

**STATEMENT OF FRANCIS M. DENG TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2003**

[Check Against Delivery]

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

In recent years, I have reported on the considerable progress the international community has made in responding to the global crisis of internal displacement. I have, however, also highlighted that too many internally displaced persons around the world are still going without adequate food, water, shelter, hygiene and other basic necessities, still subject to physical violence, sexual assault and discrimination, still no closer to return or resettlement in permanent homes, in short, still desperate and urgently in need of help. This is again my message today.

On the positive side, the level of awareness about the crisis has risen considerably as has the consensus that it is an issue of legitimate and pressing concern for the international community as a whole. When the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons was created over ten years ago, the issue was considered extremely sensitive. Some Governments feared that international attention to the issue might provide a pretext for interfering with state sovereignty. Today, those concerns have been significantly mitigated. And indeed, in carrying out the responsibilities of my mandate, I have endeavoured to assure Governments of my recognition of the problem as inherently internal and therefore falling under state sovereignty. My role is a catalytic one, to promote international cooperation with Governments to enable them to discharge what is first and foremost their own responsibility – providing protection and assistance for persons under their jurisdiction. In this context, I am glad to report that quite a number of Governments have responded positively to this approach.

Another area of progress has been the development, dissemination, promotion, and application of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are based on binding principles of international humanitarian law, human rights law, and analogous refugee law. The Principles have been very well received by Governments, a number of which have found them to be a useful guide in the development of their own policies, laws and approaches to internal displacement. They have been equally well received by United Nations agencies, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and even non-state actors. To be sure, some Governments have expressed concerns that the Principles were not formally negotiated by States. However, through on-going dialogue, consensus behind the Principles has broadened considerably.

While the growing acceptance of the Guiding Principles is vitally significant, the development of effective institutional mechanisms at the international level for assisting

States in carrying out their responsibilities with regard to the internally displaced is equally important. The international community has been grappling with this task for some time. To date, the preferred response has been the “collaborative approach,” according to which existing humanitarian and development agencies and organizations agree to work collectively to address the needs of the internally displaced within their various mandates and with regard to their comparative advantages. Important steps have been taken to solidify this approach, including the designation of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators as officials charged with ensuring coordination of assistance to, and protection of, the internally displaced at the country level, the designation of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) as the focal point for issues of internal displacement at the headquarters level, and the creation of the OCHA IDP Unit to assist the ERC in his task.

Nevertheless, serious problems of coordination persist and many internally displaced persons continue to fall through institutional cracks, leaving their pressing needs unmet. Serious questions remain to be answered, including how responsibilities are assigned and how to ensure that appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place. This is widely acknowledged within the humanitarian community and I sense a growing willingness from all parts of the system to find answers. Yet, it bears repeating that the current shortcomings require immediate, effective and efficient action by the international community.

My country missions have proven to be the litmus test for the effectiveness of both national and international responses to the crisis. Through my reports on these missions, I have endeavoured to turn statistics into human faces, making visible the deprivation and degradation which displacement inflicts on the dignity of human beings. So far, I have undertaken twenty-eight missions around the world, including, since my last report to you, visits to Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines, Sudan, Uganda, and the Russian Federation, in that order. In general, I can say with confidence that my missions have been successful in promoting constructive dialogue, a crucial first step toward finding solutions. To be sure, some Governments have initially been reticent to extend invitations, but once they have done so, they have invariably recognized that the outcome was positive, although following up on these visits could be more expeditious than it has been. I must note that there remain some countries that do not allow access to their internally displaced populations and therefore avoid dialogue on their behalf. Unfortunately, it is precisely in these countries that the needs of the displaced for assistance and protection tend to be most pronounced. The international community must find a way of responding to these difficult situations.

I have complemented my UN activities with the support of the Project on Internal Displacement of the Brookings Institution and the Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS), which I co- direct with Roberta Cohen, whose contribution to this cause has been widely acknowledged. The Project not only conducts and commissions research on various aspects of the problems of internal displacement, but also organizes seminars at the national and regional levels, and cooperates with various organizations, community leaders, research institutions, university scholars, and

individual experts around the world. This creative partnership between UN bodies and external resources could not have been possible without the generous support of a number of Governments and foundations. We are very grateful for their support.

One of the areas in which the Project has assisted me in my work has been in forging cooperation with regional organizations. Over the years, we have developed cooperation with the Organization of African Unity (now reconstituted as the African Union), the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth, and most recently the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

I would like to draw particular attention to the conference IGAD convened in September of this year with the support of my office and the OCHA IDP Unit. The conference was hosted by the Government of Sudan in Khartoum and took place in a remarkably constructive atmosphere. The resulting IGAD Ministerial declaration took note of the utility of the Guiding Principles, identified regional dynamics aggravating internal displacement problems, and committed member governments to ongoing cooperation on this issue, including through the creation of a dedicated unit on displacement within the IGAD secretariat. I welcome this forceful first step by IGAD members to work together to address internal displacement in one of the worst affected areas and look forward to further development of their plans. I also hope that other regional organizations will consider taking comparable steps.

Perhaps the most pivotal – and difficult – issue when it comes to internal displacement is the need to address the root causes, often embedded in gross inequities, discrimination and marginalisation to an extent that makes citizenship of value only on paper. I have often argued that internal displacement and even the conflicts that generate it are only symptoms of deeper structural problems. Prudence should dictate that internal displacement and the crises generating it be viewed as alarm signals that also offer opportunities for developing strategic remedies. Internal displacement is more than a humanitarian and human rights issue; it is also a political and security issue – indeed, a challenge to nation-building.

Once again, I reiterate that a great deal has been accomplished, but a lot more needs to be done; there can be no room for complacency.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention.