

**Address by Mr. Walter Kälin,
Representative of the Secretary-General on the
Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons**

**at the event of the launch of the
Migration and Internally Displaced Population Survey**

Ankara, 6 December 2006

Honorable Minister, Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to have been invited, in my capacity as Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, to participate in this launch of the Survey on Migration and Internally Displaced Population in Turkey, undertaken by the Hacettepe University's Institute of Population Studies.

This has been a very productive year of intensive cooperation between my mandate/office and the Turkish Government. In February, I participated in the launch event of the project "Support to the development of an IDP program in Turkey", which the Minister of the Interior and the United Nations Development Programme had organised jointly. Recently, in September, I addressed the launch event of the Action Plan for improving the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Van Province. I was impressed with the broad consultations that took place during the development of the Plan, and with the comprehensive and concrete programme designed to find durable solutions for IDPs in the region. As I highlighted, the implementation of the Action Plan merits the full support of the Government and of all stakeholders involved, and could serve as an example also for other provinces of Turkey. I welcome and endorse the bottom-up approach of the Ministry of Interior to develop action plans in

the other effected provinces using the same inclusive and participatory methodology as in Van which will provide the basis for the National plan of action.

The close working relationship which I, as Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs enjoy with the Turkish Government, builds on the work of my predecessor in office, Mr. Francis Deng who came to Turkey on official mission in 2002.

One of Mr. Deng's main recommendations at that time was that comprehensive and reliable data on the nature and scale of the problem of internal displacement in Turkey should be collected. The purpose of such exercise would be to gain a more accurate picture of the protection, assistance and reintegration needs of those who have been displaced against their will. Their needs often differ from those of the wider population. For example, displaced persons are less likely to find employment, because they may not have the skills or support networks needed in a new environment. Some of the displaced in Turkey have also had problems accessing health services, and their children's education may have suffered. Mr. Deng suggested that data was required on the overall number of the displaced, their current whereabouts, their living conditions and the specific challenges they faced. Finally, information was needed on whether people intended to return, to resettle elsewhere, or to integrate into the communities where they are currently living. Credible and precise data could form a reliable basis for the Government's ongoing efforts to design return and reintegration policies, he suggested. I would like to add that such survey is also an excellent means of consulting with the displaced and find out about their opinions, as required by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which the Government has reaffirmed on several occasions.

I very much welcome that exactly this kind of information has been presented to us today, in the form of this very important, indeed, pioneering Survey on migration and displacement in Turkey. Being an academic myself, I would like to commend my colleagues from Hacettepe University for their very professional work and I am convinced that their study can serve as a model for other countries. I am also pleased to

see that the Government is taking great interest in this academic research and is ready to openly embrace its results and their policy implications.

Of course, it has been well-known before that there have been widespread and large-scale population movements in Turkey throughout the last decades. We also knew that a significant group of Turkish citizens had been forced to abandon their homes and villages in the past due to violence and human rights abuses, and that many of these have not yet been able to re-build their lives but remain at the margins of society. When the Survey was undertaken in order to gain a precise figure of the magnitude of the problem, the Government of Turkey had already begun to find solutions. The Council of Ministers adopted a national strategy commonly referred to as the Return to Village Project,¹ whose implementation is foreseen through more detailed Action Plans which could be similar to the one recently adopted in Van. The Compensation Law for private property destroyed in the context of security operations was adopted and then amended to address early concerns, and the Damage Assessment Commissions have begun their work. Despite certain problems with the law and its implementation, this is a very good start.

This is why I am confident that the Turkish Government is well-prepared to make the best use of the Survey results which have just been presented, in order to fill remaining gaps and address outstanding challenges to the reintegration of the displaced. For example, the Survey shows that most displaced have lost or had to abandon their property when they fled. But it also shows that significant parts of the displaced population simply do not know that they could apply to obtain compensation through the Compensation Law. Therefore, efforts to improve the full, consistent and equitable application of the Law need to proceed further.

The Survey also demonstrates that more than half of the displaced citizens now wish to return to their communities. The others would prefer to remain and reintegrate into society in the place where they have been living for the past years. In accordance

¹ Full title “Measures on the Issue of Internally Displaced Persons and the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project”.

with the Guiding Principles, it is essential that Turkish citizens can make this choice freely, and that they receive the necessary support for their decisions. Finally, it becomes clear from the results that tens of thousands have already gone back to their communities of origin. According to the Survey, most returnees who were asked said that they were happy with the conditions they found back home. Yet the concerns of those who were not need to be taken seriously and to be addressed to the extent possible, so that they, too, are able to rebuild their lives.

I would like to encourage the Turkish Government to continue with its intention of integrating the Survey's findings into social assistance and integration or re-integration programmes, on the one hand, and of designing a comprehensive policy instrument in response to the results, on the other. In order to enhance the efficiency and impact of such a policy response, the Migration Survey should be disseminated widely, so that its findings can stimulate an open and constructive debate involving all stakeholders.

I look forward to being able to participate in this debate. In my capacity as Representative of the Secretary-General, I stand ready to continue to support the efforts of all relevant government agencies, civil society organisations, and the international community in your efforts to enable the displaced in Turkey to stop being affected by problems brought over them in the past, and to start their new lives as full and productive members of society.