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IDPs-Debriefing by Dr. Francis Deng, RSG/IDPs on his mission to Turkey and Mexico: Summary Report of the Mission of the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons to Turkey, 27-31 May 2002

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Introduction

At the invitation of the Government of Turkey, the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis M. Deng, undertook an official mission to Turkey from 27-31 May. The objectives of the Representative's mission were to study first hand the situation of internal displacement in the country and to dialogue with the Government, international agencies, representatives of donor countries and non-governmental organizations towards ensuring effective responses to the conditions of the internally displaced in Turkey.

In Ankara, the Representative held official meetings with (in the following order) the Minister of State for Human Rights, Mr. Nejat Arseven, the Minister of State for Children and Women's Issues, Mr. Hasan Gemici, the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Rüstü Kazım Yücelen, Ambassador Ugur Ziyal, Under-Secretary, and Ambassador Daryal Batibay at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Selçuk Polat, Assistant Under-Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister, Dr. Olcay Ünver, Director of the South Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Regional Development Administration, and the Vice-Chairman and some members of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights. He also held meetings with representatives of United Nations agencies and other international organisations, representatives of donor countries and local non-governmental organisations.

The programme included visits to the provinces of Diyarbakir, Sirmak and Sanliurfa in the south-east of the country where the Representative met local Government officials, including the Governor of the Region of the State of Emergency, Mr. Gökhan Aydinler, and the Governors of Sirmak and Sanliurfa, as well as local NGOs and displaced persons.

The present summary report has been prepared for the purposes of the 50th meeting of the IASC-WG, from 18-19 September 2002. A final and more comprehensive report is being prepared for submission to the next session of the Commission on Human Rights.

I. Displacement in Turkey

A distinctive feature of displacement in Turkey is that it effectively results from the full spectrum of causes, as contained in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.¹ That is to say, it results from the more traditional focus of the Representative's mandate, notably armed conflict, generalised violence and human rights violations. In Turkey, this specifically arose within the context of the armed conflict in the south-east from 1985 to 1999 resulting from the activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the anti-terrorist operation of the security forces. Connected to this, displacement in Turkey can also be considered within the broader context of economically-motivated rural-urban migration, in particular the movement of persons due to the economic disruption in the south-east resulting from the violence there. Displacement in Turkey results also from the implementation of large-scale development projects, in particular in the south-east of the country, in the context of the Government's ambitious South Eastern Anatolia (GAP) project. Finally, Turkey's internal displacement can be attributed to natural disasters, such as the "Mamara earthquakes" of August 1999 which displaced 600,000 persons in north-western Turkey.

The mission focused primarily on the displacement resulting from the violence in the south-east which has claimed over 35,000 lives and caused the displacement of somewhere between 378,000 to 4.5 million persons of predominantly Kurdish ethnicity. Indeed, estimates for the numbers of persons displaced in and from the south-east vary widely. According to Government figures, by the end of 1999 a total of 378,000 persons had been "evacuated" by the security forces from 3,165 rural settlements in the south-east.² However, it has been observed that this figure does not include persons who were not evacuated but who left their homes as a result of the general situation of insecurity, or because of conflict with the PKK or the "village guards" – a state-sponsored civil defence force comprised of local Kurds, formed to defend their villages against attack by the PKK and to deny them logistical support from villages in the area. Reports by Turkish NGOs claim that between 2 to 4.5 million Kurds have been displaced, while external observers claim that a "credible estimate" of the number of persons who remained displaced in 2001 was as high as 1 million.³

Prior to undertaking the mission, the Representative was aware that the problem of displacement in Turkey, in particular that arising from the conflict in the south-east resulting from the actions of the PKK and the reaction of the security forces, is the cause of extensive concern for a number of governments, regional organisations and NGOs. Indeed, there was a widely shared perception that the Government was in denial of the problem to the point of not seeking international assistance in meeting the needs of those affected. As a result of the apparent sensitivity of the Government to the issue, the international community, including United Nations agencies in the country, avoided open discussion of the problem with the authorities and refrained from providing

¹ According to which, internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.

² Cited in Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, *Humanitarian situation of the displaced Kurdish population in Turkey*, doc.9391 (22 March 2002) para.11.

³ United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2001* (March 2002).

protection and assistance to those displaced by the conflict, except within the context of projects implemented in areas of the country in which the displaced were located, but for which they were not specifically targeted.

II. The Mission and its Findings

On the basis of his discussions with Government Ministers and officials, the Representative noted a gap between the negative perception of Government policy and the positive attitude he found during his mission. The Representative's discussions with Ministers and officials at all levels revealed an unexpected openness and transparency on the part of the authorities to discuss the various aspects of the displacement problem, including its causes, in particular the conflict in the south-east and the responsibility of both sides for the displacement of the civilian population, as well as the steps which were being taken to facilitate the return and resettlement of the internally displaced, following the marked reduction in the level of hostilities towards the end of the 1990s. Indeed, the Government's decision to invite the Representative to visit the country was widely perceived as an indication of a possible change in approach on its part. The continuing improvement in the situation was reflected by the Government's decision to lift the state of emergency in two of the four provinces during the Representative's mission, with the declared policy of lifting it in the remaining two provinces in the near future.

What is critically important in the view of the Representative is that an opportunity now exists for the international community to assist the Government of Turkey in the challenging task of facilitating the voluntary return, resettlement and reintegration of the displaced population. The Representative observed that an open and constructive partnership involving the Government, civil society, and international agencies would serve to facilitate the timely and effective implementation of the Government's return policy, while at the same time alleviating the concerns expressed by NGOs and improving the perception of the problem, both within and outside the country.

III. Recommendations

To facilitate this process, the Representative made several preliminary proposals, among them the need for the Government to formulate a clear policy on the return issue, to make that policy and related programmes transparent to all concerned, to establish focal points within the Government, to improve coordination among the relevant Government institutions, including regional authorities, and to facilitate cooperation with the international community in meeting the urgent needs of the affected populations.

In discussions with Government authorities and representatives of the NGO community, the Representative called for close cooperation between them in the service of the affected communities. He observed that an open and constructive partnership involving the Government, civil society, and international agencies would serve to facilitate the timely and effective implementation of the Government's return policy, while at the same time alleviating the concerns expressed by NGOs and improving the perception of the problem, both within and outside the country.

As concerns the role of the United Nations agencies, the Representative makes the following recommendations:

Assisting the Government in addressing the current conditions of the displaced.

While the Representative welcomes the improved possibilities for return, it must be recognized that the return of the displaced to their original homes and lands may be a lengthy process and the Government, in the meantime, needs to enhance its efforts to address their current conditions, in cooperation with NGOs and United Nations agencies. The Representative acknowledges that many of the social and economic problems affecting the displaced are also confronted by host communities and that measures to address these are ongoing, including within the context of the GAP project and in cooperation with local NGOs and United Nations agencies. However, greater attention must be paid by the authorities, NGOs and United Nations agencies to addressing those problems which are specific to the displaced, such as access to adequate housing and land and psycho-social care for women and children.

Enhanced role for United Nations agencies. In connection with the foregoing, although it should be noted that the Government has not requested assistance from the international community, it is recommended that United Nations agencies in the country review their activities with a view to identifying ways in which they might enhance their role in supporting the Government in assisting the displaced. The Representative has reason to believe that such an initiative would be welcomed by the Government.⁴ The Representative also recommends that the United Nations Development Group expressly request the Resident Coordinator to develop, in cooperation with the country team, a strategy to assist the Government, in particular with regard to its efforts to return and resettle the displaced. In addition, and with a view to facilitating cooperation between the Government and United Nations agencies, the Resident Coordinator and country team are encouraged to consider the establishment of a thematic group on internally displaced persons to bring together the relevant United Nations and Government actors and provide a forum for regular dialogue on this issue.

Enhanced cooperation between the Government and international agencies. In its efforts to meet the current needs of the displaced and to facilitate their return and resettlement, the Government is strongly encouraged to examine areas of possible cooperation with the international community. The Representative notes that to date the international community has not contributed to the Government's return efforts and that the Government has not requested any such assistance. However, the task ahead of the Government is a substantial one for which assistance from international agencies would be a definite asset. The Government is encouraged to convene a meeting with international agencies, including the World Bank, and representatives of the diplomatic community to explore ways in which the international community could assist the Government in responding to the needs of the displaced.

⁴ A letter of 17 July 2002 received by the Representative from the Permanent Representative of the Government in Geneva, after an exchange of views following the mission, indicates that much.