the need to preserve our neutrality and independence prevents us from being formally coordinated by other agencies or bound in advance to a specific sectorial approach. It is important that cooperation with other organisations be carried out in a manner which does not jeopardise the perception of the ICRC as a neutral, impartial and independent organisation, exclusively driven by humanitarian concerns.

As a standing invitee, the ICRC participates in the work of the Senior Network on Internal Displacement and various IASC meetings. The ICRC actively participated in the various consultations on the IDP collaborative approach as well as the recently proposed sectorial approach within the UN system. The extent but also the limitations of our interaction within these frameworks were explained. The ICRC is genuinely committed to develop operational complementarity in order to advance the best interests of those affected by conflict and other situations of violence. This requires sustained dialogue with key partners, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels, including exchange of information on what each other plans to do.

At field level the ICRC tries to concentrate its participation to coordination meetings which are really bringing added value to work on the ground without merely adding a bureaucratic layer. Within the limits imposed by confidentiality concerning specific violations, the ICRC is taking part in a selected way in the protection coordination meetings recently organised in some countries. If first analysed if such participation might jeopardise the confidence that the authorities and non-state actors have in the ICRC.

Let us hope that the current discussion regarding IDPs protection issues as well as international and interagency cooperation and coordination will finally result in a concrete improvement of protection!

Alain Aeschlimann is the Head of the Protection Division, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) www.icrc.org
Email: aaesclimann.GVA@icrc.org

Coordination and funding: return of IDPs in the Congo

A pilot project to return IDPs by river transport has highlighted the scale of the task of return and reintegration of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s estimated 2.3m IDPs.

Since the mid-1990s millions of Congolese have fled their homes to escape fighting between rebel groups and the national government in a complex conflict which has, at times, involved as many as nine neighbouring states. Close to four million people are thought to have died.

At field level the ICRC tries to concentrate its participation to coordination meetings which are really bringing added value to work on the ground without merely adding a bureaucratic layer. Within the limits imposed by confidentiality concerning specific violations, the ICRC is taking part in a selected way in the protection coordination meetings recently organised in some countries. If first analysed if such participation might jeopardise the confidence that the authorities and non-state actors have in the ICRC.

Let us hope that the current discussion regarding IDPs protection issues as well as international and interagency cooperation and coordination will finally result in a concrete improvement of protection!

Alain Aeschlimann is the Head of the Protection Division, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) www.icrc.org
Email: aaesclimann.GVA@icrc.org
slow pace of disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration (DDRRA) programmes have led in some areas to the remobilisation of militias.

Troops from the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) have helped stabilise the situation in some places. However, with only 16,000 troops (UNMIL in Liberia has 15,000 in a country a twentieth the size of the DRC), it remains seriously constrained despite having a Chapter VII mandate (authorising 'peace enforcement', not simply 'peace keeping').

Some 900,000 IDPs have returned to their places of origin since the end of 2003, the great majority with little or no assistance. Some of the 380,000 Congolese refugees living in nine neighbouring countries are also coming home. An estimated 25,000 have returned on their own initiative to South Kivu, Katanga and Equateur provinces since 2003. UNHCR has assisted 12,000 returnees to return from camps in Tanzania over the last year.

The IDD report insists that if returns are to be safe and sustainable, a clear strategy and close collaboration between a wide range of government authorities and humanitarian and development actors are needed. Likewise, it says the UN must urgently assist the DRC government to develop a national return and reintegration framework and to adopt national legislation on IDPs consistent with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

On 19 May 2005 a barge belonging to the Congolese navy left the capital, Kinshasa. It carried some 1,600 IDPs who had been living for up to nine years in camps or with host families to destinations along the Congo River. On the one hand, the barge served as a powerful illustration of the willingness of many of the DRC's displaced people to return to their places of origin if assisted to do so. On the other hand, it drew attention to the need for close cooperation between government authorities and the multiplicity of humanitarian and development actors in the country. In particular, it highlighted the need for rehabilitation and reconstruction work in areas of return.

Some 900,000 IDPs have returned to their places of origin since the end of 2003, the great majority with little or no assistance. Some of the 380,000 Congolese refugees living in nine neighbouring countries are also coming home. An estimated 25,000 have returned on their own initiative to South Kivu, Katanga and Equateur provinces since 2003. UNHCR has assisted 12,000 returnees to return from camps in Tanzania over the last year.

The Transitional Government established in June 2003 continues to struggle to affirm its authority in much of the eastern part of the country, making it hard for the international community to work with local counterparts. The proliferation of ministries in Kinshasa (more than 50 were created in order to allow all parties to obtain government posts) has complicated coordination arrangements. Return and reintegration activities are handled by at least four different ministries.

To facilitate more spontaneous returns there is a need for a substantial increase in recovery activities. The IDD report says these should include a focus on establishment of rule of law and functioning judicial systems; repair or construction of health, education and water facilities; rehabilitation of essential infrastructure such as roads, railways and bridges; and labour-intensive public works, to encourage IDPs and ex-combatants to return. OCHA, UNDP, UNHCR, the World Bank and donors must develop closer links in order to coordinate DDRRA programmes. Only where development actors are unwilling or unable to act quickly enough should humanitarian actors step in to fill the gap.

Donors must ensure that both humanitarian and longer-term development programmes in the DRC are adequately funded. So far, this has not been the case. The 2005 Humanitarian Appeal for the DRC of $201m was only 43% funded by late August, in spite of the fact that the DRC is a pilot country for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative. Donors must realise that support for IDP and refugee returns will not only help provide durable solutions for displaced people but also contribute to the consolidation of peace in the DRC.

Tim Morris is one of the FMR editors. For the full IDD report, see www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/reports/2005/DRC%20mission%20report%2012-20May%202005.pdf

FMR has published two previous supplements on IDPs:

Researching Internal Displacement: State of the Art (report of conference held in Trondheim, Norway, 7-8 February 2003)

Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens (report of conference held in Oslo, Norway, 9 November 2001)

Both reports are available at www.fmreview.org/mags1.htm

For a hard copy, please contact the FMR editors at the Refugee Studies Centre, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK. Email fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk