

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP  
56th MEETING**

**11-12 February 2004  
Auditorium  
WFP Headquarters, Rome**

**IDP Situation in the Russian Federation: IDP situation in the North Caucasus,  
the Russian Federation – Follow-up to the recommendations made by the RSG-  
IDPs after his September 2003 mission to the Russian Federation.**

**Circulated: 4 February 2004**

**1. General Background:**

The North Caucasus presents one of the most complex humanitarian environments in the world. Hostilities in the Republic of Chechnya have continued for over four years. Human rights violations and collapse of economic infrastructure have led a civilian population to live in fear and with many basic humanitarian needs. The republic has a population of some 800,000, some 85% of whom are unemployed. Over 99% live below the poverty line established by the federal government. In addition, it is estimated that some 140,000 people are internally displaced within the republic.

Over the past year, authorities have pursued an agenda that could be characterized as forced normalization. The government has conducted a referendum, amnesty of former fighters, and republican presidential election. Despite this, hostilities not only show, as of yet, no sign of abating but spill over to neighbouring republics.

Approximately 67,000 IDPs fleeing violence in Chechnya have yet to return and are still resident in Ingushetia. Of this figure, some 7,000 IDPs live in three tented camps, 24,000 in temporary settlements and 36,000 in private accommodation<sup>1</sup>. Official government figures place the total IDP population in Ingushetia at 63,000 (although various ministries have cited different figures, some as low as 49,000) and those living in tent camps at 4,800. The past year has been witness to substantial return of IDPs to Chechnya. However, it seems likely that a significant number of IDPs wish to remain in Ingushetia – largely as the result of concerns for their security. While two tent camps were closed in the fall of 2003 in a more or less satisfactory manner with the rights of IDPs being respected, various government officials have repeatedly set deadlines for closing the three remaining tent camps and returning IDPs to Chechnya despite the absence of both alternative shelter in Ingushetia and any shelter in Chechnya. Thus, ensuring the right to seek safe haven and return to Chechnya voluntarily and with dignity continue to be of primary importance to the humanitarian community.

The result of years of instability is a highly complex environment in which humanitarian organisations work. Security concerns also limit the presence of aid workers in Chechnya. The continued detention of MSF worker Arjan Erkel, now nearly 18 months in captivity, is a constant reminder of the humanitarian context in the North Caucasus. The result of unreliable access to Chechnya and security

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<sup>1</sup> Figures provided by DRC as of 31 December 2003.

concerns has been infrequent and irregular humanitarian presence in Chechnya. This has limited the scale and effectiveness of relief work and has thus had a direct negative impact on the lives of civilians living in Chechnya. In Ingushetia, authorities have instituted a regime of access permits thus limiting humanitarian access to those in tent camps. In addition, authorities have hounded NGOs with various bureaucratic hassles making working in the region that much more complicated.

Recently, the Ingush authorities have increasingly been focusing on a population of some 20,000 IDPs from the Prigorodny conflict of 1992 urging the the international community to assist this population of IDPs alongside those from Chechnya. Some humanitarian assistance is being provided to these IDPs and major donors and NGOs are looking to work more actively with this group of people.

## **2.The RSG-IDP's mission recommendations**

Mr.Deng, RSG on IDPs carried out a fact-finding mission to the Russian Federation, including the North Caucasus, from 8-12 September 2003, to assess and reach a better understanding of the IDP situation in the country. He presented his mission findings to the IASC-WG held from 17-18 September 2003. On that occasion, RSG-IDPs noted that the current situation of the IDPs in the North Caucasus present the Government of the Russian Federation, the Governments of Ingushetia and Chechnya and the international community with several challenges, including the following:

- To reaffirm their commitment to the right of the IDPs in Ingushetia to voluntary return in safety and dignity and to make that commitment credibly known to the IDPs themselves.
- To provide them with adequate and accurate information about the situation in order for them to make an informed choice between returning, waiting in areas of displacement in dignified circumstances until conditions in Chechnya become convincingly improved, integrating locally or seeking alternative settlement elsewhere in the country.
- To ensure to the returnees conditions of greater safety and security.
- To provide the Government of the Russian Federation and the Governments of Ingushetia and Chechnya with supplementary resources to assist the IDPs with the provision of better temporary shelter in areas of displacement outside Chechnya and in reconstructing destroyed or damaged properties inside Chechnya.
- To ensure that all persons whose property was damaged or destroyed have equal and fair access to compensation regardless of whether they choose to return or not. The Government assured the Representative that this would indeed be the case, and explained that new legislation was in the process of being drafted to that effect.
- To assist the Government of Ingushetia with adequate means to provide humanitarian assistance to the Ingush IDPs from the Prigorodny region in North Ossetia whose conditions are no less compelling than those of Chechen IDPs.
- To organise a consultation involving UN agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the donor community and of course the relevant authorities to seek to identify strategies to help alleviate the plight of IDPs in the Russian Federation and to enhance the coordination among different actors.

### **3. Progress made on the RSG-IDP's recommendations**

In many respects, the UN has been very successful in meeting the recommendations of the RSG-IDP. The two tent closures that have taken place since his visit have been characterized by greater communication and coordination between the UN and the Russian government as well as a significant increase in respect for the Guiding Principles on IDPs. IDPs have been given the option of returning home, shelter in alternative shelter, or moving to another tent camp. With several exceptions, water and utilities have remained on throughout the camp closure so as not to force or infringe on the dignity of IDPs remaining in the camps. The UN has continued to raise the issue of security for returning IDPs as well as its hope compensations are provided fairly to those entitled to them in a transparent manner. However, this is clearly the responsibility of the host government, and the capability of the UN to influence these processes is extremely limited. Little has also been achieved on providing IDPs with accurate information on their rights to reside in a place of their choosing. The UN has taken steps to encourage humanitarian organizations to get involved with IDPs from the Prigorodny region including liaising with authorities on the issue and leading donor missions to assess their living conditions. Finally, in close cooperation with the Russian Federal Migration Service, the UN has been actively planning a meeting, for 9 February 2004, to involve UN agencies, several Russian ministries (including the Federal Migration Service, the Russian Ministry of Chechen Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the ICRC and several donors to discuss issues related to humanitarian aid in the North Caucasus. Protection of the rights of IDPs and strategies for alleviating their plight will figure prominently in such a discussion as will the future of humanitarian aid, safety for aid workers and other issues.

### **4. UNCT's recommendations for IASC members to strengthen collective response and protection efforts**

#### **IASC-WG members are requested to:**

- Repeatedly stress to the Russian government that any IDP return must be voluntary and IDPs must be provided with alternative shelter and the realistic possibility to remain in Ingushetia. This precludes hasty and unprepared tent camp closures.
- Step up engagement with the federal and local authorities to ensure free access to IDP camps and increased humanitarian space for the international aid community.
- Highlight the responsibilities of the authorities for the safety of aid workers. This includes the reasonable request for access to VHF radio frequencies.
- Demand that the Russian authorities take all steps to ensure that Arjan Erkel is freed.
- Increase focus of international aid community on the overall situation, and assistance and protection needs of the civilians in Chechnya.
- Continue to make all efforts to work in close cooperation and communication with the government of the Russian Federation and its subject regions.