



25 million people internally displaced by violence worldwide

By the end of 2003 there were nearly 25 million people displaced within their own countries by conflicts and human rights violations. During the year, some three million people were forced out of their homes in 2003; a similarly high number of IDPs were able to return, albeit often into situations of poverty and continuing human rights violations.

In its yearly analysis of the worldwide internal displacement situation¹, the Global IDP Project found that the African continent was again worst affected, hosting half of the world's IDPs. The conflicts causing the largest new displacements are also to be found in Africa - in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and Sudan.

Other regions were affected, too. In Asia-Pacific, a region accounting for 3.6 million IDPs, military campaigns launched by governments to quash insurgencies were a major cause of new displacement, while return movements continued elsewhere. In Latin America, the bloody conflict in Colombia accounted for nearly all the region's 3.3 million IDPs and all new displacements during 2003. Some three million IDPs were still waiting in Europe to return home although active fighting has long since ended in most of the conflicts that caused their displacement. Little progress was made in the Middle East to find durable solutions for its two million IDPs, many of whom have been displaced for several decades.

Encouraging peace processes in many countries raised hopes for the return of IDPs in 2003. Large-scale return indeed took place in a few countries; in Angola, for instance, nearly two million people were able to return home. In some countries, however, progress in the settlement of conflicts was overshadowed by the outbreak or

intensification of other crises which led to new displacement. This was the case, for example, in Darfur in western Sudan, in the Ituri province in eastern DRC and in Indonesia's Aceh province.

Fighting between government forces and rebel groups remained the main cause of displacement in 2003. Worryingly, civilians were in many cases deliberately targeted and expelled from their homes by armed forces as part of their military strategies. In several cases, national armies or government-backed militias were behind such displacements, including in Burma, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

The displaced were only rarely afforded adequate protection and assistance by their governments. In 13 of the 52 countries affected by internal displacement, IDPs could not count on their government for protection at all.

The world's 10 worst displacement situations

Burma	Burundi
Colombia	Côte d'Ivoire
DRC	Indonesia (Aceh)
Liberia	Russia (Chechnya)
Somalia	Sudan

This meant that more than ten million people were confronted with hostile or, at best, indifferent authorities who made no effort to protect them. Nearly 18 million IDPs received no humanitarian assistance from their government, or only on an occasional basis.

The international community did not do enough to fill the gap left by governments unable or unwilling to help their displaced populations. Funding for humanitarian assistance was insufficient, and the UN has yet to put in place a system to more effectively protect and assist IDPs. Nearly a third

of the world's internally displaced - some seven million people - do not benefit from any systematic UN assistance at all.

The international 'war on terror' appears to have had a worsening effect on the protection of displaced people, particularly by encouraging governments to seek military solutions to conflicts and by undermining respect for international humanitarian and human rights standards. Labelling rebel groups 'terrorists' has allowed a number of regimes to intensify counter-insurgency campaigns, attract foreign military aid and avoid international criticism of human rights abuses against civilians.

The full report, with detailed regional overviews, is available at www.idpproject.org.



1. Global IDP Project 'Internal displacement: A Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2003', Geneva 2004 (www.idpproject.org/press/2004/Global_Overview.pdf)

IDP news

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