



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

PROGRAMME UNIT ON JUSTICE AND SERVICE  
COMMISSION ON INTER-CHURCH AID, REFUGEE  
AND WORLD SERVICE

150, ROUTE DE FERNEY, P.O. BOX 2100  
1211 GENEVA 2, SWITZERLAND  
TELEPHONE: (022)791 61 11  
TELEX: 415 730 OIK CH  
CABLE: OIKOUMENE GENEVA  
TELEFAX: (022)791 03 61  
DIRECT TELEFAX: (022)788 00 67  
DIRECT DIAL: (022)791 63 18

7 November 1990

Dear Friends,

As you know, we have been asked by many churches to raise protection issues of uprooted people at the UN Commission on Human Rights. This is an issue which we have taken very seriously and we thought it would be helpful to share with you our assessment of the situation.

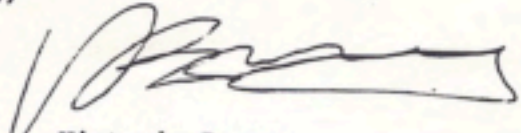
In 1988, we worked with the Churches' Commission on International Affairs to present a statement outlining our general human rights concerns relating to refugees and other uprooted people (attached). Then after consultation with church partners, we identified the protection needs to internally displaced people as being a priority for further work at the Commission. We drafted the attached statement which was presented at the Commission and served as the basis for our work at the Sub-Commission. But in addition to the statement, we worked with the Quaker UN Office here in Geneva to urge representatives from the governmental missions to support this initiative. Among other activities, we organized a meeting for governmental representatives to talk with a Roberta Cohen from the Refugee Policy Group about the protection needs of internally displaced people. (A copy of her statement is available if you would like further information). Unfortunately, our suggestion that the Commission call for a Special Rapporteur to study the situation of internally displaced people was not taken up at either the Commission or the Sub-Commission Meeting. But these initiatives take time and we hope that at the February meeting of the Commission, increased attention will be given to the internally displaced. We urge you to discuss this issue with your government before the Human Rights Commission Meeting. If you need further background information, please contact either of us.

A second human rights issue about which some churches have expressed concern is the "Draft Declaration on the Right to Leave and Return". We have asked the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, Canada, to play a leading role in analyzing and coordinating advocacy. If you are interested in working on this issue, please contact Tom Clark, Canadian Council of Churches, ICCR, 40 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 201, Toronto, Ont. M4T 1M9, Canada (Fax: 416 921 7478).

Since WCC's 7th Assembly will be held at the same time as the UN Human Rights Commission, it is particularly important that advance work be done and that the churches work together. We are also, of course, open to other suggestions for human rights initiatives related to uprooted people. Thanks for your support.

Sincerely yours,

  
Elizabeth Ferris  
Refugee Service

  
Victoria Berry  
CCIA

WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS 1990

BY THE COMMISSION OF THE CHURCHES ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ITEM 13 (F) HUMAN RIGHTS AND MASS EXODUSES

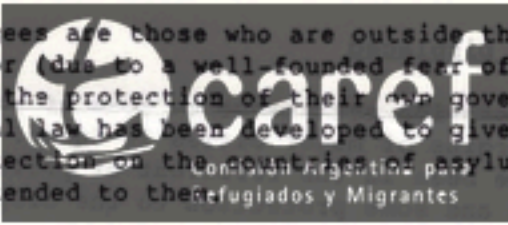
THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED

Presently 30-40 million people have been uprooted from their communities but remain within their national borders where they suffer serious protection and assistance problems. Their basic human rights are violated on a massive scale. Unlike refugees, who are uprooted for similar causes but who have managed to cross into another country, those who are internally displaced has been virtually ignored by the international community and particularly by the United Nations system. Given the scope of the problem, and the urgent needs of these individuals, UN human rights bodies must seriously address these concerns.

Refugees and the Internally Displaced

People are forced from their communities for a variety of reasons: wars, communal and ethnic violence, forced resettlement programmes, civil conflicts, persecution, environmental disasters and systemic economic deprivation. Some cross an international border and are recognized as refugees. A far larger number remain displaced within their own countries of origin where they face a precarious and dangerous existence.

By definition, refugees are those who are outside their countries of origin and who are unable or (due to a well-founded fear of persecution) unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their own government. Thus, a whole body of international law has been developed to give refugees special rights to ensure their protection on the countries of asylum and to permit special assistance to be extended to them. *Refugiados y Migrantes*



In contrast, the internally displaced remain inside their country's borders, a fact which creates serious protection problems for them. In some cases their governments may be unable to protect them; as in Mozambique where more than three million people have been displaced by the violence. In others, where the government is not in sympathy with the population, the government may restrict access to displaced populations by the media, voluntary agencies, and international organizations. This treatment sometimes extends to the prevention of food aid reaching the displaced. Furthermore military and security forces may consider them as subversives; sometimes they are the targets of 'death squads'. Attacks against internally displaced people range from aerial bombing to abduction, torture, disappearance and murder. Often the proximity of the internally displaced to the causes which provoked their uprooting means that they live under constant threat of being attacked - or of being uprooted again.

In comparison with refugees, the plight of the internally displaced is often far worse than that of refugees - precisely because they are still within their home countries. Moreover, displaced people often have fewer resources, are in worse physical condition and lack the skills of refugees who manage to leave the country. Displaced populations seem to be disproportionately composed of a majority of women, children, elderly and handicapped, although reliable demographic information is almost completely lacking, as no one is responsible for collecting it.

Refugees can appeal to a host of international conventions and procedures. The 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol provide certain minimum guarantees of protection and assistance to those displaced outside their countries of origin. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is mandated by the international community to see that the basic needs of refugees are addressed.

While there are many problems in implementing these refugee conventions, the fact remains that the international system has responded to the needs of refugees by creating specific international instruments for their protection and assistance.

In contrast, for those displaced within their own countries, there is no specific international organization to which they can appeal for protection or assistance. Moreover, there is no body of international law designed specifically to address their needs even though the basic human rights instruments and the Geneva Conventions protecting the victims of war are applicable to the situation of the internally displaced.

As UNHCR is mandated to work with those outside their home countries, it is usually unable to respond. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) gives the greatest priority in aiding civilians in conflict times but is reluctant to jeopardize this work by involvement with groups of displaced who have moved out of conflict zones to areas still under the sovereignty of the national government.

#### Churches and the Displaced

Churches try to provide assistance to some of the estimated 1.5-2.8 million living on the margins of major cities in Sudan. In El Salvador and Sri Lanka the churches have been in the forefront providing shelter, medical assistance, food and some protection to the displaced by the violence.

But churches are increasingly recognizing that these efforts are not enough to respond to the urgent human rights violations of the world's displaced. More attention must be focused on their plight and its causes. The international human rights machinery must be challenged to respond in creative and humane ways to these massive needs.

As a first step in raising awareness about the protection needs of the internally displaced, and further to the encouragement provided by Report A/43/868 to the General Assembly in December 1988, we call for the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur to study the status of internally displaced worldwide and to make recommendations that would ensure that their protection needs are met.



\*\*\*