

In Indonesia, the suspension of hostilities agreed upon by the government and the GAM in Aceh at the end of 2002 has resulted in a significant decrease in armed confrontations

and human rights abuses and has allowed for limited return movements under the surveillance of peace monitors. Little displacement took place during 2002 and returns and resettlement movements continued in areas where security permitted, like in North Maluku or central Sulawesi, while large caseloads of IDPs remain displaced with little prospect of return as in North Sumatra, Madura Island or in Maluku province.

In the Philippines, the vast majority of the more than one million people displaced by intense fighting between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the southern Island of Mindanao during 2000 have been able to return during 2001 and 2002. By the end of 2002 anti-terrorist operations conducted by the military with the help of US soldiers continued to cause new displacements of population in the south of Mindanao.

National and international response

Few governments in Asia 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 conflict leading to such displacement. In Indonesia, the government issued at the end of 2001 a new policy on IDPs aimed at 'solving' the IDP problem within a year. Aid to the displaced was to be discontinued by the end of 2001 and 3 options were offered to the displaced: return to their home areas, integration in areas of displacement or resettlement in new locations. Faced with the skepticism of NGOs and UN agencies, claiming that such a policy was unrealistic given the tensions and ongoing conflicts in some areas of displacement, the government continued to provide aid to the displaced during 2002 but again announced at the end of 2002 that aid to the IDP would stop in February 2003.

In Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Nepal, the little efforts made by the governments to respond to the needs of their displaced population or even to acknowledge the issue of internal displacement in their respective countries has more to do with geo-strategic and political considerations than with a lack of resources. In the Solomon Islands the near total collapse of the State and the flimsy financial resources at disposal is the main obstacle to an efficient response to the needs of the close to 20,000 persons still estimated to be displaced.

In Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, change of governments at the end of 2001 has had a positive influence on the state's IDP policy and overall response. The lack of capacity of both states has been complemented by new efforts to cooperate with the international community in a joint effort to better respond to the needs of the displaced population. Major constraints were the insufficient response of the donors to fund emergency relief for the immediate needs of population returning to their home areas or resettling elsewhere. In both countries the majority of the more than 700,000 IDPs returning during 2002 did so spontaneously without assistance from the government or the international community.

Asia has no dedicated regional mechanisms to deal with problems of internal displacement. The reluctance of intergovernmental regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to discuss this issue at the regional level is to be linked to their strong adherence to the concept of state sovereignty, which lead them to avoid taking positions on matters within the domestic sphere of states like the issue of internal displacement.

Most regional efforts to coordinate and improve the response to internal displacement in Asia stem from non-governmental efforts from the activities of national human rights commissions and from the thinking of academic researchers, illustrating a 'sharp disconnect between the concerns of the civil society and those of their governments when it comes to the issue of forced displacement' (Roberta Cohen, 2000).

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN THE AMERICAS

Some 3 million people are internally displaced people (IDPs) in Latin America, making up 10 per cent of the world's IDPs. The great majority of Latin American IDPs are in Colombia, where some 353,120 fled during the first nine months of 2002, in other words 1,623 people daily, according to NGO sources. Colombia is one of the worst internal displacement crises in the world, but displacement also remains a problem in Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. While UNHCR had registered about 100,000 refugees that had crossed international borders in the Americas region by the end of 2001, USCR figures indicates that the real refugee number was at least four times higher.

With the exception of Colombia, conflicts in the Americas have largely abated. 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 in these countries has been accompanied by large waves of returns. Even in Mexico, Peru and Guatemala – all countries still hosting IDP populations – relative peace has allowed for a significant decrease in the numbers of IDPs from the height of the conflict. Estimated IDP numbers had reached 40,000, 600,000 and 750,000 in Mexico, Peru and Guatemala respectively.

Despite successful conflict resolution 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. CODHES, an NGO monitoring IDPs, estimates that 2.8 million Colombians have been displaced since 1985.

Displaced by political violence

Conflicts and forced displacement in Latin America are mostly rooted in economic disparities and unequal land access affecting marginalized and persecuted communities. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian villagers, Maya communities in Mexico and Guatemala, and Quechua-speaking people in Peru have suffered disproportionately from displacement. In response to economic inequalities, landless farmers supported by indigenous communities have posed challenges to governments, sometimes in the form of armed guerrilla movements.

Violence related to insurgency and counter-insurgency operations has caused large-scale displacement in Colombia and Peru. Latin American society has often been polarized between indigenous under-classes and large landowners. In an effort to safeguard the economic interests of large landowners, governments have often used military means to 'solve' political problems related to land disputes. This approach has blocked agrarian reform, and resulted in repression and mass population displacements. In some cases, displacement appears to be an end in itself, people have been displaced by warring parties trying to seize control of territories rich in natural resources or oil. In Colombia, both guerrilla and paramilitary continue to forcibly displace people and depopulate rural areas for political and economic gains and to control or regain strategic areas.

Internal displacement in Latin America has often been carried out directly by paramilitary forces. Linked to government security forces and land-owning elites, these paramilitary groups commit human rights abuses against rural and indigenous populations with near impunity. In Colombia, a 'peace process' initiated by President Alvaro Uribe with paramilitary groups may result in absolving the paramilitary United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC) from war crimes. Similarly, Civil Defence Patrols in Guatemala, unpunished for their crimes, are reportedly renewing activities that have displaced indigenous communities in some parts of the country. In some cases, paramilitary groups have labelled indigenous people as guerrilla supporters, before uprooting them and killing them, to appropriate their lands for illicit crop cultivation or to serve the interests of large landholders.

In Colombia, a climate of increased social polarization and escalation of conflict is likely to displace more people. Generalized violence and complex war allegiances have forced from their homes many journalists, human rights advocates, judges, social activists, teachers, clergymen and leaders of internally displaced organizations. These groups have become victims of 'political cleansing'. In Colombia – by far the most violent country in the Americas – the head of the paramilitary AUC, publicly declared that the organization would target social workers and trade unionists considered agents of the insurgency (UNHCR, 16 March 1999, p.16). Since the breakdown of dialogue between the government and the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces), violent actions against civilians including kidnappings have multiplied and conflict is deepening.

Residents of coca cultivation zones have been forced by one or more of the parties to the conflict to participate in illicit activities, under threat of violence or expulsion from their homes. The proliferation of drug cartels in Colombia and Peru considerably complicates displacement patterns: Tripartite alliance between security forces, drug traffickers and wealthy landowners finance paramilitary groups to defend their interests. At the same time, guerrilla movements create and manage their own networks for the use of drug-trafficking profits for armed activities. In addition displacements caused by fumigations of illicit cultivations is also on the rise.

Dispersed and in slums

Landless indigenous populations have often been forced to flee brutal political violence in Latin America's conflicts. Stigmatised as subversive, these populations have often been the target of violent counter-insurgency reprisals by military and paramilitary groups, in violation of human rights and humanitarian principles. In Guatemala, Mayan IDPs were widely linked with the uprising in that country and consequently were forced from their homes into camps controlled by the army, or coerced into joining counter-insurgency defence patrols. 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 Uribe took office in August 2002, he declared a State of Emergency and introduced a policy of 'democratic security' (intensified civil counter-insurgency activities) that could further blur the distinction between combatants and civilians, undermining principles of International Humanitarian Law.

For the most part, Latin American IDPs have dispersed rather than living in organized camps. IDPs of indigenous origin have fled to mountainous regions and other rugged terrain, often living in desperate conditions, with little food and nearly no medical supplies. Other displaced populations have found shelter with host communities where

cultural ties provide some social support. But in Colombia, stigmatisation of IDPs has made resident communities reluctant to play host to people displaced by conflict.

Many IDPs have been forced to find minimal shelter in urban slums with impoverished populations. There they live in abject poverty, often with no sources of income, no proper water or sanitation, and no access to medical care and education. In addition, they often face particularly intense discrimination: blacks, Indians, and other non-Spanish speaking groups are often considered undesirable neighbours by authorities and resident populations. In Colombia big city-slums are increasingly drawn into warlord and gang warfare replicating national-level war divisions and allegiances. Internally displaced women often suffer racial and class discriminations, but their status as single mothers, widows and poor literacy exposes them to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Many IDPs are effectively denied legal status. Fearing further attacks or the stigma of being displaced, many IDPs do not register with authorities or request assistance in Latin America. Even for those who wish to register, a lack of identity documents – because they were confiscated or because they were not issued at birth – undermines their rights before the law. Lack of documentation prevents people from gaining access to social services such as health, education, government assistance or employment, and undermines their ability to own or reclaim their property.

The Colombian conflict, moreover, is now spilling over its borders. Displacement of indigenous Emberá/Kuna Panamanian communities, and massacres attributed to AUC, were reported in early 2003. Indeed, the intensifying conflict in Colombia poses real threats to the stability of the region. Increased warfare along its five borders has forced many to flee internally or to seek asylum in neighbouring countries.

Government inaction

Governments in the Americas have increasingly acknowledged the problem of internal displacement in their respective countries and have taken some steps to address it. In Colombia, national legislation on IDPs is more advanced than anywhere else in the world, however important parts of it remain to be implemented. Many of the peace agreements in the region have included provisions relating to the return and reintegration of the displaced; but these provisions have often been ignored. For example, even though the return of IDPs was an integral part of the 1996 peace agreements in Guatemala, the government has failed to fulfil its land allocation commitments to the displaced so that many thousands are still waiting to go home. In Peru, the government's Project in Support of Repopulation (PAR), which has focused on the resettlement of IDP populations, has not established any programmes to integrated those people wishing to stay in urban centres. In Mexico, despite the government's commitment to the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced People, no policy to address the problem of internal displacement had been formulated yet.

A strong civil society in the Americas has been influential in organizing the displaced into self-help and advocacy groups. A vast network of solidarity, church and civil society associations has encouraged the development of IDP organisations capable of articulating claims, bringing their governments to the negotiating table, and drawing international attention to their plight. Some of the most powerful organizations, which assisted the IDPs to recover identification papers, and reclaim their lands and property,

have been the National Council of the Displaced in Guatemala (CONDEG), the Reconstruction and Development Association of the Andean Communities in Peru, as well as a number of influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Colombia. IDPs in both Peru and Colombia have formed national coordination bodies.

Regionally, there are various noteworthy initiatives in Latin America aimed at tackling the problem of internal displacement. These include 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 reintegration of uprooted populations. In addition, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) appointed a special rapporteur for IDPs in 1996. The Commission was, in fact, the first regional body to endorse the UN Guiding Principles and apply them to its work. However, under-funding seriously limits its impact. The creation, in 1992, of the Permanent Consultation on Internal Displacement in the Americas (CPDIA) is yet another initiative, providing technical assistance to governments, as well as support to displaced persons' associations.

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, mandate to safeguard international humanitarian law, and care for civilian victims of war at large, places it in the best position to gain access to affected IDPs in all sides of conflict zones. In Colombia and Mexico, the ICRC is one of the few international organizations working directly with the IDPs. UN agencies including UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, 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 IN THE MIDDLE EAST

With approximately 1.5 million internally displaced people, the Middle East is the region with the least IDPs. Approximately 80 per cent of them have been displaced for over ten years. The vast majority are in Iraq, although the estimate of IDPs in that country is a rough one at best, as few independent organizations have been granted access by the Iraqi government. The Middle East is one of the few regions in the world where internal displacement is smaller in scope than the refugee issue in the same area, with 3.9 million refugees originating from the Middle East as of December 2001, according to UNHCR and UNRWA.

While prospects for the return of internally displaced people in Lebanon and in some parts of Iraq have improved over the last couple of years, other situations have stagnated or worsened. The withdrawal of Israel from the south of Lebanon in May 2000 and the demise of its ally, the South Lebanese Army, gave IDPs the possibility of returning home. In Iraq, the Kurdish parties controlling the north of the country finally agreed to allow the return of their respective IDP populations. At the same time, the regime of Saddam Hussein has continued to expel the non-Arab population from the oil-rich region of Kirkuk. Grave tensions between Israel and its neighbours and the renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since September 2000 – and its worsening in 2001 – have caused additional internal displacement of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and dimmed the prospect of return for IDPs in Syria and within Israel.

Causes and areas of displacement

Internal displacement in the Middle East stems from religious and ethnic conflicts which have spanned several decades, as well as competition over land and resources. In many cases, conflicts and subsequent displacement have resulted in the resettlement of populations along ethnic or religious lines.

Religious and ethnic tensions have played a primary role in every situation of internal displacement in the region. The Arab, Sunni Muslim government of Iraq has killed or displaced members of the ethnic Kurdish minority for decades, and its Anfal policy in the late 1980s has been qualified as genocide by Human Rights Watch. The government has also uprooted Shia Muslim Arabs in the southern marshlands. In the context of the Lebanese civil war between Christians and Muslims, fighting has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Several wars have broken out between Israel and its neighbours since 1948. These wars have caused the expulsion of Arab populations within Israel and Syria, but also to neighbouring countries. The violence since September 2000 has resulted in the demolition of the homes of several thousand Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The forced dislocation of populations has often been conducted in the Middle East to facilitate control over a territory and its natural resources. The most prominent example is the 'Arabization' policy of the Iraqi government, whereby Iraq has tried to change the ethnic character of the oil-rich region of Kirkuk. It has been expelling non-Arab inhabitants from this region – ethnic Kurds, Assyrians and Turkmen – and has offered land and employment to ethnic Arab citizens who have moved there from the South.

Internal conflicts in the region have been exacerbated by outside states, which have provided financial, political or military support to parties to the conflict. In Iraq, the governments of Turkey and Iran have supported the Kurdish armed groups fighting one another for control of the northern part of the country. In Lebanon, religious rivalries have been exacerbated by Syrian and Israeli intervention. Despite the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the south of the country in 2000, the Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah continues to clash frequently with the Israeli army, with support from Iran and Syria.

Patterns of displacement

Over half the internally displaced people in the Middle East have been so for at least 20 years. It is difficult to assess whether those who have been displaced for so long have in fact integrated in 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.

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 when the political situation allows.

Human rights and humanitarian situation

The human rights record in the Middle East remains poor. Violence against IDPs was particularly severe in Iraq and in the Palestinian Territories. In Iraq, extra-judicial killings, torture, forced evictions of minorities and political opponents are said to be widespread. In the Palestinian Territories, human rights organizations have reported violations committed by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), such as unlawful killings and the destruction of civilian property, since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000.

Internally displaced people are often among the poorest and most vulnerable, as in the case in 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.

National and international response

Governments in the region have provided little protection and assistance to the people displaced within their countries. In Lebanon, however, efforts have been made to assist IDPs, most notably through the establishment of a ministry for the displaced. Despite this measure, the return process in Lebanon has had mixed results.

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 over 30 IDP associations have been formed since the early 1990s to campaign for a return. In addition, several associations focus on the land rights of Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

The response to internal displacement at regional level has been weak. The Middle East does not have an organization representing all the states in the region. The League of Arab States is the only body close to fulfilling a regional function, and that excludes Israel and Iran. Despite repeated declarations by Arab experts urging the League to work on behalf of IDPs and refugees, it has not followed these recommendations. The organization addresses the issue of displaced Palestinians, but not of other displaced peoples, such as the Kurds in Iraq.

Assistance to the region is moderate and long-term IDPs are generally neglected. In Lebanon, however, IDPs receive some assistance in the context of poverty alleviation programmes. 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. The Iraqi government has reportedly harassed and intimidated relief workers and UN personnel throughout the country for years, and it has only given permission to seven international NGOs to operate in the government-controlled area. 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 delayed by bureaucratic procedures.

