

# NGO Statement on US IDP Policy

## December 19, 2008

### CONTEXT

Internal displacement continues to be one of the most challenging humanitarian problems of our time. There are an estimated 26 million people internally displaced by conflict who are in need of international attention, more than double the number of refugees. Despite this disparity, which has grown over the past decade, the global response has been weak, characterized by incomplete access to the displaced, lack of clarity as to mandates and responsibilities, and funding that falls well short of what is required. In consequence, hundreds of thousands of people suffer unnecessarily. Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and other areas of major strategic interest to the United States are currently grappling with large-scale internal displacement crises, the resolution of which is critical to bringing durable peace to these countries.

As a leading donor and voice in the humanitarian field, it is essential that the United States address this problem. While USAID's policy on internal displacement in 2004 was welcome and the U.S. often provides quick, direct funding in specific emergencies, the U.S. government must be a much stronger advocate for finding solutions for internally displaced people (IDPs). It has been at best ambivalent in its support of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It is essential that the United States government send clear messages to UNHCR about its role in responding to internal displacement and engage more consistently with host governments on the issue. It is equally critical that the U.S. government clarify funding, advocacy and leadership responsibilities for IDPs between USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and effectively involve other government offices. Finally, with a new administration at the helm, there is an opportunity for stronger overall leadership on the humanitarian reform efforts of the United Nations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations, urge a new more dynamic approach to this worldwide problem by the in-coming administration. We propose a set of overarching principles to guide specific policy changes, followed by policy recommendations.

#### Principles

*Comprehensive Approach:* The U.S. needs to approach displacement holistically in emergencies, seeing refugees and internally displaced people as part of the same dynamic of forced displacement, while providing for different responses, given the different legal frameworks, vulnerabilities and needs.

*Recognition of the Guiding Principles:* The U.S. should recognize and promote the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are rooted in international human rights

and international humanitarian law and represent the best international consensus on the rights of the internally displaced.

*Proportionality:* In keeping with Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, the U.S. should ensure that adequate funding is available to respond to the needs of the internally displaced, with vulnerability and scale of need as the primary criteria for fund allocation. The U.S. should also seek to develop flexible funding to ensure that the full spectrum of needs is met from the time of initial displacement to the time of reintegration into home or new communities, and that host family and community needs are given attention as well.

*Clarity:* The U.S. should clarify responsibilities for responding to internal displacement within the government and find an institutional home for coordinating the response.

## Policy Recommendations

### To improve the U.S. response to internal displacement, the in-coming administration should:

- ❑ Establish a position at the National Security Council devoted to integrating and coordinating the overall U.S. response to displacement. This effort should include not only OFDA and PRM, but other relevant offices and bureaus, such as International Organizations, Human Rights, and Policy Planning.
- ❑ Ensure that U.S. diplomatic missions in countries experiencing internal displacement engage with host governments on this issue and press for responses commensurate with the protection and assistance needs of the displaced; establish IDP focal points at these embassies and systematically include fuller reporting on IDP response in the annual human rights report, while using the findings as the basis of a dialogue with host governments to improve the overall response. Support regional and national initiatives to address internal displacement, such as the African Union's efforts to agree on an IDP convention.
- ❑ Provide full support and encouragement for UNHCR's involvement in responding to internal displacement as mandated under the cluster leadership approach; specifically, ensure that the Refugee Agency has the funding and the political will to add field staff focused on IDP protection, appoint focal points at headquarters, fulfill its leadership responsibilities under the protection cluster, respond to specific emergencies involving large-scale internal displacement, and engage with protracted cases where serious problems continue to exist.
- ❑ Review the implementation of the 2004 USAID IDP policy and take energetic steps to reduce the gap between the policy and the practice. Ensure that response to IDP needs is an agency priority, integrated in the agency's post-conflict development strategies and programming, and report annually on the response.

- ❑ Establish a flexible fund that can be quickly allocated for crises with high levels of internal displacement, assuring sufficient levels of overall funding and support for IDPs in protracted situations.
- ❑ Engage more substantively with the overall UN humanitarian reform effort, making it a priority issue for the new U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.
- ❑ Support the work of the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs and ensure that the position is maintained after 2010.

American Refugee Committee  
Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
Human Rights Watch  
IDP Action  
International Catholic Migration Commission  
International Medical Corps  
International Rescue Committee  
Invisible Children  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
LIFE for Relief and Development  
Lutheran World Relief  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Mercy Corps  
PACT  
Refugees International  
Relief International  
Resolve Uganda  
Survivor Corps  
The Advocacy Project  
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children