



Uganda's IDP policy

Uganda has a massive number of IDPs – more than 1.7 million, over 6% of the national population. Although it is one of the few countries with a national IDP policy, ineffective implementation means many IDPs still face security threats, limited access to humanitarian assistance and difficulties in returning home

Some 90% of the population of northern Uganda have been uprooted as a result of conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government. Considerable additional displacement has been caused by armed cattle raiders from the northeastern Karamoja region. The majority of IDPs have been living in squalid camps – some for 10 years – where they are vulnerable to human rights abuse, disease and deprivation.

Uganda's National Policy for IDPs was adopted in 2004, following a visit by Francis Deng, former Representative of the Secretary-General on IDPs.¹ It draws on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and commits the government to protect its citizens against arbitrary displacement, guarantee their rights during displacement and promote durable solutions by facilitating voluntary return, resettlement, integration and re-integration.

Walter Kälin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs (RSG), made a six-day working visit to Uganda in July 2006 at the invitation of the government. He took note of Uganda's excellent national policy and was encouraged by the relative improvement in security in the north. However, he expressed concern that serious humanitarian and human rights problems persist in the IDP camps – poor health and sanitation conditions, lack of access to schools and availability of teachers, and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence. He heard testimony of prevailing institutional impunity, also involving members of the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) and local defence units who

at times abuse the rights of the very people they are charged to protect.²

In an effort to address these issues, the RSG and the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement convened a two-day workshop in Kampala – hosted by the Government of Uganda – to identify the challenges to the implementation of Uganda's IDP policy and work towards practical solutions. Kälin reminded participants that "the work of a policy cannot stop at its adoption. The political will to set priorities, cooperate and coordinate will be critical in implementing the policy and upholding the human rights of IDPs."

The workshop brought together over 100 participants – representatives of the government, the UPDF, the police, the UN, donor governments, the Uganda Human Rights Commission,³ local and international NGOs, IDP leaders and researchers. Taking place shortly after newly elected national and local government officials took office, the workshop provided many officials with their first opportunity to meet each other to discuss implementation of the national IDP policy and to meet face-to-face with civil society representatives and members of the international community to discuss internal displacement.

The workshop discussed key obstacles to the implementation of the policy: lack of communication between national and local authorities; little consultation or communication with IDPs; an under-resourced and often absent police force; an ineffective system for providing resources to local government; and insufficient attention to land issues and other arrangements for IDP returns.

Participants called for:

- wide dissemination of the IDP policy to foster a greater understanding of its provisions and encourage its implementation
- building the knowledge and skills of local and central

level government officials so that they can effectively implement the policy

- active involvement of all relevant government ministries in implementing the policy
- consultations with IDPs and their communities, particularly in relation to security, return and land issues
- deployment of well-trained civilian police – including women – in camps and areas of return
- improvements in the system for allocating resources from central to district administration
- establishment of a functioning judicial system that includes mechanisms to resolve land disputes and protect property rights in areas of return
- increasing security, rebuilding infrastructure and making social services available in areas of return.

At the close of the workshop, Uganda's Minister of Relief and Disaster Preparedness, Tarsis Kabwegyere, committed the government "to do what it takes to make sure that where criticisms are valid they will be addressed... Next year will find a different situation." Since the workshop, the Government of Uganda and the LRA have engaged in a peace process that has brought hope for Uganda's IDPs. But for returns to be successful, policies and plans must be implemented, not just announced. The Ugandan government needs to take steps to promote the safe and sustainable returns of millions of people.

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1. See FMR 19, www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR19/FMR19Brookings.pdf

2. The post-visit press release is at: www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/50C46C08623F73FEC12571A1004DCA32?opendocument

3. www.uhrc.org