ties at national level. Despite the fact that the representatives of the displaced in this council have been constant in participation and in putting forward proposals for action, after eight months of meetings the District Plan has still not been approved.

In my experience, the main difficulties for the organisations of the displaced and for its leaders are:

- the dispersal, heterogeneity and anonymity of the displaced populations in Bogota
- lack of information among the displaced population regarding their rights and regarding the processes for access to the few government programmes that exist
- the continuation of persecution, threats and attacks by armed groups
- discrimination and rejection by local authorities and communities
- Despite the existence of a law protecting the rights of the displaced, the response of the state is less than generous, usually late and generally focused on emergency assistance. Furthermore, the authorities delegate their responsibilities to national and international NGOs.
- Facing this situation, the displaced population is then at the whim of offers of help and of pressure by political sectors and armed groups.
- Basic operating conditions do not exist for organisations nor for the practice of leadership and dialogue with the state. The government does not support the organisations; its relations with them are characterised by distrust, lack of transparency and verbal aggression. Also, in the few instances of participation and dialogue, the government will not offer logistical assistance (offices, transport, photocopies of documents, etc) which means that most of the organisations are weak and it is difficult for the leaders to do their work and support their families.
- The government does not meet its obligations under Law 387 to offer protection to IDPs and their leaders, many of whom are once again victims of threats, attacks and repeated displacement.

On the other hand, my experience does offer some positive results:

- Despite all the above constraints, the displaced population persists in its attempts to organise in order to rebuild its social fabric and to demand that the government fulfill its legal duties to care for and protect IDPs.
- Through its efforts in organisation and training, the displaced population has succeeded in formulating and disseminating several proposals for wide-scale solutions (such as resettlement and urban integration) and pressed demands for truth, justice and reparations.
- There has been some progress in relations between the organisations for the displaced population and national and international NGOs, UN agencies and other sectors of Colombian civil society.

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IDPs: time to move forward

by Kofi Asomani

Governments and the UN believe that the response to internal displacement has often been ineffective.

In order to strengthen the international community’s response in situations of internal displacement, a new Unit has been established under the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Unit will bring together major agencies working for IDPs.

In July 2000 the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a body that groups agencies involved in humanitarian work, decided to establish an Inter-Agency network on internal displacement composed of focal points from different organisations. The network was to be an ad hoc body which would look at the questions of internal displacement and come up with recommendations. A special co-ordinator was appointed, my predecessor Dennis McNamara. This group has undertaken a number of missions to different IDP situations, visiting Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Afghanistan, Colombia and Angola. The network came up with recommendations on ways of improving the response to IDP situations in these countries.

In addition to the missions, one of the tasks of the network was to propose institutional mechanisms for responding to these situations of internal displacement. In August 2001 it was decided to create a Unit. Putting this Unit together is one of the tasks that I have undertaken. The Unit is expected to strengthen the hand of the Emergency Relief Coordinator who heads the UN Office for the
At times there is a lack of in-depth analysis and a lack of sensitivity towards the communities with whom the UN is supposed to be dealing. This in turn leads to a situation where the desired activities of the UN do not have the desired impact. Capacities exist either within IDP populations or in the wider environment in which they live which could be mobilised to respond effectively to the situations that we are faced with.

We sometimes lack access: the ability to provide IDPs with assistance and protection. Resources available to us are in many cases deficient. We need to stress the importance of promoting empowerment of IDPs and vulnerable populations so that they themselves can recognise possibilities, recognise their aspirations and identify ways of supporting the response strategy for dealing with their own situations. Fortunately, there is a growing understanding that this is a dimension of the international community’s efforts on behalf of vulnerable populations which needs to be expanded. I am talking not only about economic empowerment but also about protection. In Colombia and elsewhere, we have seen that IDPs can play a key role in protecting themselves. In situations where communities were aware that they were the objects of displacement, the fact that they were very well organised enabled them to be able to withstand and to foresee the impact of displacement. In some contexts they were even able to avoid displacement, because they were organised. In some situations, they were able to assert themselves as a community and, at the same time, claim their rights.

We think it is necessary to help IDPs to help themselves, particularly in the search for durable solutions. The activities in this regard must have as a starting point support of the capacities of the groups themselves. They should aim not just at supporting them to be resilient but also at helping them promote in a constructive manner their recovery and reintegration. We have examples of how this has been done. We have examples of IDP communities being helped to help themselves in Georgia, Azerbaijan and elsewhere in the fields of professional training, income-generating activities, credit schemes and so on. As a Unit we will try hard to develop and expand activities in these areas. We are planning a review of activities in Georgia and Azerbaijan in order to draw out lessons which can be applied elsewhere.

We want to broaden the UN response, to make it more effective and more timely. We will also be looking at the wider environment. We will focus on what IDPs can do and what opportunities are presented by situations so that they can respond to their own needs.

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