

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
IASC WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

17 October 2007
Geneva

I Debriefing on the RSG on Human Rights of IDPs' Working Visit to Afghanistan

Ms. Karen Gulick (UNHCR), Sr. Legal Advisor to the Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights of IDPs, Professor Walter Kälin

Ms. Gulick, who works on the mandate of the RSG in UNHCR, reported on key findings and recommendations following Professor Kälin's working visit to Afghanistan from 11-18 August 2007. During his stay, the RSG participated in a the three-day OCHA workshop on the protection of civilians, and he also took the opportunity to meet with government officials, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, donors and the Afghan Human Rights Commission. Moreover, he met with urban IDPs in Kabul and Kuchi tribe members recently returned from Pakistan, but due to security conditions he was not permitted outside the Kabul area.

In his memorandum to the government and the SRSG, the RSG noted that the problem of displacement in Afghanistan is complex, and precise figures are not well established. Nonetheless, he identified several categories of IDPs, including: (i) An estimated 130,000 protracted IDPs in the south and southwest having been displaced due to drought and insecurity more than five years ago; (ii) minimum 15.000-20.000 families are estimated to have been displaced in recent years due to human rights violations, inter-communal tensions, floods and drought; (iii) an increasing number of persons displaced due to the escalation of armed conflict in the southern provinces, particularly Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand; (vi) potentially significant numbers of returnees from Iran and Pakistan who would face becoming IDPs if they are unable to find durable solutions through local integration or return to home communities; and (v) IDPs living in urban areas (difficult to identify how many IDPs are living in Kabul, as more the 50 % of urban Kabul consists of irregular settlements).

The RSG identified a number of immediate as well as longer-term measures that could help address displacement in Afghanistan, such as full compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, and a focus on the components needed for durable solutions for IDPs. While both national authorities and international organizations are aware of the challenges and vulnerabilities of IDPs, and a range of limited programs are in place, the RSG found that a more comprehensive and coordinated response is needed, such as the development of a national IDP strategy as well as the establishment of a clear mechanism for coordination and assignment of responsibility and accountability within the government as well as among international actors. Ms. Gulick particularly stressed the importance of making use of already existing mechanisms, institutions and structures - not necessarily creating new ones - just as she emphasised the need for strengthening capacities of local actors and working with institutions that have better access than most international actors, such as the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

Anyone working on these issues and who is interested in follow-up is welcome to contact Ms. Gulick. The RSG hopes to return to Afghanistan in 2008 for a full mission.

II Afghanistan: Losing Hope - Women in Afghanistan

Ms. Katarina Toll (OCHA), Donor and External Liaison Officer, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Emergency Services Branch

Ms. Toll briefed participants on IRIN's plans for 2008 in Afghanistan, where IRIN is active in reporting both for IRIN's website and for local radio programmes. Moreover, participants viewed the IRIN film 'Losing Hope – Women in Afghanistan' from April 2007, which shows that even though some progress has been made in urban areas regarding the condition of women in Afghanistan since the end of the Taliban regime, the situation of Afghani women is still very dire in remote areas, particularly in terms of access to health services.

For more information on IRIN's work in Afghanistan, please see the document 'Concept of Operations – IRIN Radio in Afghanistan 2008-2009', which has been uploaded to the IASC Website along with the present summary note. Moreover, to watch the film 'Losing Hope – Women in Afghanistan, please visit IRIN's website at:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72866>

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