

# Opening Statement at the Conference on Internal Displacement in Asia

**Bangkok, Thailand, February 22-24, 2000**

**Delivered by Francis M. Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution**

On behalf of the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, of which I am co-director with my illustrious colleague, Roberta Cohen, I should like to welcome you to this conference on internal displacement in Asia. May I also extend warm greetings to you in my capacity as Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons.

The Brookings Project is pleased to co-sponsor this conference along with UNHCR, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia), the Norwegian Refugee Council and the U.S. Committee for Refugees. We are most grateful to the University of Chulalongkorn and Forum Asia for hosting this meeting. I should also like to give special thanks to a number of individuals—Gimena Sanchez of the Brookings Project, Anna Heed and Amara Lohvithe of UNHCR Bangkok, Irene Khan of UNHCR Geneva and my colleague Roberta Cohen—whose tireless efforts have been essential to the organization of the conference.

This conference is the third in a series of regional conferences on internal displacement that the Brookings Project is co-sponsoring. The first took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1998 and the second in Bogota, Colombia in 1999.

The objectives of this conference are threefold. First, to promote the dissemination and application in Asia of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which I had the honor of presenting to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998. Since that time, the Guiding Principles have gained wide recognition at the international level as well as by regional organizations in Africa, Europe and the Americas. This meeting is the first to introduce the Principles at the regional level in Asia. The second objective of the conference is to share information on the problem of internal displacement in the Asian region and to identify practices for addressing it effectively. Third, it is the aim of the conference to promote more regular and systematic networking and documentation of problems of internal displacement and to develop monitoring systems within the region.

An impressive array of over 40 participants from 16 Asian countries is gathered here today to work towards these ends. Indeed, the response to this conference has been overwhelming. Unfortunately, for reasons of space, we could not invite all those interested in attending, while those of us here today find ourselves in rather close quarters. On the positive side, the significant interest in the subject is most exciting and can be productive. It also suggests the need for additional such meetings in Asia.

Our gathering here today reflects our shared concern about the problems of internal displacement in Asia. The rich cross-section of participants—from non-governmental organizations, research institutions, national human rights commissions and regional and international organizations—is an indication of the potential for partnerships among us to address the problems in a collaborative and comprehensive manner. It is my hope that this conference will foster a regional approach and closer collaboration among the various partners to develop strategies for improving the lives of the millions of internally displaced in Asia.