

# IN NEED OF DURABLE SOLUTIONS:

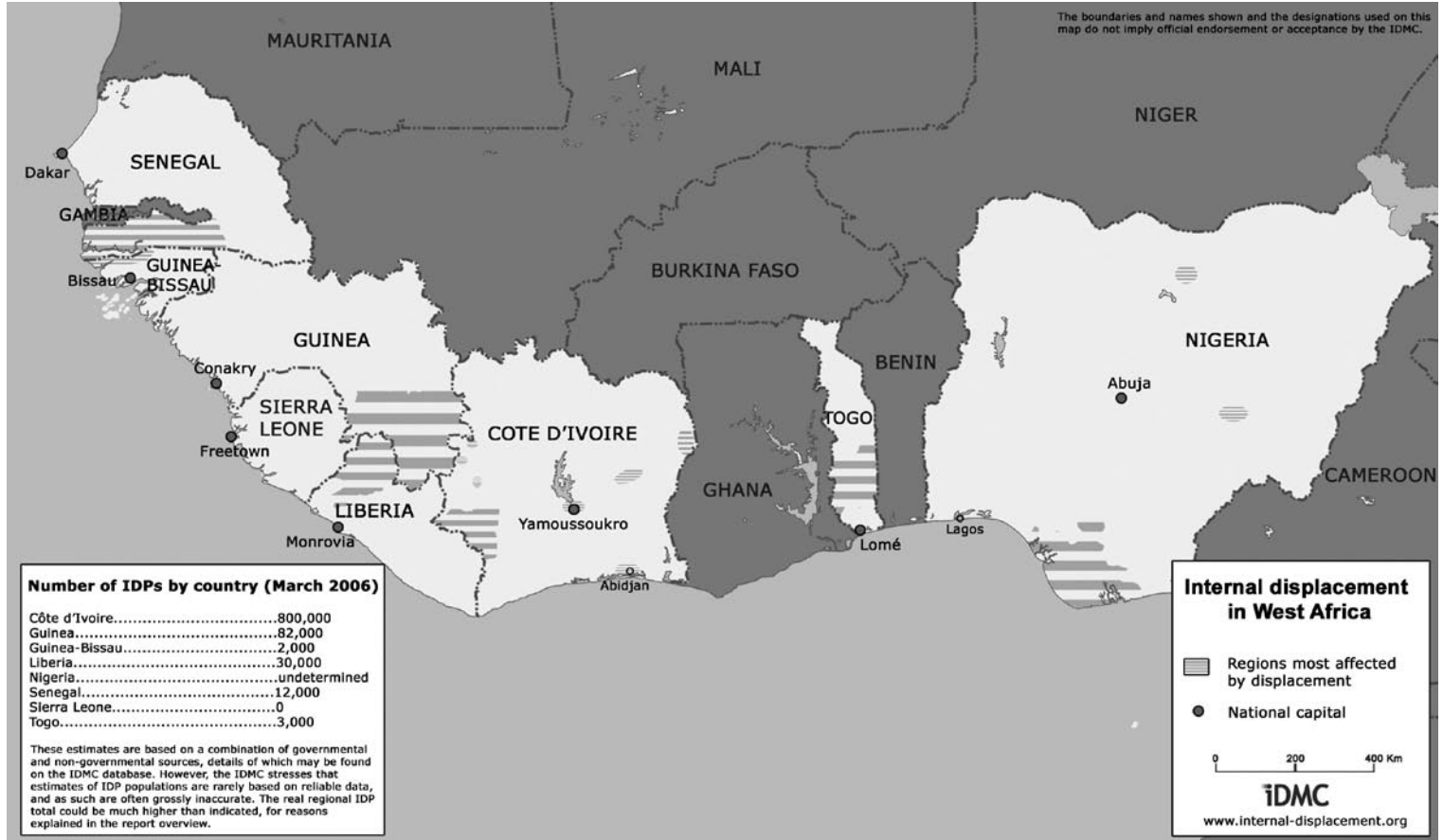
## THE REVOLVING DOOR OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN WEST AFRICA



NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL  
1946 - 2006

iDMC internal  
displacement  
monitoring  
centre

# Internal Displacement in West Africa



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## **Acknowledgements**

The report was written and researched by Claudia McGoldrick of the IDMC, with additional research (on Guinea and Senegal) by Hortence Mpako Foaleng. Part of the research was conducted during a series of fact-finding missions to the region in 2004- 2005. The report also relies heavily on information and analysis provided by a wide range of sources, including state authorities, UN departments and agencies, international and national NGOs, human rights organisations and donors.

For a full list of sources, please visit the respective Internal Displacement Profiles included in the IDMC's database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

March 2006

Cover photo: Young IDP girl, newly arrived at the Grafton camp, Sierra Leone. (Photo: Jon Spaul)

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# Foreword

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council is pleased to present this report on internal displacement in West Africa.

In line with the IDMC's broader aim of giving a regional focus to its monitoring and advocacy on situations of internal displacement in some 50 countries worldwide, this report provides information and analysis on what is undoubtedly one of the world's most significant regional displacement crises. Although the total number of IDPs in West Africa may – at the most conservative estimate – currently be fewer than one million (but possibly much higher), the potential for spiralling instability and massive levels of internal displacement is acute.

The Norwegian Refugee Council currently has field operations in Liberia, as it previously had in Sierra Leone, and is planning to begin IDP-related programmes in Côte d'Ivoire in 2006. Yet, as the report clearly shows, the overall national and international responses to situations of internal displacement in the region have been strikingly inadequate – both with regard to preventing displacement in the first place and responding to the humanitarian and protection needs of IDPs in a timely and systematic manner.

We hope that this report will serve to increase awareness and understanding of West Africa's internal displacement crisis and thus contribute to efforts aimed at improving national and international responses.

The report places special emphasis on the role of national governments, as they are responsible under international law for protecting the civilian population within their jurisdiction and providing them with humanitarian assistance if needed. The heads of state at the 2005 UN World Summit reconfirmed this when they recognised the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as an "important international framework" and "resolve(d) to take effective measures to increase the protection of internally displaced persons".

Despite the enormity of the challenge and the often daunting constraints, national governments in West Africa can – and must – do more to live up to their responsibilities vis-à-vis IDPs during all phases of displacement, from prevention right through to finding durable solutions for their return or resettlement.

The international community must also improve its efforts to prevent or end conflicts in the region, as well as to establish a credible humanitarian response system to address the needs of IDPs, who often suffer particular neglect despite their extreme vulnerability.

Elisabeth Rasmusson  
NRC Resident Representative and Head of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

## About this report

This report contains a general overview of the background and causes of conflict-induced internal displacement in West Africa, as well as a country-by-country overview of the main protection and assistance concerns of IDPs in six countries of the region: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Senegal. While the IDMC no longer actively monitors the situation in Sierra Leone, the integral part that country has played in West Africa's regional conflict and ensuing displacement crisis necessitated its inclusion in this report. And while the IDMC began monitoring the situation of internal displacement in Togo following the country's political crisis in 2005, the relatively small number of IDPs as well as the scarcity of relevant information on their situation has not warranted a full country overview.

The overviews are based on the internal displacement profiles included in the IDMC's database. For better readability, the country overviews are not footnoted, but all sources used can be found in the respective profiles included in the database [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

Each country overview also highlights some of the main gaps in the overall humanitarian response to IDPs in that particular country, and ends with key recommendations to the relevant national authorities. The objective of these recommendations is to underscore the primary responsibility of national authorities with regard to the provision of protection and assistance to IDPs within their jurisdiction, as highlighted in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Principle 3). In line with the approach advocated by the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, these recommendations aim at supporting state authorities in fulfilling their responsibility towards their citizens and thus better meeting their obligations as sovereign states.

The IDMC acknowledges that durable solutions to the plight of internal displacement also depend on political factors often beyond the control of the national authorities concerned. Nevertheless, the IDMC calls upon all state parties directly involved in unsolved conflicts and displacement crises to remove all causes of displacement as well as obstacles to the return of IDPs to their homes.

# Overview

When civil war broke out in Liberia at the end of 1989, it triggered an intractable cycle of conflict and displacement that would directly affect three other countries and indirectly affect several more. The violence that has ebbed and flowed between Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and more recently Côte d'Ivoire has created an extremely complex situation of displacement, both internally and across borders.

While accurate figures simply do not exist, virtually all of Liberia's 3 million population is estimated to have fled their homes at some time during 14 years of intermittent conflict, most of them becoming internally displaced – some for a few weeks and some for several years, and many of them several times over. Up to one third of Sierra Leone's 6 million population was estimated to have been internally displaced at the height of the country's 11-year civil war which ended in 2002. Up to 360,000 people became internally displaced when conflict erupted in Guinea in 2000-2001, and as many as 1 million Ivorians fled within Côte d'Ivoire when an abortive coup in September 2002 effectively split the country in half.

The end of Sierra Leone's civil war in 2002, followed in 2003 by Liberia's peace agreement and the eventual inauguration of a new democratically elected president in January 2006 gave rise to optimism that both countries are firmly on the road to recovery. Yet peace remains fragile. The UN peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) finally packed up and left at the end of 2005, while hundreds of thousands of refugees had returned. At the same time Liberia's highly criticised disarmament process left, by late 2005, some 26,000 former combatants still waiting for places in reintegration projects, with few prospects of gainful employment. The programme to return internally displaced people to their areas of origin was in many cases of questionable safety and sustainability. Root causes of the conflict in both countries – including endemic poverty and lack of economic opportunity, inequitable distribution of rich natural resources, poor governance, and cross-border flows of weapons and mercenaries – remain largely unchanged.

Côte d'Ivoire's beleaguered peace process seems particularly fragile. Ethnic tensions in the polarised country remain acute, and continue to periodically erupt into violence causing death and displacement. The conflict, in varying degrees, has so far eluded all military and diplomatic efforts to end it – including the deployment in 2004 of a 6,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI) on top of an existing contingent of 4,000 French peacekeepers, and the Linas-Marcoussis Accord signed by all parties to the conflict in January 2003. While parties to the conflict were discussing disarmament, ex-combatants were reportedly being recruited.<sup>1</sup> The postponement of elections scheduled for October 2005 and a troubled transition period – including the imposition of UN sanctions against three individuals in February 2006 following targeted violence against the UN<sup>2</sup> – further exacerbated political tensions. Any further setback could result in a rapid spread of violence causing massive displacement not only in Côte d'Ivoire, but also affecting the populations of Liberia, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali – countries from where about one quarter of the country's 16 million population originate.

The situation in Guinea is also volatile, particularly in the south-eastern Forest Region that is bordered by Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and that has been home to hundreds of thousands of refugees from all three countries. Thousands of former Guinean militiamen as well as Liberian fighters live in this impoverished region that has seen a steady rise in banditry and trade in small arms, and where inter-ethnic tension is high.

Political upheaval in Togo following the death of former President Gnassingbe Eyadema in February 2005 and the subsequent declaration by the army of his son Faure Gnassingbe as head of state raised the potential for regional instability. Although Gnassingbe was forced to step down and call elections in April 2005, violent



protests erupted when he was declared the winner in a disputed poll. In the ensuing fierce crackdown by Togolese security forces on opposition supporters, thousands of people fled mainly to neighbouring Benin and Ghana, and there were also some reports of relatively small-scale internal displacement.

Apart from West Africa's regional conflict, separate situations of internal displacement also exist in Senegal and Nigeria. In Senegal, a long-running separatist rebellion in the southern Casamance province officially ended in 2004, raising hopes for the return of several thousand IDPs – although divisions within the rebel movement itself erupted into renewed fighting in early 2006. Up to 64,000 people may have been internally displaced during the conflict, thousands killed and many others injured by landmines. And in Nigeria, which is Africa's most populous nation, a multitude of religious, ethnic and political fault lines that periodically erupt into communal violence has created a sizeable, albeit fluctuating internally displaced population – particularly since the return of democracy in 1999. Government sources say that the cumulative total of people displaced within Nigeria since 1999 may be as high as 3 million, although there has never been systematic registration or verification of numbers. There is clear cause for concern however that the level of conflict – and with it the level of internal displacement – may increase as the 2007 presidential elections draw nearer.

Guinea-Bissau's civil war of 1998-1999, sparked by an attempted military coup, caused up to 350,000 people to flee their homes. Most of the IDPs were believed to have returned to their homes within a couple of years. However, lingering political tensions have continued to jeopardise efforts to consolidate the peace and prevent renewed violence – not least the encroachment of periodic fighting into the border region from neighbouring Senegal.

As of early 2006, the most conservative estimate of the total number of IDPs in the region stood at a little under one million, based on a combination of governmental and non-governmental sources which may be found on the IDMC database (Côte d'Ivoire: 800,000; Guinea: 82,000; Liberia: 30,000; Senegal: 12,000; Togo: 3,000; Guinea-Bissau: 2,000; Nigeria: undetermined; Sierra Leone: 0). The real figure could be much higher, for a number of reasons. Firstly, estimates are rarely based on actual IDP registration exercises, and are notoriously unreliable. In the case of Nigeria, while some government sources reported a cumulative total of 3 million IDPs from 1999-2006, no current estimate appears to exist. Secondly, where registration has taken place, there are invariably large numbers of unregistered IDPs who usually fall outside official statistics and assistance programmes. Thirdly, in many cases IDPs who receive return assistance are automatically no longer considered as IDPs, regardless of whether or not durable solutions exist for their return and reintegration, as required by the UN Guiding Principles. Lastly, it is important to stress that even though current IDP estimates in the region may be relatively low, the potential for renewed and increased instability and massive population movements is, conversely, very high.

## Common causes of displacement

Although there are numerous causes at the root of West Africa's regional conflict, one of the main catalysts was undoubtedly Charles Taylor, the warlord who in 1989 plunged Liberia into the region's bloodiest and most destructive civil war since Biafra's attempt to secede from Nigeria.

Leading the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and with varying degrees of support from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Libya, Taylor launched an armed rebellion in the north of the country ostensibly to topple the Samuel Doe regime. Fighting quickly reached the capital, Monrovia. In 1990 the Economic

Community of West African states deployed a Nigerian-led peacekeeping mission (ECOMOG) to Liberia to restore order. ECOMOG's control did not extend beyond Monrovia, however, and the rest of the country was ruled by Taylor and other faction leaders battling over the country's rich natural resources, principally timber and to a lesser extent diamonds.<sup>3</sup> Taylor effectively controlled the Liberian countryside through the instigation of ethnic massacres and gross human rights violations. An estimated 150,000 people were killed and several hundred thousand internally displaced during the first phase of the conflict that lasted for seven years.

Taylor was also directly responsible for starting Sierra Leone's civil war in 1991, training and sponsoring the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels to effectively act as his proxy in the diamond-rich areas in the east of the country.<sup>4</sup> What began as a small incursion from Liberia turned into a brutal campaign of terror against civilians throughout the country that cost an estimated 50,000 lives and, at its height, forced up to one third of the country's 6 million people to flee their homes.



Charles Taylor, Liberian rebel leader and subsequently president, at his Gbarnga headquarters in 1994. Taylor was a driving force behind the conflict that eventually destabilised the entire region.  
(Claudia McGoldrick)

In 1997 Taylor won legitimacy through the ballot box, winning a landslide victory in the Liberian presidential contest. With plentiful resources to woo voters, Taylor had no need as such to rig the elections. He held the key to Liberia's destruction and ironically, to its reconstruction. "For many, Mr Taylor was a pragmatic choice – a choice based not on the lesser of evils but on the reasonable assumption that, if Mr Taylor lost the elections, he would make Liberia ungovernable".<sup>5</sup>

But peace in Liberia was short-lived. Predictable problems quickly surfaced: factional and ethnic tensions continued across the country, exacerbated by Taylor's tendency to brutality and despotism, and only about half of the estimated 60,000 Liberian fighters had been disarmed by the ECOMOG peacekeeping force. Less than two years after the elections, Liberian dissidents based in Guinea attacked north-western Liberia. Fighting between government forces and the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) spread throughout much of the country, worsened by the appearance of another rebel movement in 2003, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), which launched attacks on border areas with neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. Sporadic but intense fighting caused almost continuous displacement, eventually engulfing the capital Monrovia in June 2003 and causing a major humanitarian and human rights crisis.

Meanwhile the violence continued to escalate on a regional level. In 2000-2001 Guinea, which hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees from both Liberia and Sierra Leone, suffered a series of increasingly

Alluvial diamond mining in Kono district, eastern Sierra Leone, a key area of displacement during the conflict, 1996  
(Claudia McGoldrick)



violent cross-border attacks from both countries. In many cases the perpetrators of these attacks were forces loyal to President Taylor, targeting bases of Liberian dissidents (many of them refugees) in Guinea, although RUF rebels from Sierra Leone as well as a Guinean rebel group were also responsible for the mayhem.<sup>6</sup> The fighting resulted in the mass displacement of civilians, particularly in the resource-rich Parrot's Beak area. It was no coincidence that Guinea also has large diamond reserves and the conflict was widely seen as having "much, if not everything to do with Taylor's quest for economic reward and advantage".<sup>7</sup>

Then, in September 2002, a failed coup by disaffected soldiers marked the worst post-independence crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, once a beacon of stability and economic prosperity in the region. Mass displacement was caused by fighting and gross human rights violations on all sides that left the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI) rebels in control of much of the predominantly Muslim north of the country, and government forces holding the largely Christian south. Two new rebel factions soon emerged in the west of the country – the *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix* (MJP) and the *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirienne du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) – whose fighters included both Liberians and Sierra Leoneans.<sup>8</sup> The campaigning NGO Global Witness has reported on Charles Taylor's direct role in setting up these rebel groups, in collaboration with Liberian logging companies, with the ultimate aim of destabilising the government of Laurent Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire and installing a "friendlier" one. There was also evidence that in 2003 Taylor – (correctly) fearing indictment for war crimes by the Special Court in Sierra Leone – was planning to reignite the conflict there and regain access to the diamond resources.<sup>9</sup> A subsequent report showed links between Taylor, the RUF in Sierra Leone and diamond trading by al Qaeda.<sup>10</sup>

Taylor was thwarted however when in August 2003, under huge international pressure and surrounded by rebel forces, he went into exile in Nigeria. Clearly, however, Liberia's – and the region's – problems did not end there. In May 2005 a report by the Washington-based Coalition for International Justice confirmed that through a complex network of collaborators Taylor was continuing to finance armed groups and political parties with the aim of influencing not only Liberia's 2005 elections but ultimately the balance of regional power.<sup>11</sup>

Nigeria's agreement in March 2006 to allow Liberia to take Charles Taylor into custody, in response to a formal extradition request by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was widely hailed as a great day for justice across West Africa. Taylor was subsequently delivered into the custody of the Special Court in Sierra Leone where he was the first former African head of state to face prosecution for war crimes.

The four countries at the heart of West Africa's regional conflict also have common internal factors that lie behind the violence, providing fertile ground for manipulative politicians and warmongers to stoke unrest and achieve their own ends. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire all suffer crushing poverty – despite their abundance of natural resources – with unremittingly bleak human development indicators.<sup>12</sup> The overall lack of economic opportunity, exacerbated by the inequitable distribution of resources by corrupt or inefficient governments, has in each of these countries produced a vast pool of frustrated youth who are easily incited to fight – many of them in several conflicts. A March 2005 report by Human Rights Watch documented the testimonies of these “regional warriors” who “unanimously identified crippling poverty and hopelessness as the key factors which motivated them to risk dying in subsequent armed conflicts”. Many of the fighters were forcibly recruited as children either by Liberian or Sierra Leonean rebels, and “thrust into a world of brutality, physical hardship, forced labour and drug abuse, they emerged as perpetrators, willing to rape, abduct, mutilate and even kill” – as well as to loot and pillage. Failures in disarmament and reintegration processes have also helped to ensure the continuing availability of these mercenary fighters.

Although none of the conflicts have been specifically over ethnicity, this has in varying degrees been a factor in both conflict and displacement. The existence of identical ethnic groups across the four countries has contributed to instability in border areas and has influenced the complex patterns of population displacement in the region. For example, the Mandingo and Krahn ethnic groups in Liberia have a strong ethnic affinity with identical groups in Guinea and Sierra Leone. There is also an ethnic affinity between the same groups in the southwest of Côte d'Ivoire and the eastern part of Liberia.<sup>13</sup> Ethnic Mandingo and Krahn people in Liberia were traditionally regarded as allies of the repressive Doe regime and as enemies of Charles Taylor, who found support among the Gio and Mano tribes. As a result, throughout the Liberian conflict civilians on all sides were often targeted for attack and human rights abuses on the basis of their ethnicity and perceived political allegiance.<sup>14</sup> The LURD rebel movement was also dominated by members of the Mandingo (or Malinké) ethnic group, which is allied with the same group in Guinea. President Lansana Conté, the current head of state, belongs to the Soussou people of western Guinea, while a third major group – the Peuls of central and northern Guinea – are seen as allied with many of the smaller tribes in the Forest Region. As internal pressures have grown against the authoritarian rule of Conté – including an assassination attempt in January 2005 – fears have been raised of widespread ethnic conflict in the country.<sup>15</sup>

Ethnicity and nationality, as well as religion, have been used by politicians as a propaganda tool to incite conflict and cause displacement most particularly in Côte d'Ivoire. For more than three decades after independence from France in 1960, the autocratic but tactical rule of Côte d'Ivoire's first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, ensured religious and ethnic harmony as well as relative economic prosperity until his death in 1993. Houphouët-Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, sowed the seeds of ethnic discord in 1995 when he introduced the concept of “*Ivoirité*” in order to restrict candidature for presidential elections, and specifically to exclude his main political rival, Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim from the north of the country whom Bédié insisted did not have two Ivorian parents as stipulated by the constitution. This was a key cause of the September 2002 coup attempt by disaffected soldiers that presaged the civil war. Since then the current head of state, President Laurent Gbagbo, has at best failed to resolve the heightened ethnic and religious divisions in the country, and these have been used by both sides to the conflict to justify widespread killing and human rights abuses that have caused the internal displacement of up to one million people.<sup>16</sup>

## Constrained response

Despite, or because of, the fact that internal displacement in West Africa presents a humanitarian challenge of daunting proportions, the overall response has been far from adequate. The responses in numerous countries in the region, in varying degrees, have shared some common constraints: weak or non-existent national response capacities; endemic insecurity resulting in limited humanitarian access; an acute lack of funding for humanitarian programmes; and in many cases weak capacity and coordination at the international level, particularly between UN peacekeeping missions and humanitarian operations. Some of the main concerns in the national and international responses are highlighted in the individual country overviews.

On a regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has played an important role in working towards the restoration of peace and stability in conflict-affected member states, through both military and political interventions. The first ECOWAS peacekeeping initiative (ECOMOG) was launched in Liberia in 1990, and was later extended to Sierra Leone in 1997 to assist the country's peace efforts, as well as to Guinea-Bissau in the wake of the 1998-1999 conflict. Although ECOMOG troops were withdrawn from Sierra Leone by the beginning of 2000, ECOWAS member states contributed troops to the UN peacekeeping mission there (UNAMSIL) as well as to various peace initiatives including patrolling the common borders of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In 2003, ECOWAS troops worked alongside French peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire, maintaining a buffer zone between the government-controlled south and the rebel-held north of the country, and were subsequently "re-hatted" as part of a new UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI). ECOWAS and the UN have continued to cooperate in controlling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region.

ECOWAS has also initiated regional conflict resolution efforts on a political level, in some cases with the support of the African Union's Peace and Security Council. Examples include Togo, where both ECOWAS and the AU imposed sanctions after Faure Gnassingbe was installed as president in February 2005, and Côte d'Ivoire where both organisations have been involved in facilitating peace talks aimed at securing the full implementation of the country's successive peace agreements since January 2003.



Nigerian ECOMOG peacekeeper,  
Tubmanburg, Liberia, 1994  
(Claudia McGoldrick)

## COUNTRY OVERVIEWS



Following Liberia's credible elections in October 2005 there is real cause for optimism for the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by 14 years of civil war. While the new government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took the first steps towards economic and security sector reform, IDPs and refugees continued to return home in large numbers. The assisted return of some 314,000 registered IDPs was expected to be completed by April 2006 and IDP camps officially closed. The presence of 15,000 UNMIL peacekeepers contributed towards the restoration of peace across the country. Yet huge challenges clearly remain. Years of conflict, compounded by acute mismanagement and poor governance, have devastated Liberia's infrastructure and economy, leaving it one of the poorest countries in the world. IDPs have returned to areas without basic social services or livelihood opportunities, in some cases causing them to drift back to camps or urban areas. Unknown numbers of unregistered IDPs continue to occupy public buildings in the capital Monrovia in often grim conditions. Protection concerns as well as urgent humanitarian needs still exist in remaining camps as well as areas of return. Crucially, the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants is incomplete, largely due to funding constraints, posing a risk to sustained peace and stability. The volatile political situation in the region, particularly in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, also has the potential to reverse the progress made.

### Protection concerns

While the Liberian conflict was characterised from the outset by horrific human rights abuses against civilians by all parties to the conflict, IDPs have consistently been identified as one of the most vulnerable groups. In the return phase there have been major concerns about abuses against both returning IDPs and those still in camps. This is largely as a result of disgruntled ex-combatants who have not benefited from reintegration assistance and lack employment opportunities. Throughout 2005, Human Rights Watch documented recently disarmed Liberian combatants – including children – being recruited to fight on behalf of the government in Côte d'Ivoire, perpetuating the regional cycle of conflict and displacement.

Returnee and displaced women and girls have remained particularly at risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence by armed gangs and former militia members. Rape was so pervasive throughout the Liberian conflict that the UN described it as weapon of war. In 2005 reports of gender-based violence continued from all parts of the country, and girls as young as 12 were known to have turned to prostitution as a survival mechanism. However, in December 2005 new legislation made rape illegal for the first time in Liberia, with rapists facing possible life imprisonment depending on the gravity of the offence. This came soon after the establishment of a Women and Children's Protection Unit within the Liberian National Police, also seen as a positive contribution towards the protection of women and children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

In the run-up to the October 2005 elections, human rights organisations warned that while some progress had been made during the transitional period, Liberia's prospects for peace continued to face numerous threats, including an incomplete demobilisation programme, the widespread availability of small arms, a culture of impunity, endemic corruption and mismanagement, a weak judicial system, ethnic discrimination and crushing poverty. Rights organisations called on the new government to urgently address these issues, particularly judicial reform.



## Chronic humanitarian crisis

The repeated cycle of conflict and displacement in Liberia since 1989 has held the country in the grip of a humanitarian crisis that has been largely hidden from the outside world. As humanitarian access gradually improved with the deployment of UNMIL troops from late 2003, the scale of the crisis became apparent.

While the UN reported in late 2005 that around 80 per cent of all IDPs who had returned may have actually stayed in their areas of return, due in part to the increasing absorption capacity of communities, there is still clearly a serious lack of basic services and infrastructure in key areas of return – such as north-western Lofa county which was once home to many of Liberia's IDPs and which was almost entirely devastated in the war. Almost two thirds of communities in Liberia do not have adequate shelter. The health care system throughout the country remains in emergency phase, with agencies and NGOs implementing more than 90 per cent of health service delivery as of early 2006. More than 75 per cent of the population has no access to referral care services such as essential and emergency obstetric care, resulting in some of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. The lack of water and sanitation facilities is a matter for serious concern: less than ten per cent of the rural population is estimated to have access to safe water, resulting in various waterborne diseases.

Liberia is also one of the most food insecure countries in the world, with less than ten per cent of arable land being cultivated. This is attributable to a number of factors, including the continued disruption of agricultural systems due to the displacement of farming communities, limited access to food due to the absence of market mechanisms, high unemployment and lack of economic opportunities, socioeconomic dislocation and the breakdown of family and community coping mechanisms especially among IDPs who have been displaced, in some cases, up to seven times since April 1999. Childhood malnutrition in particular remains high, with 39 per cent of children under five stunted.

The humanitarian situation of IDPs remaining in camps has also continued to be grim. With the official IDP return process expected to end in April 2006, many camps have been closed, the huts demolished and services such as health posts largely reduced. According to some NGOs, the conditions in the remaining camps – including those officially closed but still housing thousands of unregistered IDPs (ie. those without a valid food ration card) – are deplorable. Not only have service providers been pulling out of the camps, partly due to lack of funding, but landowners have in some cases been stripping the camps of water pipes and other infrastructure. Shelters are in a state of collapse, and water and sanitation facilities are seriously lacking. The absence of a clear plan for the consolidation and integration of IDPs who for various reasons do not wish to return has exacerbated the situation. Reasons cited include inadequate return packages and lack of transport, continuing security fears, and lack of infrastructure and services in home areas.



Displaced man in Monrovia,  
Liberia, 1995  
(Claudia McGoldrick)



Displaced girls at Clay camp, near  
Monrovia, Liberia, 1995  
(Claudia McGoldrick)

## Hopes for improved IDP response

The October 2005 elections provided the first essential step towards restoring Liberia's credibility internationally after years of pariah status. Liberia's international isolation reached its depths during the rule of Charles Taylor who fled into exile in Nigeria in August 2003, but who in March 2006 was finally brought before the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone to face prosecution for war crimes.

A UN sanctions regime, banning the sale or supply of arms, diamonds and timber, as well as travel, was again renewed by the Security Council at the end of 2005, on the basis that the situation in Liberia continued to constitute a threat to international peace and security. At the same time donor support to humanitarian assistance in Liberia has been extremely low – notwithstanding the departure of Charles Taylor in 2003 – largely as a result of rampant corruption within the transitional government.

Donors have therefore been encouraged by the government's endorsement, in September 2005, of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) that aims to stamp out corruption and achieve financial accountability by placing foreign experts in key administrative positions. The UN also welcomed the adoption of the GEMAP agreement, saying it carried "much promise" in addressing the problems that have in the past hampered donor funding.

The previous National Transitional Government of Liberia did not have the financial or technical resources to fulfil its primary responsibilities for IDP protection and assistance. While hopes may be high that the new government will usher in a new era of positive change, it is clear that at present the national agency responsible for coordinating assistance to IDPs – the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) – continues to be hampered by a serious lack of capacity and resources.

Given the previous transitional government's incapacity, as well as the overwhelming humanitarian needs in Liberia – and within that the magnitude of internal displacement – there has been a relatively huge international presence, bringing with it confusing and sometimes highly divisive coordination mechanisms.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) – with almost 15,000 troops one of the largest peacekeeping missions in the world – is headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) supported by two deputies who include the Humanitarian Coordinator. A key concern, particularly among international NGOs in Liberia, has been the fact that the SRSG effectively manages not only the Humanitarian Coordinator but also all the UNMIL military contingents, raising fears that humanitarian mandates take second place to political and military ones.



International NGOs in Liberia have consistently voiced concerns that humanitarian coordination particularly of the return process has been politically driven by UNMIL. The UN's desire for a "success story" ahead of October 2005 elections in Liberia, they have claimed, has been the main reason for what they see as a rushed and poorly planned reintegration process. They have argued that the necessary safeguards of voluntariness, the availability of full and objective information, and the declaration of return areas as safe based on an objective assessment, all risked being jeopardised. A dire lack of services as well as continuing protection concerns in areas of return has reportedly resulted in IDPs returning to the camps, or creating new settlements near the capital Monrovia, according to NGOs.

However, the year 2005 also saw some significant changes towards strengthening IDP response at the international level. Humanitarian reform globally resulted in the assignment of clear responsibilities to lead organisations at sector level, with a priority in relation to the protection and care of IDPs. UNHCR agreed to take on sectoral responsibility for camp management, emergency shelter and protection – with Liberia identified as one of three pilot countries for 2006. Although crucial issues remain to be resolved – not least the question of additional funding and resources to allow UNHCR to fulfil its new responsibilities – UN agencies and NGOs in Liberia have generally been very supportive of the new "cluster approach".

A national policy framework – the Results-Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) – was adopted by the international community and the transitional government in 2004 designed to address all aspects of Liberia's rehabilitation, including IDP and refugee return. At the end of 2004 both humanitarian and targeted transitional needs were integrated into the RFTF Humanitarian Appeal. However, donor reluctance to continue supporting reconstruction activities in view of government corruption – resulting eventually in the endorsement of GEMAP – also threatened the release of funds for urgent humanitarian activities. The UN therefore issued a Consolidated Appeal for 2006, requesting \$121 million to address priority humanitarian needs, which was seen as a more effective way of ensuring sustained donor support. The term of the RFTF is due to end in March 2006, while discussions have been underway on the launch of a Common Country Assessment/UN Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF) process as well as an interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper during 2006.

Pending the full development of the CCA/UNDAF, and with the official return programme of registered IDPs expected to be completed in April 2006, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP have established a Joint Action Plan for Community Based Recovery (2006-2007). This provides a framework for a collaborative response to the reintegration of displaced populations in Liberia – targeting community-based projects aimed at the restoration of basic services, protection, productive livelihoods, shelter and community infrastructures. The Action Plan also supports national institutions to progressively take the lead in directing the recovery process.

#### **Key recommendations to the government:**

- Ensure IDP return is in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, particularly the right to return voluntarily, in safety and dignity
- Develop a clear plan for the consolidation and integration of IDPs who do not wish to return
- Support income-generating activities, including job creation, in return areas to help ensure successful reintegration for both returnees and ex-combatants
- Cooperate fully with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created to probe human rights abuses from 1979-2003



Almost 250,000 displaced Sierra Leoneans were resettled or had returned to their areas of origin by the end of 2002, according to UN figures, officially ending the situation of internal displacement in the country and further consolidating its recovery after more than a decade of devastating civil war. As in Liberia, the sustainability of return and resettlement was in many cases questionable with some NGOs in particular criticising the whole process as being politically driven ahead of elections in 2002. While peace and security have continued to hold, even with the departure of the remaining UNAMSIL peacekeepers at the end of 2005, this risks being jeopardised by a number of unresolved issues – including extreme poverty, high unemployment, corruption and inequitable distribution of resources. Indeed some of these issues may be brought into yet sharper focus as political tensions rise ahead of national elections to be held in 2007. The UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) was established at the beginning of 2006 with a broad mandate that includes building national capacity for conflict prevention and preparing for free and fair elections in 2007.

## **Gross human rights abuses**

Sierra Leone's 11 year civil war was characterised by widespread and systematic sexual violence and rape, as well as mutilation of civilians – many of them while fleeing. Lack of adequate protection of internally displaced populations was a major cause for concern throughout the conflict. Large parts of the country had no law enforcement system for several years, and while civilians outside rebel-held areas received some protection from civil defence militia and the West African ECOMOG forces, this was clearly inadequate. The atrocities meted out on civilians by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels during the January 1999 attack on Freetown were just one example of this failure.

As in Liberia, rebels in Sierra Leone regularly abducted children, either to fight in combat or as domestic and sex slaves. According to Save the Children-UK, children constituted about 60 per cent of IDPs in Sierra Leone and as many as 1.8 million children may at some time have been displaced since the outbreak of the war in 1991 – making them extremely vulnerable. More than 5,000 parents reported their children missing just in the wake of the rebel attack on Freetown in January 1999.

Since the end of Sierra Leone's civil war in 2002 and the subsequent resettlement of hundreds of thousands of IDPs, the country has started to recover from more than a decade of trauma and devastation. The RUF was officially disarmed, and a UN-mandated Special Court indicted several people for war crimes, including Charles Taylor. The UN peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, finally withdrew at the end of 2005 after successfully contributing to the restoration of peace and security in the country.

Yet the overall situation remains fragile and challenges remain to ensure the consolidation of state authority and maintain security throughout the country, particularly in border areas. Economic recovery has been very limited, with poverty, high unemployment, and continuing corruption and mismanagement within the government all presenting urgent challenges. Frustration especially among young demobilised fighters who lack sustainable reintegration opportunities constitutes a major risk to continuing stability, more so in light of reports of continuing cross-border flows of diamonds, arms and mercenaries. And while many of the egregious human rights violations that caused or resulted from the civil war are no longer taking place, there is still not a general culture of respect for basic human rights. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed its mandate in 2004, the government has yet to prepare a comprehensive action plan for implementing the recommendations.

## Unresolved humanitarian needs

In stark parallel to the current situation in Liberia, many internally displaced Sierra Leoneans returned to areas with no basic infrastructure or social services in place, creating acute humanitarian needs and causing some resettlers to drift back to urban areas. Resettlement assistance was only provided for registered IDPs, not for the many thousands who were either unregistered, or who did not wish to be resettled for various reasons, including security fears. Homelessness in the capital Freetown has become a serious problem.

While the agriculture sector has been recovering since the end of the conflict in 2002, with food production gradually moving towards pre-war levels, food security is still weak particularly in eastern and southern areas to where many IDPs returned. WFP food aid for vulnerable populations is still required. Access to food is restricted in many cases by high prices, rampant unemployment and overall lack of economic opportunity, as well as poor infrastructure. Major rehabilitation of the education and health care sectors is also still needed.

## When does displacement end?

While some hailed Sierra Leone's resettlement process as a success story in which the wishes of internally displaced people themselves prevailed, others insisted it was a highly flawed and politically driven process.

President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah first took office in 1996 in war-time elections, was toppled in a military coup one year later, and was subsequently reinstated with help from West African peacekeepers and British troops. At the beginning of 2002, with a large UN mission deployed across the country and disarmament completed, Kabbah declared the war to be officially over – just four months ahead of presidential elections that won him another five year term in office. By this time resettlement was proceeding at full speed. Displaced Sierra Leoneans were resettled in accordance with the national government's Resettlement Strategy, which applied to IDPs as well as refugees and ex-combatants with their dependants, and was meant to apply only when resettlement areas were "sufficiently safe to allow for the return of displaced people in safety and dignity". UNHCR was one of numerous agencies that helped to plan and implement the strategy, aiming to harmonise the resettlement of refugees and IDPs. Both groups were offered resettlement packages, which included a two-month food ration, household utensils, plastic sheeting, and in some cases, transportation. Some 220,000 registered IDPs were resettled in several phases in 2001 and 2002. Many more returned home spontaneously. Officially, at least, this left no more IDPs in Sierra Leone.



Remains of a RUF rebel in burnt out house, Makeni-Kono road, Sierra Leone, 1997 (Claudia McGoldrick)

Not surprisingly, the resettlement process raised some thorny issues – all of which may be applied to the ongoing process in Liberia. Firstly, nobody could be sure of the real number of IDPs in the country since during a decade of conflict there were always large numbers of unregistered IDPs. Only registered IDPs were eligible for assistance in the camps, and for resettlement packages. With registration itself often unreliable, it was reasonable to assume that there was still an unknown number of IDPs who were not recognised and would not be assisted to return home.



Displaced girls who have undergone female genital mutilation as part of their initiation into the secret 'Bondo Society': Grafton camp, near Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1997. The practice of female genital mutilation on sometimes very young girls – which raised serious protection concerns in IDP camps – remains widespread today  
(Claudia McGoldrick)

Secondly, there were also many IDPs who did not wish to be resettled for various reasons. Some were traumatised, some had security fears related to their areas of origin, some had lost their coping mechanisms and had become dependent on camp life, while others were unwilling to return to areas where they knew there was a lack of infrastructure and basic services. Many had become urbanised in the capital, Freetown, adding to a growing problem of homelessness. NGO sources in Sierra Leone privately reported that about 10,000-20,000 "unofficial" IDPs remained, mostly in urban areas. Since one of the principles of the government's resettlement strategy was to discourage dependency on humanitarian aid and prolonged displacement when areas of return were declared safe, there was little if any assistance available for "residual" IDPs.

Another contentious issue was that some IDPs may have been resettled to unsafe areas. The declaration of areas as "safe for resettlement" – the main factor in effectively ending displacement – was based on a number of criteria spelled out in the government's resettlement strategy. These criteria included the complete absence of hostilities, unhindered and safe access of humanitarian workers and sizeable spontaneous return movements. While the entire country was eventually declared safe for resettlement, concern was expressed in some cases that certain areas were prematurely classified as safe, or that established criteria were not properly applied, especially in light of the volatile situation in Liberia. The downsizing and eventual withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, heightened anxieties for some. Allegations were also made that insufficient or even misleading information was given to displaced people about conditions in their areas of origin.

A further cause for concern was that inadequate resettlement packages, combined with a chronic lack of shelter and basic services in areas of return, caused many IDPs to return once again to urban areas. Plans for

community rehabilitation programmes had in many cases not yet been developed, partly due to insufficient donor funding.

NGOs were among the harshest critics of the government-led resettlement programme. MSF claimed that the government, with the UN, practically forced people to return – ahead of elections and ahead of the planting season in order to avoid food aid dependence for another agricultural season; that in many cases return could not be described as voluntary because IDPs were not given the information to make an informed decision; that inadequate support during both the transit and rehabilitation phases meant that IDPs were returning in neither safety or dignity as required by the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; and that in some cases resettlement was taking place to areas considered by the UN as too dangerous for its own staff. While the UN acknowledged that numerous challenges had arisen during the resettlement process, which needed to be urgently addressed, it also said that the MSF report to some extent focused on specific issues out of context, thereby misrepresenting the full reality of the situation. However, various other NGOs were also critical of the enormous security, political and socio-economic pressures faced by IDPs in their “voluntary” return home.

**Key recommendations to the government:**

- Support income-generating activities, including job creation, in key return areas to help ensure successful reintegration for both returnees and ex-combatants
- Focus on rehabilitation of rural infrastructure in key return areas where food security is particularly weak
- Help ensure the sustainability of return by giving sustained attention to the provision of critical services, mainly education, health and sanitation
- Prepare a comprehensive plan for implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Guinea is still struggling to cope with the legacy of the civil wars in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia. The country hosted nearly one million refugees from these two countries for almost ten years, creating ethnic tensions and economic decline. Tens of thousands of people continue to be displaced inside Guinea as a result of fighting in the border regions in 2000-2001 – although the scope of internal displacement remains unclear. No comprehensive survey has been carried out since 2002, when the government put the total number of internally displaced at 82,000. Guinea's internal problems – not least frustration with the dictatorial President Lansana Conté who narrowly missed assassination in January 2005 – combined with a number of external threats have contributed to a growing sense of insecurity among Guineans. The conflict in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and the incomplete reintegration of Liberian ex-combatants – many of them trained in Guinea – continue to have a destabilising effect.

### **Acute protection concerns**

In Guinea, IDPs to a large extent integrated with resident populations. As was the case with many Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees displaced by the fighting in Guinea, it became apparent that Guinean IDPs also suffered human rights abuses during flight. According to an Amnesty International report published in 2001, Guinean civilians were killed, beaten, raped and abducted by armed political groups, including the RUF, in cross-border attacks from Sierra Leone. Women and children, estimated by the UN to make up 60 per cent of the IDP population, have been at particular risk. While large numbers of Guinean IDPs are believed to have returned to their homes by late 2002, there is scant data on the scope of the country's displacement crisis. The continuous movement of populations in the border areas and confusion about the categorisation of IDPs, refugees and Guineans returning from neighbouring countries has complicated efforts to identify the internally displaced as a group with particular needs and vulnerabilities.

Protection needs remain acute amid growing concern over ethnic tensions and tensions between refugees and host communities in the Forest Region – both worsened by a steadily declining economy. Border areas remain highly volatile, with an abundance of small arms and roaming fighters from Guinea as well as Liberia and Sierra Leone ready for recruitment by the highest bidder. This has also increased the risk of forced recruitment of children, sexual and gender-based violence particularly against refugee and displaced women and children, rising levels of crime and armed banditry, and increased levels of HIV/AIDS. Deteriorating security in Côte d'Ivoire with the resulting population movements would further impact on the situation in Guinea.

### **Deteriorating humanitarian situation**

The humanitarian situation of IDPs in Guinea remains fragile almost six years after the height of the fighting. While some emergency assistance was provided at the time of the conflict, longer-term needs have generally been neglected. There has been no comprehensive assessment of the current needs of IDPs in Guinea, and no assistance with return and reintegration. The situation has been further blurred by the fact that most IDPs took refuge with overburdened host communities in urban districts.

Fighting in the border areas of Guinea's Forest Region caused major destruction in towns such as Guéckédou and Macenta, where 90 per cent of destroyed homes and public buildings still need to be rebuilt or repaired.



In Guéckédou, at least 25 to 30 per cent of returned IDPs are in need of food and shelter assistance. While some returnees have been able to resume agricultural activities, the majority lack the necessary seeds and tools. Host communities have borne the brunt of assisting the IDPs, putting an enormous strain on already limited school and health care facilities and resulting in food shortages and increased morbidity. Overall living conditions and coping mechanisms have steadily eroded as economic conditions continue to worsen.

In rural areas, access to arable land is still limited and the UN has reported that some 90 per cent of the population in general are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. One in three households is reported to be confronted with severe malnutrition, with children under five and pregnant and lactating women most affected. The nutritional situation has deteriorated considerably and is most worrying in the Forest Region. Lack of access to basic health and water services, poor hygiene as well as precarious living conditions have contributed to malnutrition as well as to the re-emergence of diseases such as polio, yellow fever and cholera. Most IDPs willing to return to their areas of origin, or to integrate into their areas of displacement, need assistance with protection, return and reintegration packages, including access to arable land, agricultural inputs, basic health, water and sanitation, and education services, according to the UN.

## Negligible response

In Guinea IDPs have effectively been an invisible problem and the humanitarian response to them negligible at best, a situation exacerbated by a serious lack of resources. The government of ailing President Lansana Conté – re-elected for another seven year term in December 2003 – has been accused of crushing opposition and failing to implement reforms related to rule of law, respect for human rights and economic recovery. As a result, in 2004 most international donors – including the European Union, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – cut their bilateral cooperation and suspended their activities in the country. This in turn has been used as an excuse by the government for failing to maintain basic social infrastructures and services, and exacerbating the subsistence needs of vulnerable groups such as IDPs, Guinean returnees and host communities. The UN warned this could lead to a humanitarian crisis even in the absence of a war or a natural disaster. However, 2005 saw a measure of political progress – including the resumption of dialogue with the opposition and preparations for municipal elections – that resulted in the resumption of cooperation by key donors.

Many houses in Guéckédou remain in ruins several years after the fighting, Guinea, 2004  
(Mpako Foaleng/IDMC)



Yet various factors continue to hamper effective IDP response in Guinea. The government body with primary responsibility for coordinating humanitarian assistance, including for IDPs, is the *Service National pour l'Action Humanitaire* (SENAH). Although SENAH is present in all four regions of Guinea, it is limited in both capacity and resources. Other than the immediate emergency response to the 2000-2001 attacks in Guinea's border areas, there has been scant assistance for IDPs, partly due to the lack of data on their numbers and needs. There has to date been no comprehensive vulnerability assessment of the relief and recovery needs of IDPs, returnees and host communities.

Moreover, Guinea hosted nearly one million refugees for almost ten years, with some 60,000 refugees from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire remaining in camps in 2005. The lion's share of humanitarian assistance has been targeted at refugee populations. The 2005 Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal (CAP) for Guinea requested \$39 million to provide assistance to conflict-affected populations, including IDPs, in and around the Forest Region, Haute Guinea and other areas. While 51 per cent of this amount was eventually funded, the majority was for UNHCR programmes.

The lack of a proper framework for tackling the protection and assistance needs of IDPs in Guinea is a fundamental issue. In most cases IDPs benefit only incidentally from relief and rehabilitation assistance provided to vulnerable groups in general. This includes improvement of access to health services, water, education, agriculture, food security and income generating programmes in the Forest Region and Haute Guinea – often implemented by UN agencies and NGOs using funds from their bilateral country programmes rather than through the CAP. Yet social indicators among communities hosting IDPs are comparatively lower than among refugees living in camps, and are continuing to slide ever lower.

**Key recommendations to the government:**

- Develop a national humanitarian action plan prioritising the needs of IDPs, returnees and host communities
- Develop and implement a strategy for IDP return or resettlement that is line with the UN Guiding Principles
- Improve and maintain basic infrastructure and social services in areas hosting IDPs
- Support peace and reconciliation efforts in areas hosting IDPs, returnees and ex-combatants





Côte d'Ivoire's volatile political situation has repeatedly raised fears of a return to all-out conflict, leaving the country's estimated 800,000 IDPs facing an increasingly precarious future. While South Africa's mediation efforts failed to narrow the gap between the government of President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebel *Forces Nouvelles*, and the transition period after the collapsed October 2005 elections giving particular cause for concern, many UN agencies and NGOs in the country made contingency plans for the "worst case scenario" entailing massive displacement and refugee flows into neighbouring countries. Meanwhile existing IDPs have been largely neglected and in an extremely vulnerable situation, the vast majority of them effectively hidden in desperately overburdened host communities. At the heart of the conflict, long-standing tensions between indigenous communities and settlers from neighbouring countries including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (as well as Ivorians from northern ethnic groups) – essentially over land – remain particularly acute in the volatile western region. Here, inter-community attacks and low level displacement have been continuing unabated. These tensions, exploited and exaggerated into a form of xenophobic hatred by politicians at the highest level, hold the key both to the country's destruction and, if properly addressed, its possible reconstruction.

## A protection crisis

Throughout the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, IDPs have been particularly vulnerable to serious and widespread human rights abuses committed by both government and rebel militia and youth groups, mostly with impunity. There have been continuing reports of attacks against civilians in general by all parties to the conflict – including killings, disappearances, torture and destruction. Extortion and racketeering are rampant throughout the country. Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against displaced women and girls, is of major concern. Repeated displacement and lack of access to education has resulted in rising levels of prostitution and domestic slavery. Sexual exploitation of displaced girls by the "impartial forces" (covering both UNOCI and French peacekeepers) has also been reported by humanitarian agencies in Côte d'Ivoire. More than one reliable source has given detailed information about the "procurement" of displaced girls for sex by peacekeeping troops, including inside IDP centres.

Due to the ongoing inflammation of ethnic and religious tensions, displaced Ivorians have been particularly vulnerable to abuse at the hands of armed fighters as well as local communities, particularly in the cocoa-rich western region. There, UNOCI's Human Rights Division reports constant inter-community clashes and displacements, particularly where IDPs no longer have access to their plantations. Militant youth groups continue to be particularly active between Guiglo and Bolequin, towards the Liberian border, with the villages of Kaade and Guinkin as worrying trouble spots.

Important protection issues have also been raised by the premature return of IDPs to their areas of residence in the western region. Although landowners have in some cases encouraged the return of IDPs to prepare for the start of the agricultural season, local populations have reportedly been alarmed and frightened by the return of "non-native" settlers. Likewise, some IDPs are



IDPs taking refuge at the Duékoué Catholic Mission, Côte d'Ivoire, 2005 (Claudia McGoldrick/IDMC)



Displaced man in Guiglo IDP camp, Côte d'Ivoire, 2005  
(Claudia McGoldrick/ IDMC)

unwilling to return before disarmament takes place. In some cases where return has been encouraged, for example by the UN's pilot return project in the village of Fengolo, returnees have found their plantations occupied, resulting in dangerous inter-community tensions and urgent calls for local peace and reconciliation work

As a result, some communities are effectively stuck in a situation of internal displacement: for example, many ethnic Baoulé from the northern town of Bouaké displaced in Yamoussoukro are unwilling or unable to return home because of security fears. Without access to employment, IDPs have thus become particularly vulnerable to recruitment by both government and rebel forces. In the rebel *Forces nouvelles* areas, for example around the north western town of Man, child soldiers (including girls) are widely in evidence particularly at checkpoints.

In Abidjan, the government policy of destroying shantytowns housing largely West African immigrants who were perceived to support the rebellion – at its height in late 2002 – has left an estimated 120,000 IDPs in the city, many of them in an extremely precarious state. With ethnic tensions never far from the surface, immigrants, northern Ivorians and Muslims – including the many internally displaced – remain particularly vulnerable to attacks by pro-government militia that are active in many areas of the city.

In an unprecedented move, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions in February 2006 against three Ivorian political figures it considered guilty of a range of serious human rights abuses and who constituted "a threat to the peace and reconciliation process in Cote d'Ivoire". These included two leaders of the Young Patriots, a pro-government militia, as well as a rebel leader. The decision to impose the travel ban and freeze the assets of the three individuals finally came after several days of orchestrated violence against UN peacekeepers and humanitarian offices in January – incited largely by pro-government militia – that forced the retreat of hundreds of troops and civilian staff, and caused millions of dollars worth of damage.

## Hidden humanitarian needs

The humanitarian situation of the vast majority of Ivorian IDPs – effectively hidden within overburdened and also vulnerable host communities – is evidently very poor.

There is only one purpose-built IDP camp in Côte d'Ivoire, in the western town of Guiglo, housing some 6,800 IDPs in two sites. Although intended as a temporary transit centre, many IDPs – predominantly Burkinabé immigrants from around the towns of Bolequin and Toulepleu near the Liberian border – have been living in the camp since the beginning of the crisis in 2002. Temporary IDP centres have also been established in a few other locations, for example in Catholic Mission buildings in the western town of Duékoué and in the capital Yamoussoukro.

The humanitarian situation of IDPs and other vulnerable groups is particularly fragile in the north and west of the country where basic social services are poor if not non-existent. The main issues for concern include the lack of potable water, food insecurity, lack of access to health services and lack of access to education. Malnutrition rates remain high, particularly among children under five. Waterborne diseases are rife, curable diseases have been on the increase, while the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has reached at least seven per cent – the highest in West Africa – which may increase further in the event of renewed population displacements. At the same time access to health care is extremely poor – for IDPs and other vulnerable groups alike – with some 600,000 people in the western region lacking access, according to international NGOs.

In rebel-held areas, many schools have not been functioning since the outbreak of the crisis in 2002, not least because large numbers of teachers (and other civil servants) remain displaced in major towns in the south. In the north-western town of Man – which hosts an unknown number of IDPs (although substantially less than southern towns) – the non-functioning of schools has been an overriding concern of both residents and humanitarian agencies. The UN estimates that in Côte d'Ivoire more than 700,000 children, mostly girls, have been denied access to primary education since 2002 due to a lack of teachers and worsening living conditions. However, in February 2006 the interim government announced a new plan to restore schooling in the northern half of the country that could pave the way for more than 90,000 students to sit key exams within a matter of months or even weeks.

In the economic capital Abidjan, an estimated 120,000 vulnerable IDPs are living an extremely precarious existence, many of them in shanty towns housing West African immigrants as well as Ivorians of predominantly northern ethnic groups. With the destruction of many shanty towns in Abidjan by government forces and their allied militia in 2002-2003, the arrival of new IDPs added to the burden of residents in making ends meet. Yet with the exception of some immediate albeit ad hoc emergency assistance by various agencies in the aftermath of shanty town destruction, the longer term humanitarian needs of the urban displaced in these areas have been completely overlooked.

Clearly, the lack of information on the numbers, locations and needs of the displaced has been a fundamental obstacle to an effective response. Ongoing low-level displacement together with small-scale spontaneous return has made existing estimates less and less precise. A UNFPA-funded IDP survey, carried out in five key areas in the government zone, was completed in November 2005, with final results expected to be published in early 2006. It is hoped this will provide a clearer picture of IDPs' numbers, locations and needs.

Boribana shanty town in  
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 2005  
(Claudia McGoldrick/IDMC)



## Weak response

The state response to the situation of internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire has been wholly inadequate, not least since at both the policy and operational levels there is little knowledge or experience in tackling humanitarian crises in general. There is no central government coordination mechanism for humanitarian response and no state body with overall responsibility for IDPs. While there is a "Ministry of War Victims" (*Ministère des Victimes, des Déplacés et Exilés de Guerre*) this has been preoccupied with seeking compensation for all victims of the conflict, and has had no real relevance to IDP response.

This situation has been compounded by the continuing absence of local administration and social service workers from many parts of the country, particularly the rebel-held north as well as insecure areas of government-held territory in the west. Although some efforts have been made to re-establish state administration, principally through the *Comité Nationale de la Redéploiement de l'Administration* (CNPRA), the lack of services combined with a deteriorating humanitarian situation remains of major concern. Humanitarian organisations have therefore been working directly with various government institutions aiming to complement their work, but in many cases effectively substituting for them.

At the local level, crisis committees (*comités de crises*) are responsible for registering IDPs and for coordinating and managing humanitarian aid mobilised at the national level – but this has been inconsistent and generally poorly managed, according to international agencies in the country. And in areas under the control of the rebel *Forces Nouvelles* the capacity to deal with the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations has been even more limited, and access to humanitarian agencies patchy at best.

At the international level, the UN response to the humanitarian crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, and is supported by UN OCHA. The UN and humanitarian agencies have faced various constraints in responding to the needs of IDPs in Côte d'Ivoire – the lack of government counterparts, lack of IDP data, restricted access and funding shortages among them. Coordination issues have also been problematic, not least the tensions between the UN Mission (UNOCI) and NGOs, with many of the latter complaining about the constraints of working alongside a mission that integrates its peacekeeping and humanitarian components. These tensions came to a head following the resumption of hostilities in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2004, when the response of French troops was widely viewed as highly partial, and by association, that of UNOCI as well. With UN peacekeepers perceived to be taking sides in the conflict, and due to the nature of the integrated mission, some NGOs argued it was very difficult to resume activities in the conflicted-affected areas and still be seen as impartial and independent humanitarian agencies

Yet the 2005 UN OCHA initiative of bringing together international humanitarian actors in a Protection and IDP Network with the aim of collecting and acting on protection-related information (with internal displacement just one component of broader protection concerns) may – potentially – make the international response more effective.

### **Key recommendations to the government:**

- Establish a clear IDP focal point at the national level to liaise and coordinate with the international community on issues relating to IDP protection and assistance
- Develop a National IDP Policy, including clear return and resettlement strategies that are in line with the UN Guiding Principles
- Support peace and reconciliation efforts particularly in areas of IDP return
- Allow IDPs to move freely and to return to home areas, particularly in the western region, without fear of harassment or reprisal by security forces or civil militia



While ethno-religious conflict is endemic in Nigeria, the resulting situations of internal displacement have rarely been considered as emergencies – at least not by international donors. Even the most serious displacement crisis in recent years – when spiralling violence between mainly Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers in central Plateau state in 2004 left possibly more than 1,000 people dead and according to some sources, up to 258,000 temporarily displaced – did not constitute a humanitarian emergency in the eyes of key donors. Various reasons were cited, not least that the Nigerian government is well endowed and should be able to address such a situation from its own resources. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, many observers believe there is real potential for violence in Nigeria that could quickly spread and cause major population movements well beyond the response capacity of the government. The high death toll resulting from a wave of sectarian violence across the country triggered by Danish caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2006, coinciding with a dramatic increase in militant violence in the oil-rich Delta region, were clear warning signs that underlying religious, ethnic and political tensions are never far from the surface. There are fears that the level of conflict, and with it the level of internal displacement, may increase as the 2007 presidential elections draw nearer.

### Complex conflicts, complex causes

With a population of about 130 million and more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation – with a multitude of religious, ethnic and political fault lines that periodically erupt into communal violence. This has created a sizeable, albeit fluctuating internally displaced population – particularly since a return to democratic rule with the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 opened up new opportunities for people to express their grievances and new areas of conflict were created by the competition for political spoils.

While some of these conflicts may appear to be caused by a single factor, such as religion or ethnicity, the reality is usually more complex. The introduction of Islamic Sharia law in a total of 12 of Nigeria's 36 states in recent years has caused tensions, but when Muslim and Christian groups have clashed this has usually been caused by other factors – such as pressure on land or unequal access to social services. However, the polarisation that follows is often along religious lines, and the conflict is easily stereotyped as a “religious war”. The same dynamic is often observed with regard to “ethnic conflicts”.

Billboard in Plateau state,  
Nigeria, 2004  
(Claudia McGoldrick/IDMC)





Perhaps the most significant cause of communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched divisions throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area, and those regarded as settlers. Even though settlers may have lived in an area for hundreds of years, they are consistently discriminated against in terms of land ownership, control of commerce, jobs and education. In predominantly Christian Plateau state, for example, the majority of "settlers" belong to the northern Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, nomads who have gradually moved southwards as the expanding Sahara desert has dried up their traditional grazing lands. Hausa-Fulani Muslims have long complained that predominantly Christian farmers steal their cattle and prevent them from grazing, whilst the farmers counter that cattle encroach on their land. At the same time there are indigenous Muslim ethnic groups fiercely opposed to the perceived expansionist tendencies of the Hausa-Fulanis.

Closely linked to this is the problem of poverty and unequal access to resources. Despite its oil wealth, at least two thirds of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day. Many people believe that conflicts are created and fanned by scheming politicians, particularly elites of the former military regime, relying on the huge pools of destitute and frustrated youths to create social division. The violence can then quickly spread and take on a momentum of its own.

Displacement has also been closely linked to oil production in the Niger Delta. While the Delta region has been volatile for many years, with impoverished local communities accusing successive governments as well as oil companies of depriving them of their fair share of oil revenues, tensions escalated dramatically in early 2006. Armed militia groups used increasingly violent means in their attempt to gain greater control of oil wealth, clashing with the Nigerian army, kidnapping a number of foreign oil workers and destroying oil installations, reducing the country's oil exports by at least 20 per cent. Violence between local militia and security forces as well as inter-militia fighting in the Delta region has frequently forced people to flee their homes and widespread destruction of property has occurred.

## **Need for return and reintegration assistance**

While immediate humanitarian needs in the wake of communal violence in Nigeria are often adequately addressed through a combination of national and international humanitarian actors, specialist and longer term needs tend to be neglected.

During the 2004 Plateau state crisis thousands of IDPs received emergency food aid, shelter, medical treatment and water/sanitation from a variety of sources, many of them in camps established in neighbouring Bauchi and Nassarawa states. But once the immediate crisis died down, humanitarian assistance particularly to IDPs attempting to return to areas affected by the fighting – such as the town of Yelwa – was virtually non-existent. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was the only relief agency present in the area, providing basic health services as well as trauma counselling. Many people witnessed relatives being mutilated and killed, and hundreds of mainly women and girls were abducted. Some were raped, although this was not well documented. Many were visibly suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Then, less than one year later, the IDP camps were officially closed and the displaced either returned to their home areas in Plateau state or resettled with relatives – spontaneously or as part of official resettlement programmes, particularly in Bauchi state. However, reports from the town of Yelwa, which was largely destroyed in the fighting, indicated that many IDPs were returning to a dire lack of basic services and without the means to start rebuilding their homes. In many cases, incidents of vandalism, burning and looting reportedly took place several weeks after the initial violence precisely in order to deter returning IDPs. This is by no means unprecedented. During the devastating communal violence in the Plateau state capital Jos in 2001, whole villages were razed to the ground, and farmers fleeing the violence in other central region states in 2001 saw their crops ruined and other properties damaged. As part of the strategy to retaliate for the killings of soldiers in Benue state in 2001, government troops were reported to have "regularly plundered" abandoned farms. In October 2002 it was reported that as many as 90 per cent of

the 60,000 inhabitants of Odi town in Bayelsa state were still living in temporary structures, having found their original homes destroyed after being displaced in 1999.

## Fragmented humanitarian response

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), established in 1999, is responsible for overall disaster management in Nigeria – including the coordination of emergency relief operations as well as assisting in the rehabilitation of the victims where necessary. It has presence in most states and often supports IDPs in the emergency phase of a crisis, but it does not have the necessary resources to assist people displaced for a longer period of time, or to assist returnees to reintegrate. State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMA) also exist in some states, but with varying performance levels.

The national response is generally constrained by lack of experience in dealing with IDP issues, which has resulted in inefficiencies and support gaps to affected populations, but also by competing mandates. Confusion exists at the federal level over who has the mandate to respond to and assist IDPs – especially between NEMA and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR, informally mandated in 2002 to also cover IDPs) – which results in competition for resources.

Coordination between the various humanitarian actors at all levels is at best inconsistent. In the wake of the 2004 Plateau state crisis, international donors criticised the overall national response on various grounds, including: a lack of coordination; the lack of a proper registration system for IDPs; inefficient use of resources despite adequate financial capacity; lack of proper planning, monitoring and evaluation; and the politicisation of humanitarian assistance.

The UN system in Nigeria – headed by a Resident Coordinator who is also Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme – consists of numerous agencies, and has since 2000 been organised around a Development Assistance Framework. So, with a firm focus on development needs, UN assistance to IDPs in Nigeria has been fairly ad hoc. The Red Cross movement as well as a few international NGOs has also been involved in IDP response, albeit in a rather uncoordinated fashion.

Indeed, the overall fragmented response to the 2004 Plateau state crisis in particular demonstrated the need for improved coordination between humanitarian actors at all stages of internal displacement from contingency planning and preparedness right through to post-emergency rehabilitation activities. Although the Nigeria government may have the financial capacity to respond to emergencies, it lacks the necessary institutional capacity and expertise to deal effectively with acute situations of internal displacement.



Attempts at rebuilding in Yelwa, Nigeria, 2004  
(Claudia McGoldrick/IDMC)

### Key recommendations to the government:

- At the national level, clarify the roles, responsibilities and division of labour between the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR) with regard to IDP protection and assistance
- Seek technical support and training for improved emergency preparedness and response to conflict-induced displacement at both national and state level
- Expedite the publication of the National IDP Policy and build on this to develop clear return and resettlement strategies at the state level
- Support projects that cater for the longer term return and reintegration needs of IDPs



The signing of a peace agreement by the Senegalese government and Casamance separatist rebels at the end of 2004 officially ended West Africa's longest-running civil war, paving the way for the return of tens of thousands of IDPs. Due to the fact that the southern province of Casamance is virtually cut off from the rest of the country by the Gambia, most people fleeing the 22 year conflict sought refuge there and in Guinea-Bissau. While information on both numbers and the humanitarian needs of IDPs in the Casamance context has been scarce, it is estimated that some 64,000 people were internally displaced, several thousand killed and others injured by landmines. The December 2004 peace agreement provides for the reconstruction and de-mining of Casamance and support for the return of IDPs and refugees. Yet various obstacles continue to hamper sustainable return and reintegration, not least an abundance of landmines and periodic attacks on civilians by unknown "armed assailants". March 2006 saw a serious setback, when violent clashes between opposing factions of the separatist movement spilled over into Guinea-Bissau, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people within Guinea-Bissau itself and across the border to Senegal.

## **Separatist struggle behind decades of displacement**

Although the separatist movement has been alive in the Casamance province since before Senegal's independence from France in 1960, the first large demonstration for provincial independence did not occur until late 1982 when the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC) organised a march on the provincial capital, Ziguinchor. Violent demonstrations continued throughout the 1980s until the MFDC officially declared its armed struggle for Casamance independence in 1990. At this time, it initiated its first organised attacks on military and civilian targets in the region. In response to the separatist attacks, the Senegalese military arrested and tortured hundreds of people, as documented by Amnesty International in 1998. From that time on, rebel incursions and government counter-measures established a cycle of sporadic violence that has continued to plague the southern province.

In May 2001, another round of violence broke out in the region. The Senegalese army and MFDC forces engaged in heavy fighting, particularly in the department of Bignona. The army shelled certain parts of the southern province and burned houses in pursuit of rebel forces. This intensification of fighting came only two months after a peace agreement was signed between the newly-elected President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and MFDC Secretary-General Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, calling for inter alia the return of refugees and IDPs. The peace agreement was the third of its kind since the early 1990s.

Intermittent clashes between the rebels and the Senegalese military throughout 2002 and 2003 continued to uproot tens of thousands of people, but many of them for short periods of time.

The death of hard-line MFDC leader Sidi Badji in 2003 paved the way for further negotiations between the Senegalese government and Diamacoune Senghor, which led ultimately to the signing of the December 2004 peace agreement between the two sides. Detailed talks have been taking place on the practical implementation of the agreement, including the issues of disarmament, reintegration and mine clearance.

## **Obstacles to return**

Since there has been scant data on the number or location of IDPs in Casamance – with many people staying with relatives and often on a temporary basis – there is likewise little accurate information on the spontaneous return process. Various reports indicate that less than 20,000 IDPs remained at the time



of the December 2004 peace agreement, and that thousands more have returned since then. Yet clearly returnees are facing considerable obstacles to reintegrating into their areas of origin. During the conflict school buildings, hospitals and other community infrastructures were often deliberately targeted by the fighting forces. Reconstruction and rehabilitation have barely begun. Schools are seriously overstretched even without the added burden of returnees. Some reports describe returnees suffering from trauma, particularly children.

Land mines pose a major obstacle to IDP return, with some sources reporting that up to 80 per cent of farmland has been rendered unusable in some areas of the Casamance. Since 1990, more than 1,000 people have reportedly been killed by landmines in the province. Food insecurity in Casamance is of particular concern. Roads and tracks particularly around the provincial capital Ziguinchor have been riddled with mines during the course of the conflict, with some 125 villages abandoned in the surrounding district as a result. Accurate information on the number and location of mines is also scarce. Added to this is a series of armed attacks and ambushes on civilians, including the murder of a top government official in Casamance in January 2006, believed by some to be perpetrated by members of the splintered MFDC rebel group. Indeed the refusal of MFDC hardliner Salif Sadio to recognise the peace agreement was reported to be the cause of the March 2006 inter-factional clashes, drawing in the Guinea-Bissau army, which displaced thousands of civilians in the border region of Guinea-Bissau.

## Humanitarian response

In response to the fighting in Casamance, the government of Senegal provided emergency relief and resettlement assistance to some families forced to flee their homes in the region. Longer-term needs have yet to be addressed. Since the signing of the December 2004 peace agreement, the government has promised to spend about \$402 million on the reconstruction and development of Casamance, but the programme will not be implemented until a “conclusive peace” materialises, according to the UN. A mine clearance programme will be implemented with the support of UNDP, aiming to clear Casamance of mines by 2009.

In 2001, WFP identified six departments in Casamance – Bignona, Oussouye, Ziguinchor, Sedhiou, Kolda and Vellingara – as highly vulnerable and targeted them as priority intervention areas through its Programme for the Revival of Economic and Social Activities in the Casamance (PRAESC). This subsequently developed into a Protected Relief and Recovery Operation for the Casamance region, with government support, the main objectives of which include increasing the ability of the population to manage economic shocks and meet necessary food needs, and strengthening local production capacity.

The ICRC and the Senegalese Red Cross Society have provided continual assistance to civilians affected by the conflict in Casamance over the years. Since IDPs have been returning in increasing numbers to their areas of origin, the Red Cross has been focusing on water supply and health care.

### Key recommendations to the government:

- Provide immediate resettlement assistance to returning populations in Casamance
- Prioritise efforts towards the reconstruction and rehabilitation of communities destroyed by the conflict, including de-mining programmes, in line with the 2004 peace agreement

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the IDMC contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.


The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the IDMC website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

## Endnotes

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