

**First Regional Conference on Internal Displacement in West Africa**  
**Abuja, Nigeria**  
**26 – 28 April 2006**

**Communiqué of meeting**

**A. PREAMBLE**

The Federal Government of Nigeria, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, having observed the plight of IDPs in West Africa with concern, organized a three-day Conference on Internal Displacement in West Africa. This was the first conference of its kind in the sub-region.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss the plight of IDPs in West Africa, with a view to finding ways of enhancing their status and welfare. It brought together eminent scholars, policy-makers, and national, regional, international, and non-governmental organizations from within Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the world to discuss and exchange ideas on the following sub-themes:

- (i) Overview of internal displacement in the ECOWAS sub-region
- (ii) Normative framework of reference: The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
- (iii) National responsibility towards IDPs
- (iv) Protection and assistance for the displaced
- (v) Risks and vulnerabilities needing special attention
- (vi) Durable solutions: return, resettlement and reintegration
- (vii) The role of ECOWAS and the African Union
- (viii) The international response

**B. OBSERVATIONS**

The conference, after comprehensive and wide-ranging deliberations, observed as follows:

1. In West Africa today, IDPs represent a significant challenge requiring concerted attention.
2. There are no accurate statistics on IDPs in West Africa. One reason is that IDPs are absorbed into households as much as possible.
3. The presence of IDPs in West Africa is a direct consequence of conflicts, natural disasters, impoverishment, environmental degradation and development projects.
4. IDPs can suffer from socio-economic deprivation, socio-cultural dissociation and emotional imbalance caused by displacement, the trauma of war and other calamities.
5. Amongst the internally displaced, the most vulnerable groups are often women, children and the infirm.

6. IDPs and people who are not displaced deserve equal human rights protection, yet the internally displaced often encounter discrimination at a variety of levels.
7. Displaced women, children and other vulnerable groups in IDP camps and elsewhere often face exceptionally difficult circumstances. They therefore need adequate protection against exploitation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from the above observations, the following recommendations were made:

1. The *Guiding Principles* should be widely disseminated and promoted across West Africa, since they are acknowledged and accepted as the standard norm and framework for addressing internal displacement within the ECOWAS sub-region.
2. National laws, policies and plans of action should be developed, based on the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. These laws, policies and plans of action should be developed with the support of the highest levels of government and should involve a process of broad consultation.
3. States should ratify, implement and monitor international, regional and sub-regional human rights and humanitarian instruments relating to internal displacement. States should also implement the recommendations of fact-finding missions carried out by the Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.
4. Comprehensive capacity building initiatives should be developed to assist national institutions and civil society organizations to address internal displacement.
5. Activities should be developed to prevent and tackle the root causes of internal displacement. These activities should address reconciliation and peace-building, poverty alleviation, accountable governance and natural disaster mitigation. Early warning systems should also be developed.
6. Decision-making processes and the implementation of programs on internal displacement should involve the active consultation and participation of the full range of stakeholders, and particularly IDPs themselves. IDPs should also have the opportunity to take part in deliberations on internal displacement at all levels.
7. Among internally displaced persons, women, children, the elderly, and the disabled may have special needs which should be identified and addressed during all phases of displacement and in all contexts, including camps and urban environments.
8. Responses to internal displacement must take into account not only the needs of IDPs, but also the concerns of the families and communities that provide them shelter.
9. Governmental, non-governmental, regional and international organizations should coordinate their activities to ensure a comprehensive approach to internal displacement that avoids the duplication of efforts and the inefficient use of resources. To this end, each ECOWAS state should identify a national focal point with responsibility for internal displacement issues.

10. States should ensure that civil society partners and international agencies have safe and unhindered access to internally displaced populations requiring protection and assistance.
11. Relevant state authorities, in conjunction with civil society organizations, academic institutions and international agencies should collaborate to improve methods of gathering and analyzing data on the location, condition and needs of IDPs and the communities in which they live. This information should be disseminated widely, especially through the media.
12. A comprehensive approach to durable solutions is required that addresses the original causes of displacement as well as the vulnerability of IDPs and their neighbors. In order to ensure the sustainability of return, resettlement and reintegration, post-conflict transition programs should be implemented, as well as land tenure reform and employment generation programs.
13. The right of internally displaced persons to make an informed choice whether to return, resettle or integrate locally should be respected.
14. Allocations for IDP programs should be made in national budgets, and opportunities for public-private funding partnerships should be explored. International donors should provide consistent and reliable support.
15. Protection and empowerment of IDP women should be enhanced. Following return, resettlement and family reunification, greater efforts should be made to ensure that IDP women can preserve and continue to develop the valuable professional and livelihood skills they often acquire while displaced, particularly as heads of households. Domestic violence against IDP women and the health and psychosocial needs of the survivors of sexual abuse should also receive increased attention from national authorities, humanitarian agencies and NGOs.
16. Protection and access to durable solutions for IDP children should be improved. In particular, increased support should be directed towards family reunification programs and the integration of provisions on displaced children into national child protection laws. Specialized training should be provided to improve services for displaced children, particularly child combatants and unaccompanied minors.
17. Responses to internal displacement should be harmonized across the sub-region. Efforts should be made to ensure the equitable treatment of IDPs and other vulnerable populations.
18. IDPs' access to national justice systems should be facilitated and every effort should be made to combat impunity for human rights violations. Community-based approaches to reconciliation such as cooperative economic projects should also be pursued.
19. ECOWAS should strengthen its engagement on issues of internal displacement. The issue of internal displacement should be placed on the agenda of upcoming Ministerial and Heads of State meetings. ECOWAS Member States should consider the development of a protocol, declaration or plan of action to address internal displacement in West Africa. Such efforts should be coordinated with the work of the African Union and linked to donor initiatives.
20. The capacity of ECOWAS to advocate on issues of internal displacement should be reinforced. To this end, ECOWAS should appoint a focal point dedicated to

addressing issues of internal displacement in West Africa. This person may be an eminent dignitary responsible for raising awareness of displacement issues, investigating situations of displacement, and promoting protection and assistance for IDPs in West Africa.

21. State commitment to ECOWAS Protocols relevant to internal displacement should be consolidated through universal ratification. ECOWAS should undertake regular monitoring of the implementation of these instruments.
22. Inter-regional dialogue on issues of internal displacement should be encouraged, including through African Union processes. In particular, national human rights institutions from across Africa should have the opportunity to meet and compare experiences in addressing internal displacement.
23. Protection issues should be integrated into the design of peace operations and the capacity of peacekeepers to respond to internal displacement should be strengthened through extensive training. The ECOWAS Stand-By Force should also receive training on issues of internal displacement. Monitoring procedures should be instituted or enhanced to ensure that codes of conduct banning the exploitation of the displaced by peacekeeping forces are rigorously enforced.
24. Every effort should be made to ensure that international interventions on behalf of IDPs do not promote dependence but foster self-reliance and community sustainability.