

Rev. 1



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS DR. FRANCIS M. DENG CONCLUDES VISIT TO MEXICO CITY AUGUST 18-28, 2002

Mexico/Geneva 27 August, 2002. At the invitation of the Government of Mexico, the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis M. Deng, undertook a mission to Mexico between the 18th and 28th of August, 2002.

The objective of the mission was to obtain first-hand information towards a better understanding of the situation of internal displacement in the country, including through field visits and meetings with displaced populations, to enter into constructive dialogue with the Government, civil society, the U.N. country team and other international partners, and to access opportunities for enhanced national and international response to the plight of the internally displaced in the country.

The Representative met with Federal, State, and Municipal authorities, including Lic. Santiago Creel, Secretary of the Interior; Lic. Jorge Castañeda, Secretary of Foreign Affairs; Sra. Marielaire Acosta, Under-Secretary for Human Rights from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Lic. Antonio Sanchez Diaz, Under-Secretary for Social and Human Development from the Social Development Secretariat; Mtro. Lorenzo Gomez Morin, Under-Secretary of Education from the Secretariat of Public Education; Dip. Jose Elias Moreno Apis, President, Human Rights and Justice Commission of the Senate and several members of both Chambers of Congress; General Brigadier Salvador Cienfuegos Cepeda from the Ministry of Defense and other high ranking officers, Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous People; Mr. Luis H. Alvarez, Peace and Reconciliation Commissioner in Chiapas; Lic. Huberto Aldaz Hernandez, Director General of the National Indigenous Institute.

He also visited the State of Chiapas where he met with Lic. Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia, State Governor of Chiapas; Lic. Emilio Zebadua Gonzalez, General Government Secretary; Lic. Pedro Raul Lopez Hernandez, President of the State Human Rights Commission; Mtro. Juan Gonzalez Esponda, Reconciliation Commissioner for the Communities in conflict in the state of Chiapas. He also met with community representatives and displaced populations and visited the communities of Polho and Los Chorros (municipality of Chenalho), and with General Carrillo Cabran at the army base

near Los Chorros. In Chilpancingo, Guerrero, the Representative met with the State Secretary of the Interior, the State Attorney General and other senior officials, as well as with the President of the State Human Rights Commission, and representatives of displaced persons.

During the mission, the Representative also met with the UN country team and agencies, representatives of the donor community and NGOs.

The Representative of the Secretary-General regrets that he was unable, for logistical reasons, to visit the communities of San Marcos (Municipality of Salto de Agua) and Tila as originally planned.

Although instances of displacement for a variety of reasons have occurred in Mexico for decades, including in the states of Oaxaca, Tabasco and Sinaloa, current displacement is largely concentrated in the state of Chiapas and is mostly attributed to the 1994 Zapatista uprising, the 1995 counter-insurgency operations by the military, the 1997 massacre in the village of Acteal by paramilitary groups, on-going harassment and intimidation by groups described by some as paramilitary and by the Government and others as armed civilian and criminal elements, acts of religious intolerance by extremist groups, disputes over land and drug trafficking.

While the Representative had been hoping to visit Mexico for the last several years, the timing of the invitation from the new Government and of the mission were quite opportune. The Federal, State and Municipal authorities all assured the Representative of the Government's commitment to effectively addressing the problem of internal displacement in the country. At the same time, the findings of the field visits to the displaced communities indicate that protection and assistance problems prevail. The gap between the stated intentions of the Government and the needs of the internally displaced on the ground can, at least in part, be explained in terms of the time factor, since the Government is still in the process of formulating its policy and operational strategies. A significant factor in this gap is the Government's lack of access to areas under the control of the Zapatistas, who persistently reject any Government assistance.

As evidence of the positive intentions of the Government, the Representative was informed of a Task Force which had been formed as part of the preparations for the mission and which had visited Chiapas, the state most affected by internal displacement. During discussions with Federal, State and Municipal authorities, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as with the displaced populations, the U.N. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were widely cited as a basis for the development of policies and operational programmes in response to the needs of the internally displaced for protection and assistance, as well as for their voluntary return in safety and dignity.

The fact that the policy of the Government on internal displacement is in the process of being developed, and, therefore, still unknown to the representatives of the international community, accounts for the absence of international cooperation with the Government in addressing the problem. The United Nations has adopted the collaborative approach within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, under the coordination of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, now assisted by the IDP Unit in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to ensure that the needs of the internally displaced are effectively addressed. However, no U.N. agency is making any direct contribution to meeting the needs of displaced populations. Indeed, the only

international organization that is making any notable contribution to meeting the needs of the internally displaced is the International Committee of the Red Cross, with its national partner, the Mexican Red Cross.

In view of the above, the Representative urges the Government to expedite the formulation of its policy on internal displacement, to establish a focal point for institutional coordination within the Federal Government and with the State and Municipal authorities, to make its policy and coordination structures known to the international community, to request the cooperation of the United Nations agencies and the international community in collaborative response to the needs of the displaced, especially in areas not accessible to the Government, and, to that end, welcome an inter-agency mission under the auspices of the IDP Unit of OCHA.

Finally, while promoting the peace process is outside the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, and, therefore, outside the objectives of the mission, it goes without saying that the best remedy to the crisis of internal displacement, would be the achievement of peace and national reconciliation, which, in turn, depend on addressing the underlying causes of the conflict.

It was intimated to the Representative by all sides that there is currently an impasse in the peace process primarily due to the amendments by Congress to the 1996 San Andres Agreement between the Government and the Zapatistas. There is a need to break the impasse, restore a degree of functional confidence, reactivate the peace process, and work towards reconciling differences.

The Representative will elaborate upon the findings of his mission in a report which will be submitted to the General Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights. He will also share the findings of his mission with the United Nations Secretary-General and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee which is composed of all the major human rights, humanitarian and development organizations.

Dr. Deng has been the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons since the position was created by the Commission on Human Rights in 1992.

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