



The Brookings Institution – University of Bern
Project on Internal Displacement



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INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: Regional Meeting Recommends Actions for Response

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Of the estimated 25 million people worldwide who are uprooted in their own countries by violence and persecution, over half are in Africa. Some 2.9 million of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) are found in countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The highest numbers are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe, where IDPs are in critical need of humanitarian assistance and protection. In addition, a sizeable IDP population still persists in Angola years after the end of conflict. Moreover, displacement continues to occur in a number of other SADC countries as a result of natural disasters and other causes.

“Africa’s IDPs are among the world’s most vulnerable,” points out the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kälin. “Over the past decade, the highest mortality and malnutrition rates in humanitarian emergencies have involved internally displaced populations in Africa. In many cases, they 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.”

In an important step towards addressing this humanitarian crisis, the first seminar on internal displacement in the SADC region was held in Gaborone, Botswana on 24-26 August 2005 to examine the phenomenon of internal displacement in the region and discuss ways to improve national, regional and international responses. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Botswana and co-sponsored by the Brookings Institution - University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The more than 100 participants included representatives of the Governments of Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles,

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South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, together with representatives of national human rights institutions, the SADC secretariat, local and international non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, donor governments and experts from research institutions. Special guests were His Excellency Sir Ketumile Masire, former President of Botswana, and His Excellency Joaquim Alberto Chissano, former President of Mozambique.

“Responsibility for assisting and protecting IDPs rests squarely on the shoulders of national governments,” emphasized Phandu Skelemani, Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration of the Government of Botswana, while also pointing out that because the effects of internal displacement often extend beyond borders, regional approaches are essential as well.

Among the recommendations made by the seminar to SADC governments were:

- The development of national laws and policies on internal displacement
- The promotion and dissemination of the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*
- Improved data collection on internally displaced populations and their needs
- Ensuring full access to IDPs
- Inclusion of IDPs in HIV/AIDS programs
- Increased training of government officials in displacement issues and the rights of IDPs
- The greater involvement of national human rights institutions, civil society and IDPs in programs to address internal displacement
- More sustained efforts to address the root causes of displacement.

The seminar also called upon SADC and other African regional organizations to appoint focal points on internal displacement, promote wide dissemination and use of the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, develop regional approaches to the problem, exchange best practices, and support the capacity of African institutions to research and participate in decision-making forums on displacement issues.

The international community was urged to develop a more effective and predictable international response to internal displacement, including: clearly defined institutional arrangements for the protection and assistance of IDPs; a strengthened role for peacekeepers in situations of displacement; greater advocacy and dialogue with governments and other actors; and adequate resources to address the emergency and reintegration needs of IDPs.

The full set of recommendations together with the summary report of the meeting and other relevant documents are published in this report, which is being translated into French and Portuguese for wide dissemination in the SADC region.