

FMR – GP10

TEN YEARS OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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Internal displacement in the Central African Republic

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In the Central African Republic (CAR), where most displaced people are unaware of their rights, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is seeking to promote wider awareness of, and respect for, the Guiding Principles.

Since 2005, 197,000 people have been internally displaced due to armed conflict between the government of François Bozizé and various rebel groups, and because of attacks by bandits known as *coupeurs de route* who take advantage of the government's inability to guarantee security. Although all

rebel groups have signed ceasefire agreements and a peace process is underway, the security of most people in northern CAR has hardly improved because banditry has replaced political conflict as the main source of violence. Displaced people in CAR have depended almost entirely on help from host

communities, and only those who are living in relatively accessible areas have received assistance from international relief organisations.

In response to the displacement crisis in CAR, NRC has been working in emergency education in the northern province of Ouham since April 2007. Home to about 12% of the country's IDPs, Ouham is one of CAR's most conflict-affected regions. NRC's project supports approximately 14,200 children in 57 primary schools through teacher training, provision

of school materials, school feeding programmes, training of parent-teacher associations and building capacity of the education ministry.

NRC also undertakes protection and advocacy by reporting on the situation of IDPs in the villages where it works and supporting joint initiatives such as a nationwide IDP advocacy campaign. The continuous presence of NRC and other humanitarian organisations in areas of displacement helps deter would-be aggressors (protection by presence).

Using the Guiding Principles

NRC has conducted protection training workshops on the Guiding Principles for local authorities, the army and the police, to support security sector reform. The government has neither adopted the Principles as a policy framework nor incorporated them into national law. However, UN agencies and international NGOs use them regularly to promote the rights of IDPs. They are a standard component of protection workshops, and have been used to train humanitarian observers, local authorities, government forces, international peacekeeping troops and rebel groups such as the Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD) which controls

areas in the north of the country bordering Chad and Cameroon.

The Principles were prominent in a September 2008 training session for the Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (MICOPAX)¹ – a regional peacekeeping force with about 300 troops from Gabon, Chad, Congo and Cameroon. Over 30 officers and troops from the Chadian contingent were trained in the Principles and on child protection in emergencies. The training sessions are an integral part of the troops' preparation for field operations.

In 2007, UNHCR translated the Guiding Principles into Sango, the national language, and illustrated some of the principles in order to make them as accessible as possible to non-literate communities. The Sango version of the Guiding Principles has been distributed to government ministries, local human rights NGOs and civil society organisations. They now need to be distributed more widely to displaced communities to raise their awareness about their rights.

The plight of displaced children

NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) visited CAR in July and August 2008

to research and report on the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced children. IDMC found that displaced children face severe protection problems from violence and insecurity.

Unlike other children, displaced children have suffered trauma after witnessing extreme levels of violence such as the killing of family members when their villages were attacked by road bandits. During these attacks, some displaced children, including girls, have been abducted to work as porters of stolen property or kidnapped for ransom. Many others have been recruited into armed forces or groups.

The nutrition, water and sanitation, health and shelter needs of CAR's displaced children remain largely unmet. Many are in urgent need of adequate shelter, having been forced to sleep outdoors during the rainy season, exposed to higher risks of contracting malaria or upper respiratory infections. Displaced children face economic exploitation as they are forced to work in fields belonging to host communities in exchange for food or meagre pay. These children's education is being interrupted and their long-term development jeopardised.



These IDPs have lived in this temporary site since February 2006 after fleeing an attack by governmental forces on their village in Boutouli, 3 km away, CAR.

Displaced children from minority groups such as the Peuhl face ethnic discrimination, not least because many host communities, and even other IDPs, have the mistaken perception that all Peuhl are road bandits. Due to the destruction of their migration routes and loss of their animals from violence and armed conflict, many Peuhl communities have been forced to settle among subsistence farmers and are struggling to adapt to a new way of life. The protection needs of displaced children have not been adequately addressed by the Government of CAR nor by the international community in general.

Legal framework for response

CAR has ratified the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes Region,²

which entered into force in June 2008. The Pact's Protocol on Protection and Assistance to IDPs commits member states not only to enact national legislation to implement the Guiding Principles into domestic law but also to create a practical implementation framework. States have different ways of introducing international law into their national legal systems. Under CAR's constitution, the provisions of any international instrument ratified by CAR become binding and have precedence over national laws.³ One gap that remains, however, is the lack of a specific legal framework to protect IDPs in general and displaced children in particular. The current laws do not provide a sufficiently detailed basis for addressing and responding to the needs of IDPs.

NRC therefore recommends that the government of CAR adopt and implement the Principles as a framework for providing protection and assistance to IDPs, and prepare and enact national legislation to implement the Principles fully, including specific provisions for the protection and assistance of internally displaced children.

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1. <http://www.operationspaix.net/-MICOPAX->

2. [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/60ECE277A8EDA2DDC12572FB002BBD A7/\\$file/Great%20Lakes%20pact_en.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/60ECE277A8EDA2DDC12572FB002BBD A7/$file/Great%20Lakes%20pact_en.pdf)

3. Article 72, Constitution of the Central African Republic, 2004.