

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
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IDPs: Focus on Liberia

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I. Background Note on the Return and Reintegration of IDPs in Liberia

After fourteen years of civil war, approximately 450,000 persons remain internally displaced in Liberia. An estimated 280,000 IDPs live in 20 (according to the Official Camp Survey, April 2004) formal camps where, due to funding constraints, they receive some protection and decreasing levels of food and other assistance from UN agencies and NGOs. An additional 20,000 IDPs live in some 14 spontaneous settlements or informal camps where they receive minimal levels of assistance. A further 150,000 IDPs are believed to have spontaneously returned and are now living in host communities around the country and are not directly assisted by the international community.

II. Status of IDP Return

On the basis of current and anticipated resources, the inter-agency Joint Planning Team (JPT) is preparing to facilitate the voluntary return of up to 100,000 IDPs during a first return phase from November 2004 to January 2005. The majority of these are expected to come from among the 280,000 IDPs in the 20 formal camps and who are returning to the counties of Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Margibi and Gbapolou. A second phase of facilitated returns to additional counties that have been or will, in due course, be declared safe will commence in January or February 2005.

In addition to facilitated returns, there are large numbers of IDPs who have already returned with more spontaneous returns expected without the benefit of transportation assistance from the international community. Notwithstanding, many of these will require reintegration assistance and protection monitoring in areas of return will also be essential.

III. Camp Support, Consolidation and Closure

Facilitated and ongoing spontaneous returns will allow the consolidation and closure of some of the IDP camps. Priority and matching resources need to be allocated to ensure the widest voluntary return possible during the window of opportunity afforded by the dry season. That said, expedited returns must be informed by the watchwords of safety and dignity for returnees. At the same time, it is unrealistic to assume that all IDPs will return between November 2004 and May 2005 (when the rainy season begins). As such, there will be an ongoing need for protection activities in camps, in particular with regard to sexual and gender based violence, and the commensurate provision of assistance to a

diminishing camp population. Such support will be required up to and beyond the end of the rainy season in October 2005 when facilitated returns can recommence.

IV. Ensuring Sustainable Return: Prioritising Protection and Community Recovery

The sustainable return and reintegration of IDPs in Liberia rests on two fundamental pillars – protection and community-driven development activities. Security and safety are major concerns for the displaced. The establishment of a coordinated and comprehensive nationwide system of monitoring and reporting, combined with timely and effective interventions when required, is fundamental to ensuring confidence in the return process and its sustainability.

Similarly, community-driven development activities that address the immediate needs of returnees serve the same purpose in terms of ensuring sustainable returns. They will also provide a much-needed incentive or “pull factor” for people to leave the camps, either with the assistance of the international community or spontaneously. Indeed, it is widely held that increased focus on community-driven development and recovery activities in areas of return, particularly in the counties of Lofa and Bomi to which most of the displaced are expected to return, will provide an important impetus for spontaneous returns.

V. Funding

Liberia is at a critical juncture. UN agencies and humanitarian partners currently have only a limited capacity to implement community development and recovery activities aimed at meeting the immediate needs of returnees, such as distributions of seeds and agricultural implements. This limits both the incentive for people to return as well as the possibilities of sustaining, them should they do so. In turn, it means that resources that could contribute to community development are used instead to support the displaced in camps where they face ongoing deprivation and exposure to rising levels of sexual violence and exploitation. Hence, the priority now is to finalise the Action Plan for the Return and Reintegration of IDPs. Where necessary, specific project proposals should be drawn up to cover areas where there are still gaps. These should then be presented to donors for funding. Without increased funding, the capacity of UN agencies and humanitarian partners will remain limited.

Proposed Actions by the IASC WG members:

- Endorsement of the JPT Action Plan for the Return and Reintegration of IDPs
- Commitment from protection-mandated agencies to review staffing levels in Liberia with a view to making additional staff available to undertake protection monitoring, reporting and intervention activities, in camps and along routes of and in areas of return
- Commitment to redouble efforts to support community-driven development and recovery activities; continuing to provide proportional assistance to remaining IDP Camps, and mobilizing additional funds to fill key gaps identified in the Action Plan (e.g. urgent need for more seeds and tools)