

**OPENING STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR WALTER KÄLIN, REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF  
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS**

**Seminar on Internal Displacement in the SADC Region  
Gaborone, Botswana  
24-26 August 2005**

Honourable Representatives of the SADC Governments,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and Co-Director of the Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, let me begin by warmly welcoming you to this seminar on internal displacement in the SADC region. At the outset, I would like to thank the SADC Secretariat for their support in the development of this meeting, and to acknowledge with appreciation the Government of Botswana for serving as host. I would also like to express my gratitude to UNHCR for their enthusiastic co-sponsorship of this timely event.

As you know, internally displaced persons are people forced from their homes by armed conflict, human rights violations and natural and human-made disasters, who remain within the borders of their own countries. It is appropriate that this seminar should follow on from the SADC government's biannual meeting on refugees, as IDPs often become refugees if effective national protection and assistance are not available. Equally, returning refugees who come home to insecurity and a lack of sustainable solutions can subsequently become internally displaced.

Of the some 25 million people worldwide who are displaced within their own countries due to conflict and communal strife, more than half -- some 13 million internally displaced persons -- can be found in Africa, of whom some 2.9 million are in countries of the SADC region. In addition to being the most numerous, Africa's IDPs also are among the world's most vulnerable. Over the past decade, the highest mortality and malnutrition rates in humanitarian emergencies have involved internally displaced persons in Africa. In many cases, Africa's internally displaced have been displaced multiple times, and separated from their homes for years on end without a durable solution in sight. Many are at high risk of ongoing armed attack, malnutrition, sexual violence and exploitation, enforced military recruitment, and disease including HIV/AIDS.

Although Africa is the continent worst-hit by internal displacement, it also has a strong tradition of pioneering innovative regional responses to the problem of forced migration. The 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa stands out as an example. Africa also was the site in 1988 of the very first international meeting that addressed internal displacement -- the Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees, and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa, and, ten years later, of the first regional OAU meeting specifically devoted to this issue. More recently, a noteworthy development has been the appointment by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of a Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa -- an office held by Mr. Bahame Nyanduga, with whom I have the pleasure of collaborating closely. And following the most recent African Union summit, an exciting standard setting initiative is underway to enhance the

regional legal framework for internally displaced persons. I am therefore particularly pleased that this seminar has presented me with the opportunity to make my first official visit to Africa as the Representative of the Secretary-General.

United Nations General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights resolutions have encouraged and welcomed the convening of regional seminars on internal displacement and the dissemination and promotion at such seminars of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the first international standards for protecting and upholding the rights of IDPs. Of course, primary responsibility for protecting the internally displaced and responding to their needs rests first and foremost with national governments. However, internal displacement often has political, economic and humanitarian repercussions in neighbouring countries as well. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has cautioned: 'If left unaddressed, internal displacement may spill across borders and upset external and regional stability.' Certainly, this is apparent in the case of Africa where there are many instances when conflict and displacement in one country have embroiled entire regions. However, it is also true that natural disasters can create devastating internal displacement crises region-wide. The Indian Ocean Tsunami last December starkly illustrates this point. In southern Africa, the devastating drought that has plagued the region for so many years provides another example of a natural disaster with repercussions that know no borders.

Preventing arbitrary displacement, ensuring protection and assistance for the internally displaced, and crafting durable solutions to their plight therefore can be critical not only to achieving national stability but also to preserving regional and international security as well. Indeed, around the world, regional approaches to internal displacement have proven to be valuable. Regional cooperation enables states to augment their capacity for instance to run reliable early warning mechanisms and disaster prevention and mitigation systems. Regional-level discussions such as this seminar also can provide an invaluable opportunity to identify best practices and channel the lessons learned by countries coping with internal displacement into the creation of sound policy at the national and regional levels.

SADC has identified the problem of internal displacement to be among the more pressing political, economic and social challenges facing the region and has already taken a number of important steps towards addressing this challenge. Particularly noteworthy is SADC's commitment to work to address the root causes of forced displacement, ensure the provision of assistance and promote the search for durable solutions for forced migrants, working in collaboration with governments and non-governmental organizations at the national and regional levels as well as the international community. Further, the 2004 *Strategic Indicative Plan* for the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation calls for the convening of seminars on internal displacement, including on the challenges of internally displaced persons' reintegration.

Our coming together at this seminar reflects our shared concern regarding the problem of internal displacement. The diversity of participants assembled, including governments, non-governmental organizations, regional and regional organizations, donors and researchers, bodes well for the forging of strong links and partnerships among us to address the problem of internal displacement in a cooperative and holistic manner. I very much look forward to our discussions and to the joint efforts that may emerge out of this seminar to address the problem of internal displacement and the plight of the many people it affects in the SADC region.