

# Opening Statement

**International Colloquy on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,  
Vienna, Austria, September 2000**

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I am very pleased to extend to all of you on behalf of the Austrian Government a very warm welcome in Vienna. It is with particular pleasure that we host this International Colloquy on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement here at the Hofburg together with the Brookings Institution and the Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations on Internally Displaced Persons, Professor Francis M. Deng. Let me also say that I am delighted to be opening the Colloquy myself. I do this for a number of reasons:

First of all, it was Austria to take up the issue of the protection of internally displaced persons in 1992 within the United Nations system, and we are continuing this task to which we are attaching great importance.

Looking back to the first resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights on the issue of internally displaced persons, it appears that this was the starting point for the articulation of new international responsibilities, and formulating perspectives, within the United Nations and beyond.

This of course was achieved with the help of numerous friends — within international organisations, NGOs, governments, and, you will certainly agree with me, this was possible only thanks to the untiring work of Professor Deng. We are especially satisfied about the way the mandate has developed over the years under his leadership into an institution that plays a crucial and catalytic role for one of the most pressing tasks of the international community. Recent discussions within the UN system, including the Security Council, have amply demonstrated this development, and, therefore, the more coherent way we are dealing with this concern; at the same time, however, these discussions have also demonstrated more than ever that the plight of the internally displaced needs to be addressed effectively and in a solution-oriented manner.

A second reason for my appreciation of this Colloquy lies in the fact that Austria attaches highest priority to the respect for international law in all areas. It is, unfortunately, only too often that fundamental legal principles are being deliberately ignored; this lack of respect for legal obligations has been particularly disconcerting in recent conflicts involving the displacement of large numbers of persons, be it in the Balkans, or in Africa, or in Central Asia.

Thus I believe that the question of the legal framework has been central not only to the mandate of the Representative, but also to our understanding of its functioning.

Therefore, we take pride in the development of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by Francis Deng and the fact that both at the beginning and at the end of this work stood international symposia here in Vienna. The Guiding Principles are indeed a fairly unique document, having been elaborated under intensive involvement of experts from all parts of the world, both from the academic community and from international organisations who had as a major focus of their work the practical impact of the Principles "on the ground."

Thus, the Guiding Principles have achieved the aim set out some years ago by Dr. Deng and the Commission on Human Rights: to bring applicable international law — human rights law, humanitarian law, and refugee law — together in one document, in order to provide a practical tool to all actors involved for the effective protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons.

Consequently, the Guiding Principles have already stood the test of being considered useful by international humanitarian practitioners on the ground.

While the need to strengthen international responses to the global crisis of displacement is widely recognised, some concern has emerged with regard to a few voices who have recently raised doubts about the Guiding Principles. Our position in this regard is clear: the Guiding Principles are an important tool, legitimised by the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly — and their wide application shows by itself their utility. I consider it therefore as necessary to enhance efforts to spread not only knowledge about them, but also about their practical use. NGOs have been very important partners in this regard and I am therefore particularly pleased that numerous representatives of NGOs are present here today.

Thirdly, therefore, I wish to point towards one arena where we are making particular efforts in promoting the Guiding Principles: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In the Charter for European Security of November 1999, the Heads of State or Government of participating States reaffirmed their respective commitments and underlined their will to pursue without discrimination the re-integration of refugees and internally displaced persons in their places of origin. As the current Chair-in-Office we have placed internally displaced persons firmly on the agenda of the organisation, building on the work of Francis Deng and his mandate.

At a special Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting next week, the OSCE will, for the first time, address the issue of internally displaced persons in a more systematic manner. The meeting is designed to lay a firm foundation for further thinking and action by the OSCE in this regard; we plan to take up the issue later in the year at the Implementation Meeting in Warsaw as well as at the Ministerial Council in November. The awareness of the situation of internally displaced persons has to be increased throughout the region and also within OSCE institutions. The Guiding Principles must be more effectively integrated into the work of the organisation. This applies to the field level but also to the assistance provided by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Finally, I would like to see the phenomenon of internal displacement in the broader perspective of human rights and security. At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights the clear link between human rights, democracy and development was reaffirmed, while security issues were not addressed.

Now, after the terrible tragedies in the Balkans, in Rwanda, and elsewhere, it is increasingly recognised that human rights and national as well as international security are equally strongly linked. As a consequence, more and more attention is paid to concepts of "human security," stressing the integrity and well-being of the individual human person as the central concern of security policies. This concept underlines also our policies, and should contribute to a further mainstreaming of human rights into all our activities.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, in his commendable report to the Security Council on the issue of civilians in armed conflict has stressed the absolute necessity of confronting the issue of displacement.

Rightly he points out the problem of non-compliance with international norms and stresses the responsibilities that come with sovereignty — a principle that has been stressed repeatedly by Francis Deng. Legal principles are only as good as is their implementation. Therefore, this Colloquy is facing the challenge of identifying concrete ways and means to promote and strengthen the Guiding Principles and their use.

We should all be guided by the "monumental plight" — as Francis Deng calls it — of the internally displaced. We have the framework and principles, we have the institutions, and we have the determination. We only need to apply them effectively. Francis Deng is showing us the way.

I wish you all success and assure you of Austria's continued support.