

Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division Mission to Uganda
(30 August – 3 September, 2004)

(The IDD mission to Uganda, comprised of Dennis McNamara, Beatrice Bernhard and Marc Vincent).

- Increasing LRA defections, UPDF operations against LRA camps beyond the ‘redline’ in Southern Sudan and a decrease in attacks in some districts in the north, have led to growing optimism among senior government officials that the conflict may be nearing an end. Religious/community leaders however, insist that the increasing international attention on Khartoum’s use of militias in Darfur, and the improving security situation in Northern Uganda need to be combined with increased pressure on Sudan to withdraw all support for the LRA, especially an end to sanctuary for Joseph Kony.
- The Government’s clarification that there is now no distinction between so-called gazetted and ungazetted camps, is likely to raise the IDP population receiving food aid by an additional 200,000. Including an estimated 200,000 IDPs in the town centers such as Gulu and Lira raises the total estimated IDP population to 2 million (almost double that of Darfur).
- Among the estimated 2 million IDPs in camps and urban centers, the situation continues to be characterized by a deep-seated fear and terror of the LRA and skepticism about any improvements in the security situation. The IDPs appear to share a common reluctance to consider return as an option in the foreseeable future until the government can guarantee security and demonstrated it has a plan that will allow people to return to their land.
- Security and return/resettlement conditions vary from district to district. While it is premature to assess whether the conflict is indeed nearing an end, several different plans apparently exist for the north among donors, agencies and the government, which need to be harmonized. A return profile of IDPs, undertaken at an appropriate time and on a district-by-district basis, could determine what material, legal and security conditions are most important to encourage a return. In addition to returns, the profile will identify those IDPs who will wish to remain settled close to urban centres.
- The current level of access to camps for international and national organizations is far from acceptable and has led to a clear bias among agencies to focus activities in Gulu District, as opposed to Kitgum and Pader Districts. It has also led to a disproportionate amount of aid to camps close to town as opposed to the more isolated ones. In a positive development, the UPDF has agreed to increase the radius outside Gulu town, to include eight more camps, which the UN and NGOs can access without escorts. UNSECOORD has requested written confirmation from authorities to that effect.
- Bearing in mind the temporary natures of camps, there is still an urgent necessity to improve camp conditions and management. Small changes continue to be implemented in the camps which help address overcrowding and poor conditions – improved shelter materials, communal kitchens, fire walls, motorized water pumps etc. In addition to improving physical aspects of the camps, ‘decongestion’ – the voluntary movement of IDPs from large overcrowded camps to smaller camps closer to parishes and land - is widely seen as a humane method to address the poor camp conditions and offer a transitional step to return. Increased NGO capacity and presence, however, is critical in both cases to ensure that all camps in all the conflict-affected districts benefit from humanitarian services and that conditions in the smaller decongested camps are attractive to positively encourage IDP movement.

- The close proximity of the IDP population to soldiers, widespread idleness and lack of access to land, despondency and alcohol abuse among men and the poor conditions of camp life has resulted in a near total breakdown of Acholi social order and traditional morals. Not the only protection problem, but among the most significant, is the high rate of child prostitution on the one hand and sexual abuse and rape by military personnel and other males in the camps on the other hand. A comprehensive response to SGBV is constrained by several factors: a) There is a lack of hard data. Women are generally afraid to come forward and make documented complaints because there is no one to report it to; and b) Although traditional justice exists in varying degrees, the civilian police or LC courts do not operate well, which means even if cases were reported the options of redress are limited. When UPDF or local militias are the perpetrators, fear of retribution is high. Recognizing that a response to SGBV must be very conscious of ensuring victim and witness protection, the lack of concrete data, significantly hampers efforts to convince authorities and the UPDF of the need to address the problem. Increased monitoring, preferably by female protection officers/monitors, is urgent.
- As a result of improving security, the number of night commuters has also decreased in both Gulu and Kitgum. The social consequences of this Uganda-specific problem in terms of predatory sexual behaviour by boys and prostitution still requires further attention, as do the long-term probable effects, such as an increasing population of street children. UNICEF has begun investigating ways to strengthen or maintain family unity of night commuters.
- Since the ERC's visit to Uganda in November 2003 and the IDP Unit's visit June 2004, there has been an ongoing effort to increase protection capacity and activities within the UNCT. UNICEF has recently deployed another child protection officer to Kitgum bringing the total to three in the north as well as a child protection coordinator in Kampala. UNICEF has also agreed to strengthen monitoring by hosting three 'protection monitors' to improve the systematic collection and verification of protection information. As support to the HC and UNCT, the protection monitors, in addition to looking at SGBV and child protection issues, would also look at broader protection issues and violations such as forced displacement, forced labour and restrictions on freedom of movement among IDPs.
- Following discussions with the HC and CT, the IDD reiterated its support for the immediate creation of an IDP Protection Coordinator's post to fortify protection coordination and management among agencies and ensure gaps are being addressed. The Protection Coordinator, working closely with UNICEF, will support the HC and UNCT in strengthening protection advocacy, improving the effectiveness of the Protection Working Groups and ensuring systematic implementation of the recommendations of the recently held Protection of Civilians Workshop. OHCHR is also in the process of recruiting a Senior Human Rights advisor, who according to recommendations from Kampala should focus on support to national human rights structures such as the Human Rights Commission.
- The protection working groups in the Districts, especially Gulu, appear to be working well as forums for information exchange on protection issues and advocacy. The linkages between the working groups in the district with Kampala still appear tenuous and need strengthening.
- On September 1, the Government formally announced that the national IDP Policy had been approved by Cabinet. The next step is the development of a realistic implementation and costing plan. In order to support implementation of the IDP policy, discussions have already started for fast-tracked funding support for a UNDP (BCPR) post to be deployed in the north as a technical adviser to the District Disaster Management Committees. The post, a complement to the international expert/advisor to be based in OPM's office in Kampala, would involve providing technical back-up on a range of daily issues including urgently-needed camp management,

development of a realistic implementation plan for the policy, encouraging greater flexibility of central government financial support to the DDMCs, and examining ways to strengthen civilian/community policing.

Summary of Recommendations and Action

1. Following the Government of Uganda's policy clarification, an immediate survey in the formerly ungazetted camps needs to be undertaken to confirm numbers and locations of IDPs. A quick response from WFP for regular food distribution and humanitarian services from other UN agencies and NGOs will be important. Protection Working Groups in all districts to monitor UPDF commitment to provide adequate security in formerly ungazetted camps.
2. Consideration to be given to registering IDPs in urban centers to better understand their protection needs and concerns. Registration would need to be done in such a way as to avoid unnecessarily adding to the numbers of food beneficiaries and contributing to aid dependency.
3. The UPDF announced at the POC workshop that it is willing to assure security for agencies that wished to stay overnight in camps. They also stated that they were willing to consider prioritizing route security as an 'alternative' to convoys in specific areas. UNSECOORD, OCHA and the HC/RC to ensure the UPDF position can be rapidly incorporated into a more flexible access strategy to address the geographic imbalance of humanitarian response among more isolated camps.
4. To address overcrowding and poor conditions within the larger camps, the UNCT and NGOs to develop a strategic, collective plan for 'decongestion.'
5. OCHA and NGO umbrella groups to encourage greater international NGO capacity and interest in northern Uganda. Consideration be given to an NGO assessment mission to review NGO capacity and presence in the north.
6. UNDP (BCPR) to consider expansion of its planned pilot program to support livelihood and vocational training in the camps and support deployment in the north of a technical adviser for the District Disaster Management Committees on the implementation of the IDP Policy.
7. NRC/ICLA Gulu to rapidly develop its proposal to conduct combined training on Guiding Principles with aspects of their recently developed camp management toolkit. The training would be suitable for DDMC officials, NGOs and the District Disaster Coordinators as proposed by the national IDP Policy.
8. It has been agreed by OCHA Kampala, IDD and PDSB/OCHA that Andrew Timpson, currently IDP Advisor and Head of OCHA office in Gulu, be transferred as soon as possible to take up the post of Protection Coordinator in Kampala.
9. IDD to pursue recommendations from the Senior Network to investigate the deployment of the Protection Standby Capacity for the protection monitors for UNICEF. Concurrently, donors to be encouraged to fund the three monitor posts, as well the IDP Protection Coordinator's post, which are all included in the 2005 CAP.
10. A clear division of labor and a protection strategy between OCHA, UNICEF and OHCHR to be developed. The protection strategy to adhere to procedural steps as outlined in the IASC-approved Roadmap on Developing an IDP Response Strategy. The protection strategy should also include clear linkages to the protection working groups and national human rights structures.
11. UNHCR to be encouraged to play a greater role in the development and support of the protection strategy, including making available a senior protection officer as advisor to the UNCT or HC.

MV/20 Sept/04