

# **REPORT ON THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ASIA**

(Bangkok, Thailand, 22-24 February 2000)

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A Regional Conference on Internal Displacement in Asia was held in Bangkok, February 22-24, 2000 at the invitation of the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis M. Deng. The meeting was jointly sponsored by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia), the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR). Conference hosts were the University of Chulalongkorn and Forum Asia.

Close to 60 participants came from 16 Asian and other countries and included representatives of national human rights commissions, academic and research institutions, local, regional and international NGOs, media, and international organisations.

The primary purpose of the conference was to focus attention on the problem of internal displacement in Asia and to identify ways of improving the response to that problem at the national, regional and international levels. More specifically, the conference was intended:

- to promote the dissemination and application in Asia of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (the first international standards for internally displaced persons, presented to the UN in 1998);
- to share information on the problem of internal displacement within the Asian region and identify effective practices for addressing it; and
- to promote more regular networking among organisations involved with internally displaced persons, more systematic documentation of the problems facing the displaced, and the development of monitoring systems.

The Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, Chuchai Kasemsarn, opened the meeting. Introductory statements were then made by Dr. Suraphol Wirurak, Vice President of the University of Chulalongkorn; Somchai Homla-Or, Secretary-General of Forum Asia; Steinar Sorlie, Secretary-General, Norwegian Refugee Council, on behalf of the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, the NRC and the USCR; Irene Khan, Deputy Director, Department of International Protection, UNHCR (Geneva), and Francis Deng, Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. Conference participants heard a global overview of the problem by the Representative of the Secretary-General, an introduction to the Guiding Principles, reports on regional patterns and trends, and country case studies on Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), North Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

This report, which sets out the main conclusions and recommendations of the conference, was prepared by the rapporteur, Wei Meng Lim-Kabaa (UNHCR), assisted by co-rapporteurs Sivanka Dhanapala (Office of the Representative of the Secretary-General on IDPs), and Steven Lanjouw (Burmese Ethnic Research Group). It was reviewed by the conference organisers.

## II. INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ASIA

1. Participants noted with deep concern that internal displacement is a global problem which poses serious humanitarian, human rights, political, economic and security challenges. In Asia, millions have been forcibly displaced in their own countries without any established or predictable source of support. Participants further noted that internal displacement is a growing problem in the region which calls for greater national, regional and international concern.

2. Two forms of internal displacement were recognised to be of critical concern in Asia: conflict-induced displacement and development-induced displacement. The two are often interlinked and if not addressed, could have severe social, economic and political consequences. Many Asian countries experience substantial internal displacement.

3. Internally displaced persons in Asia live under conditions of severe deprivation and hardship and a large proportion are women and children. Women and children are especially vulnerable, given that many women are single heads of households while children do not enjoy the benefits of a normal family life and may also be exposed to forced recruitment by armed groups.

4. Participants underlined the difficulties of the international community in raising issues of internal population displacement with governments in the region, given the extreme sensitivities of these governments to their sovereignty over populations within their jurisdiction. The challenge, however, is for governments in the region to view state sovereignty not negatively as a means to exclude themselves from international scrutiny, but rather as an exercise of their responsibility toward their own people, including addressing the problem of forced population displacements within their jurisdictions.

5. Participants further noted that against a backdrop of the withdrawal of major powers from many parts of Asia as a result of the ending of the cold war, the international community is facing increasing problems in finding sufficient resources to address humanitarian problems in the region. Thus it is crucial that governments in the region be made aware of their responsibilities toward internally displaced persons within their jurisdictions. This was considered even more important given the absence of regional mechanisms to deal with the problem of internal displacement in the Asian region.

## III. THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

6. Participants expressed appreciation for the work of the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, and called on governments of countries affected by the problem of internal displacement in Asia to invite the Representative of the Secretary-General to visit their countries and undertake studies of situations of internal displacements within their jurisdictions.

7. Participants welcomed the Guiding Principles which represent the first set of international standards specific to the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. Developed by a team of international legal experts under the direction of the Representative of the Secretary-General, the Principles articulate the meaning of protection for internally displaced persons by setting forth the rights of such populations and identifying the obligations of states and other authorities in the different phases of displacement.

8. The widespread acceptance of the Guiding Principles by the international community was noted. It was recognised that while the Guiding Principles are not legally binding, their authority lie in the fact that they reflect international law, namely humanitarian law, human rights law and analogous refugee law and also rest on the moral authority of the Representative of the Secretary-General as well as the fact that they have been acknowledged by the United Nations General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, and Commission on Human Rights. The Guiding Principles have been endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, are widely disseminated through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and are promoted by various international humanitarian agencies within and outside the United Nations system.

9. Participants noted that the Guiding Principles do not seek to create a privileged category of persons or establish a separate legal status for the internally displaced. Rather, the principles are based on the assumption that internally displaced persons have the same rights and obligations as other persons in their own country. At the same time, however, the Guiding Principles draw attention to the importance of realising those rights in a way that addresses the particular situation and needs of the internally displaced.

10. Participants stressed the importance of implementation of the Guiding Principles and also stated their commitment toward disseminating the Guiding Principles and promoting their application and observance by governments, non-state actors and all other parties concerned.

11. Participants considered the Guiding Principles applicable to both development- induced and conflict-induced displacement and suggested that the Guiding Principles could be used in a number of ways:

- as an advocacy tool to engage all concerned parties on behalf of internally displaced persons as well as those who are at risk of displacement;
- to raise awareness generally to the rights of internally displaced persons and the responsibilities of the various authorities in respect of those rights;
- as a yardstick for monitoring the situation of internally displaced persons and assessing their needs;

- as a model for domestic legislation concerning the protection of internally displaced persons;
- as a reference of applicable standards for the treatment of internally displaced populations when the rights of displaced populations are being adjudicated in a court of law;
- to empower internally displaced communities by providing them with information concerning their rights and the responsibilities of the concerned authorities.

#### IV. DEVELOPMENT INDUCED DISPLACEMENT

12. Participants stressed the importance of addressing the problem of development-induced displacement in Asia where rapid economic development has resulted in the forced displacement of millions of people. Development-induced displacement, participants noted, often produces conflicts and violence within societies and may provoke conflict induced displacement. It was noted that development projects may have a negative impact on human rights; first, they may benefit only certain segments of the population in the country and may thus affect the economic rights of the population which are affected negatively by such projects; and second, inadequate efforts to consult with and address the needs of the populations at risk of displacement may be detrimental to their human rights.

13. The relevance of Section II of the Guiding Principles which concerns protection from arbitrary displacement was underlined. In particular, Principle 6 provides that displacement as a result of large-scale development projects can be deemed arbitrary if the projects are not justified by compelling and overriding public interests.

14. Where the displacement cannot be prevented, participants stressed that protection measures should be undertaken by the authorities concerned to minimise the adverse effects of the displacement, as enumerated in Principle 7 of the Guiding Principles. Such measures should include adequate financial compensation as well as alternative accommodation which should be comparable to the area from which the displacement took place. It was underscored that with regard to the displacement of tribal populations, indigenous peoples, and other such groups, Principle 9 of the Guiding Principles imposes on States particular obligations to prevent their displacement given their special dependency on and attachment to their lands. Thus where displacement does occur, it was of particular importance that comparable alternative accommodation sites be provided by the concerned authorities, in view also of the fact that tribal and other populations generally have no land titles to claim ownership of the lands they have been occupying. It was recognised that the Guiding Principles would provide a valuable point of departure for the further development of legal norms and principles addressing with greater specificity issues of compensation and land reallocation.

15. Many participants emphasised the importance of states having legislative provisions and legal mechanisms which would enable the fair and efficient adjudication of claims of displaced populations. In this context, participants recognised the importance of assisting communities to develop their capacity to negotiate with the authorities concerned, and encouraged local non-governmental

organisations and other local concerned agencies to support and assist such persons in the negotiation process.

16. Participants called on governments to establish consultation mechanisms which would allow the solicitation of views of the populations to be affected by large-scale development projects and, in this context, urged governments to ensure the undertaking of human rights impact assessment studies prior to such projects being endorsed. Many participants voiced the need for international financial institutions which often fund development projects, to be included within the consultation process and reiterated that such institutions should not fund development projects which may lead to the violation of basic rights of the affected populations.

## V. DISPLACEMENT CAUSED BY ARMED CONFLICT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

17. Participants noted with serious concern that in certain countries in Asia, armed conflict has gone on for over a decade, and has resulted in massive population displacements for a protracted period of time. It was recognised that in situations of conflict-induced displacement, the practical application of the Guiding Principles is especially difficult because of the inability of the governments to fulfil their responsibilities or their unwillingness to do so. Participants thus called on governments to make special efforts to extend protection and humanitarian assistance to persons displaced by armed conflict, violence and human rights violations in accordance with the standards set forth in the Guiding Principles.

18. Participants emphasised that humanitarian agencies have an important role to play in supporting governments' efforts to provide assistance and protection to internally displaced populations. Participants urged States not to perceive offers of services from these agencies as an unfriendly act or as interference in the State's internal affairs, but to consider them in good faith.

19. In discussing the protection of persons displaced as a result of armed conflict, violence and human rights abuses, participants underlined the difficulties of gaining humanitarian access to these populations as well as the lack of information concerning the displaced populations. Participants noted that in certain instances, out of necessity, non-traditional methods of gaining access to the internally displaced by relief agencies may be called for, or the expansion of monitoring activities to those externally displaced so as to obtain information about the situation of displaced populations inside the country of origin. Participants stressed that in order to address this problem and bring about positive changes in the situation of the internally displaced, humanitarian organisations should engage all concerned parties to the conflict in dialogue. In this context, many participants highlighted the relevance of the Guiding Principles as a tool of engagement.

20. The importance of integration of protection concerns into the provision of material assistance to internally displaced persons was stressed. In this context, participants agreed that the Guiding Principles could be used as benchmarks for the setting of protection objectives and to guide the planning of assistance activities. In order to achieve more effective protection, international agencies need to ensure their

presence in affected areas, establish close relations with all concerned parties including the internally displaced and local NGOs, engage government and non-governmental groups in dialogue, undertake advocacy work and create greater humanitarian space as part of their strategy. At the same time, it may be necessary, in certain situations, to assess any possible negative impact that assistance programmes may have on the protection of the beneficiaries and to this end consider the withdrawal or non-implementation of assistance projects. Some participants pointed out that, nonetheless, where monitoring of food distribution is obstructed, and protection cannot be integrated with assistance, there may still be a “trickle down” effect of the assistance provided, thus making continued aid essential.

21. Participants further recognised that for any engagement and dialogue to be successful, international humanitarian organisations must act impartially and be seen to maintain their neutrality as regards the parties to a conflict. Participants urged all concerned authorities to respect the work of international humanitarian organisations and other relief agencies, to protect the staff and workers of such organisations and not subject them to attack or other acts of violence.

22. While acknowledging the constraints under which international agencies were operating in various countries in the region, participants underscored the need for greater co-operation among United Nations and other international humanitarian and development organisations in order to share information where there are serious humanitarian needs in the country concerned, in particular situations concerning internally displaced persons. Participants further stressed the important role of local relief agencies and concerned non-governmental organisations. These have the advantage of possessing an understanding of the local religion and culture and may therefore be better placed to win the trust and confidence of the authorities concerned. It was also felt that governments would be less inclined to perceive the involvement of local agencies as an attempt to internationalise the problem of internal displacement which exists within their jurisdictions. At the same time, participants reported that local NGOs which defended the displaced came under attack in a number of Asian countries, making it essential that international attention be focused upon them.

23. Participants stressed the need to address the political, social and economic root causes of displacement, including human rights issues. Addressing root causes call for responsible political leadership, greater democratisation, strong civil society and a willingness on the part of all parties concerned to engage in dialogue and find acceptable approaches in order to avert forced population displacement. Several participants emphasised that greater democratisation and stronger civil society would help reduce the power of the military whose role in conflict-induced as well as development-induced displacement has often been pronounced.

24. Participants reiterated that assistance to internally displaced persons should not be provided for the purpose of preventing efforts to seek asylum outside the country. At the same time, they saw value in such assistance reducing the need for internally displaced persons to move outside their countries to seek asylum elsewhere. Asylum countries, after all, would be less inclined to adopt restrictive asylum policies if their fears of having to host large numbers of asylum seekers were allayed.

## VI. RETURN RESETTLEMENT AND REINTEGRATION

25. Participants affirmed that it is the primary responsibility of State authorities to establish conditions which are conducive for the return of internally displaced persons to their homes or places of habitual residence or else to resettle them voluntarily in another part of the country. It was stressed that ultimately, returning populations should be able to avail themselves of the national protection of the State. In discussing Principle 28, it was recognised that while the precepts in that provision are drawn by analogy from refugee law, its application to internally displaced persons should be in the context of human rights law concerning the basic right to freedom of movement and choice of residence in one's country. Participants also recognised the important role which the international community could play in assisting the development of the capacity of concerned authorities to create conducive conditions.

26. It was noted that in most situations, displaced persons have been unable to return to their homes and therefore State authorities should make available alternative sites for resettlement. Many participants emphasised that in Asia where the majority of displaced populations are rural, availability of safe and good quality agricultural land for resettlement is particularly important if the sustainability of the return is to be achieved.

27. Participants underscored the responsibility of State authorities to assist returned and/or resettled internally displaced persons to recover their property and possessions which they left behind or were dispossessed of upon their displacement. Where the recovery of such property and possessions was not possible, the authorities should provide or assist such persons obtain appropriate compensation or another form of reparation. Participants further underscored, in this context, the importance of land policies which take into account the needs of displaced populations, development of relevant legislation, and establishment of judicial and other mechanisms to deal with land and property claims on the basis of the rule of law.

28. Participants noted with regret that there continue to be situations in which returned displaced persons have been faced with discrimination, such as not being allowed to exercise some of their basic political rights, and called on concerned authorities to take action to redress such situations in accordance with the Guiding Principles.

29. Participants noted the importance of enabling internally displaced persons who have returned home or resettled, to be assisted to reintegrate within the existing community and public structures. In this context, the usefulness of micro-credit schemes as a means of developing self-sufficiency was noted and participants encouraged concerned humanitarian agencies to explore, wherever appropriate, the possibilities of implementing such schemes, in particular for women heads of households.

## VII. DISPLACED WOMEN AND CHILDREN

30. Participants noted with appreciation the gender sensitivity of the Guiding Principles and urged all parties disseminating the Guiding Principles to highlight the provisions that concern displaced women and children.

31. Participants emphasised that the particular vulnerability and special needs of displaced women and children call for their special care and protection. It was noted that women displaced by armed conflict are affected in a particularly adverse manner, at times requiring them to take on new roles such as heads of families, a situation which severely tests their ability to cope and manage. The discussions also highlighted the special vulnerability of internally displaced women to medical problems where they are not able to or may even be prevented from access to normal health care facilities. Poverty and unfavourable religious and cultural practices also exacerbate the plight of internally displaced women. Additionally, the special vulnerability of displaced women in conflict situation to gender-related crimes, such as rape, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse was also underlined. Participants stressed that strenuous efforts must be undertaken by concerned authorities to ensure that internally displaced women receive special care and protection which takes into account their special needs as women.

32. Participants also stressed the importance of a rights-based approach when addressing issues of internally displaced women, in particular in a situation where religious and cultural practices do not enable women to exercise their basic rights. Under such circumstances, it was important that displaced women be made aware of their basic rights and be assisted to explore how to exercise these rights within their religious and cultural environment.

33. Participants also called on humanitarian organisations and other concerned governmental and non-governmental organisations to ensure that women are accorded a prominent role in the planning and implementation of assistance programmes, including those for rehabilitation and reintegration of returning or resettling displaced persons; that they are properly represented on any committees established to articulate the views of the internally displaced; and that the establishment of women's groups and associations is effectively supported.

34. In relation to rehabilitation of displaced women, participants noted that displaced women who have adapted to a new role during displacement may face special difficulties returning to a social environment which is characterised by gender discrimination and sexual exploitation, and which does not recognize their new role in the social structure. In this context, participants urged that programmes developed to assist returned or resettled displaced persons should be designed taking into account the empowerment of women so as to enable them to become self-sufficient and economically independent.

35. In regard to displaced children, participants noted with regret that children displaced by conflict are often victims of forced recruitment, exploitative labour and sexual abuse. Many are also separated from their parents and are often traumatised. Such children are thus in need of special physical and psychological support. At the same time, recognising that the protection of children depend very much on the protection given to the family, participants stressed the importance of supporting the family structure in order to ensure adequate protection for children. Participants called



on all concerned authorities to give special attention to the situation of displaced children taking into account their special protection needs.

## VIII. INFORMATION GATHERING AND EXCHANGE

36. Participants noted with regret the general lack of information on the situation of internal displacement in many Asian countries. It was recognised that information on situations of internal displacement is an important tool in sensitising governments to the existence of the problem, such sensitisation being a prelude to adequately addressing the needs of internally displaced persons in the countries concerned.

37. Participants noted the particular difficulties of information gathering in Asian countries. In some, there is a general lack of access to various parts of the country, while in others, access is denied to those areas where massive population displacement has taken place. It was observed that during the conference, information on the situation of internal displacement in some countries had been provided for the first time, which had thrown light on a number of hidden situations and problems. Participants urged concerned authorities to allow access to internally displaced persons in their jurisdictions and encouraged international humanitarian organisations and NGOs to intensify their activities in gathering information from available sources.

38. In this regard, participants expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the Representative of the Secretary-General, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, research institutes and international and local NGOs to gather information on situations of internal displacement and disseminate it as widely as possible. Participants welcomed the establishment of the IDP Global Database by the Norwegian Refugee Council and encouraged the further development of this database, in particular to include situations of internal displacement induced by large-scale development projects. Participants stressed that the information available should be shared, not only with international organisations, relief agencies and concerned authorities, but with internally displaced persons themselves, although the inherent difficulties of achieving this was recognised.

39. It was noted that since there are substantial parts in Asia which do not have access to the internet, the use of the IDP Global Database may be limited in the region. Participants thus called for the development of a complementary system of information gathering and sharing within the region.

40. The importance of the media in bringing forth little known information was emphasised. In some cases local media was allowed entry while international media and international organisations were barred. In this connection, the need to enhance safety for journalists and other media was underscored.

## IX. REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

41. Participants noted with regret the lack of any regional or sub-regional structures in Asia which could have a role in addressing the problem of internal displacement in the region. In addition, since issues relating to armed conflict, human rights violations and mass

population displacements are a source of political controversy, states normally avoid taking up such issues within any existing regional forum. Participants therefore urged the development of strategies to encourage the introduction of the issue of internal displacement into the agendas of regional bodies such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Participants also considered it essential that regional non-governmental organisations and regional bodies, such as the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, address issues of internal displacement and promote the Guiding Principles as a tool of protection for internally displaced persons as well as those at risk of displacement.

42. Further, participants recognised the importance of enhancing the role and capacity of local structures in preventing and responding to situations of internal displacement. In this regard, participants agreed that local non-governmental organisations, national human rights institutions and all other concerned authorities, groups and entities, including where relevant, religious institutions, should be sensitised to the problem of internal displacement and to the Guiding Principles and be encouraged to undertake promotional and remedial efforts.

43. Recognising the resourcefulness of internally displaced persons themselves, participants also agreed that internally displaced persons themselves should be assisted to know and understand the Guiding Principles as well as to articulate their basic rights and to negotiate with the concerned authorities.

## X. PLAN OF ACTION

44. Participants recognised the need to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to effectively address the problem of internal displacement in Asia. In particular, participants noted the importance of building awareness of the situation of internal displacement in Asia, gathering information, monitoring and reporting on the situation, strengthening and developing national and regional mechanisms to effectively address the problem and building capacity to promote protection of internally displaced persons within the framework of the Guiding Principles.

45. In order to achieve the above objectives, participants put forward the following concerted plan of action:

- Strengthening the capacity of non-governmental organisations with respect to:
  - ensuring that issues concerning internally displaced persons are incorporated as key human rights issues within their respective programmes;
  - deepening their knowledge and understanding of the Guiding Principles particularly through training and workshops;
  - disseminating the Guiding Principles to all levels of civil society, including internally displaced persons themselves and enlisting the media for mass education in the principles;
  - drafting of national legislation for the protection of the rights of internally displaced persons in line with the Guiding Principles;

- networking among NGOs in the region to develop their capacities, improve co-ordination and harmonisation in their approaches to issues of internal displacement and strengthen their joint efforts to promote the observance of the Guiding Principles;
  - raising the issue of internal displacement and disseminating information on situations of internal displacement in Asia in all relevant international and regional fora;
  - gathering of information on situations of internal displacement and sharing of such information with other concerned agencies and organisations, including the IDP Global Database, international humanitarian organisations and donor and other supportive governments.
- Strengthening the capacity of national human rights institutions with respect to:
    - deepening their knowledge and understanding of the Guiding Principles, particularly through training and workshops ;
    - applying the Guiding Principles when dealing with the rights of internally displaced persons;
    - investigating, documenting, and reporting on the situations of internal displacement;
    - intervening on behalf internally displaced persons with concerned authorities or through national judicial mechanisms;
    - drafting of national legislation for the protection of internally displaced persons;
    - collaborating with concerned government authorities, non-governmental organisations as well as all levels of civil society to raise awareness to situations of internal displacement and to disseminate the Guiding Principles;
    - disseminating the Guiding Principles in appropriate national, regional and international fora.
  - Encouraging and assisting academic institutions, within a multidisciplinary approach, to:
    - introduce the teaching of the subject of internal displacement within the framework of existing courses;
    - undertake research and publications on the subject of internal displacement;
    - assist national human rights commissions with information and studies;
    - hold conferences, workshops and seminars on the subject;

- network with other academic institutions within the region to develop joint research and teaching programs.
- Developing strategies to promote greater attention by regional intergovernmental organisations to situations of internal displacement, and in particular encouraging the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions to place internal displacement on its agenda and disseminate the Guiding Principles.
- Translating the Guiding Principles into local languages and ensuring their dissemination to all sectors of civil society.
- Developing programs to engage internally displaced populations in promoting their own rights.
- Participants noted the ongoing activities of Forum Asia in relation to issues concerning internal displacement, noted its proposed recommendations (see Annex), and encouraged Forum Asia to continue its activities. Some participants, in particular those from the Philippines, expressed their strong support for Forum Asia's initiatives.

## ANNEX

### FORUM ASIA DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR PLAN OF ACTION

Based on presentations and discussions during the past two and a half days, we can conclude that in almost all countries in the region, the situation of the internally displaced peoples in particular and the human rights conditions in general are acute and need urgent response. The complexities of causes and effects, with a number of players involved not only governments but non-government forces, as well as IMF, World Bank and multinational corporations in cases of development-induced displacements necessitate deeper study and analysis that would address the root causes of this phenomenon.

First, we see the need to highlight internal displacement as a core human rights problem. It is not only a humanitarian issue that requires humanitarian response. Internal displacement violates civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

Second, a clear distinction between development and conflict, and in some cases, natural disaster-induced internal displacements cannot be made in most cases within the Asian context. Long histories of conflicts and development, characterised by repressive colonial rule, authoritarian regimes, ethnic differences, religious intolerance, etc. create a complex situation that require deeper understanding and analysis.

Third, the impact of globalisation that we can attribute many, if not all of the development induced internal displacements that have occurred in Asia should be considered in analysing the situation and in planning strategies in terms of demanding for accountability and responsibility from states and other actors involved.

Fourth, given the nature of governments in countries where IDP problem is most critical, the role of NGOs become extremely important and crucial in the protection and assistance to IDPs. In many countries in Asia, human rights NGOs and defenders are at great risk and often targets of persecution. There is a need to further develop some mechanisms at all levels to ensure their protection and well being.

Fifth, given the fact that political solutions are called for in addressing the root causes of internal displacements, relief and other temporary/emergency humanitarian assistance should be geared towards empowering populations and creating space where they can exercise their rights.

Sixth, the fact that women and children are in a most vulnerable position among the IDPs, they should be given due consideration in protection and assistance and should not be subjected to discrimination.

Recognising that a number of initiatives are taking place at different levels involving various groups in the region, the following proposals are put forward to complement what already exists and to try to explore more effective ways of addressing the problem.

## 1. Formation of an Asian regional network of NGOs working on IDPs

This will be a loose network that will have the following objectives and mandate:

- a. To promote the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement through effective information exchange and dissemination, training and use of mass media.
- b. To co-ordinate existing initiatives towards improving capacities in documentation, database building, advocacy and lobbying through training and exposure programs.
- c. To explore more effective strategies to address the situation of the IDPs through research, consultations and other means.
- d. To undertake activities in support of IDPs and NGOs working on IDPs in the region through urgent actions such as sending petitions, missions, high-level representation, etc.

### *Proposed initial structure and process of organization*

- a. From this conference, country representatives will be identified. In case there are more than one participant, they will choose among themselves who will represent them in the Co-ordinating Group (CG). In countries not represented e.g. East Timor, Malaysia, contacts there will be asked to choose their representative for the Coordinating Group.
  - b. When the Co-ordinating Group meets, they will choose the members of an Executive Committee that will be composed of one each from South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Central Asia. These representatives will be chosen by their constituencies in their respective sub-regions. CG is suggested to meet once a year and the Excom once every six months or twice a year.
  - c. The Co-ordinating Committee will also identify a lead organisation to host the network's secretariat composed initially of one full-time co-ordinator.
  - d. A General Assembly may be convened two years later to assess the initial mandate, operation and structure and to plan for the next phase of the work.
2. Coordination of Urgent Action and other mechanisms to protect IDPs and NGOs working on IDPs.
  3. Indigenisation of the Guiding Principles through translation to local languages, training of grassroots communities and other capacity-building efforts and effective use of media for mass education on the Guiding Principles.
  4. Identification of focus countries/issues for each sub-region for regional and international campaign e.g. Burma for SEA, Afghanistan for CA, China for NEA and Sri Lanka for SA; Dam Campaign, Women/Children Campaign, Landmine campaign, etc.
  5. Publication of Directory of Local, National and Regional Organisations Working on IDPs in Asia.
  6. Publication of Directory of International Organisations Supporting IDPs in Asia.
  7. Publication of a Working Paper on the Situation of IDPs in Asia

This can be the starting paper, which can be used for further discussion and debate for deeper analysis to assist NGOs in their strategies and action.

(Gathered from informal brainstorming and initial consultations made by FORUM-ASIA with its member network from South and Southeast Asia.)