

3 Internal Displacement and Forced Removals

The UN has stressed that the crisis of internal displacement affects over 20 million people worldwide. In response to this situation, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on IDPs, Mr. Francis Deng, a Sudanese national, has issued Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. These respond to the fact that persons forcibly uprooted from their homes by violent conflicts, gross violations of human rights and other traumatic events, but who remain within the borders of their own countries, nearly always they suffer from severe deprivation, hardship and discrimination. The national authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, but the need for these things, the deprivation, hardship, and discrimination, can often be laid at the door of those authorities in the first place.

But what is the reality? A local official from Nhialdiu: "Civilians, cattle, children, have been killed, and our homes burnt. We don't think we are included in the human rights of the world." Or a woman from the same village: "Our tukuls have been burnt. I hope you will convey that we are people, we cannot go and eat grass like a cow."

Leonardo Franco has stated that up to 4.5 million people have been displaced in Sudan since the beginning of the current phase of civil war in 1983. In his report to the UN General Assembly, he reiterated his concern at the prolonged war which "has affected mainly the civilian population, whose plight should be regarded as one of the most pressing human rights concerns facing the international community".

The UNDP believes that as many as 1.5 million IDPs are now living around Khartoum, which is overwhelming the authorities. We visited one of the smaller camps for IDPs, Wad El Bashir. It "houses" about 50,000 people, some of whom had been there for as many as 7 years. Most IDP households are headed by women. In order to survive and feed their families, in circumstances where there are no jobs and no financial support from government, the women have to do what they can. When they turn to producing alcohol, as many do, the results are catastrophic. The activity is illegal in Sudan though it does earn the women a subsistence income. Perhaps the authorities are against it as much for this reason as any other. In any event, the result is often heavy fines and very hard imprisonment, sometimes children incarcerated along with mothers, further family break up and destitution all round.

In discussion with UN workers engaged with the IDP problem, we learned that there are IDP camps in other parts of Sudan too. There are three official camps in West Kordofan, and, again, there are IDPs resident in them who have been there for 10 years. In South Darfur, there are fifteen camps, with more IDPs outside them than inside.