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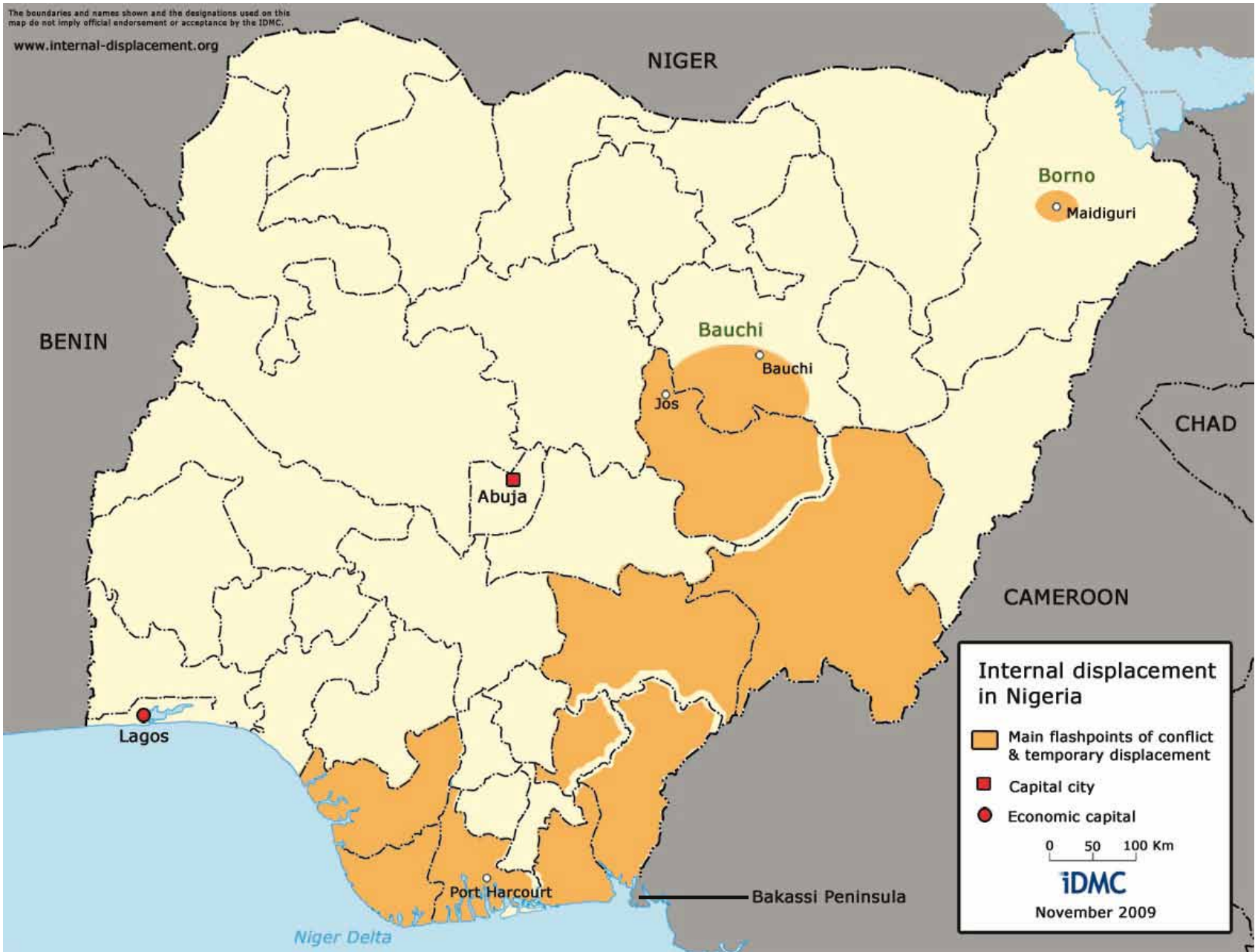
## NIGERIA

# Simmering tensions cause new displacement in the “middle belt”

In early 2010, unresolved conflicts and simmering tensions between different social and ethnic groups led to renewed displacement in the city of Jos in the heart of the “middle belt” region of Nigeria. As in the rest of the country, no clear figures on the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) were available for this latest incident of violence. Ad-hoc local registration exercises have hinted at the scale of displacement, but many people sought shelter and support from family and friends and so were not counted.

Displacement across the country is a common result of both communal violence and internal armed conflict. While some of the conflicts appear to be caused by religious or ethnic differences, benefits of a political, social and economic nature are generally behind the violence in a country with endemic poverty, low levels of education and a huge and alienated youth population. Nigeria also regularly experiences displacement as a consequence of natural disasters such as flooding or soil erosion.

The government has not yet adopted a national IDP policy, and national, international and local agencies have only assisted IDPs on an ad-hoc or selective basis. The signing of the African Union’s IDP convention in October 2009 may indicate the government’s intention to address internal displacement in a more consistent and coherent manner. As a first step, the government has realised the importance of undertaking a comprehensive profiling exercise to fully understand the scope of displacement in the country.



Source: IDMC  
 More maps are available at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

## Background and causes of displacement

Nigeria has been affected by recurrent internal conflicts and generalised violence since the end of military rule and the return to democracy in 1999. The systematic and overlapping patterns of inequality in the country have been described as "breeding grounds" for conflict (Okpeh, 2008; CRISE, June 2007). As a result, the country is faced with the ongoing challenge of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable internally displaced population.

Nigeria is made up of an extremely complex web of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Conflicts have been triggered by disputes over access to land, citizenship and broader questions of identity. Identities have been particularly important in the shaping of both the political and social arena in Nigeria both during colonial and post-colonial times. Under British colonial rule, religious, ethnic and regional differences were given prominence, which eventually exacerbated divisions between Muslims and Christians, Northerners and Southerners, and Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo groups (Okpanachi, 2010). Such differences, particularly between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as settlers, became instrumental after independence in the manipulation of identities to political ends (Jega, 2000).

Indigenous groups have routinely prevented settlers from owning land or businesses, or accessing jobs and education; this has inevitably caused tensions. According to a strategic conflict assessment carried out by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in 2002, the return to democracy and the competition for the new political opportunities had led to increased violence. Local competition for resources has often been aggravated by "inter-elite" rivalries over privileges such as political and public service appointments, oversight of projects and admission into schools (IPCR, October 2002).

Violence before and after national and local elections has frequently led to internal displacement in Nigeria. Nigeria's national elites have tried to avert sectarian divisions since the end of military rule by nominating one southern Christian and one northern Muslim to the posts of president and vice-president on an eight-year rotational basis, in a practice known as "zoning". The death of Muslim president Umaru Yar'Adua in May 2010 and the accession of Christian vice-president Goodluck Jonathan to the highest office, however, have not followed this practice (CFR, September 2010). Presidential polls are forecast for April 2011 (Reuters, 7 October 2010), and analysts have identified two possible causes of serious post-electoral violence if the elites compete openly for the presidency: the division of the electorate along religious, ethnic and regional identities; and the inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure free and fair elections (CFR, September 2010). Months ahead of the polls, clashes between supporters of rival politicians have already broken out in some of the northern states (AFP, 27 August 2010).

In the Niger Delta region, displacement has been closely linked to oil production. Oil fields in the region are the principal source of wealth in Nigeria. The country's dependence on revenues from oil has undermined stability and governance. Huge quantities are removed from pipelines, and oil smuggling is seen as a major threat to the rule of law in the whole West African sub-region (UNODC, July 2009).

State revenues have not been shared effectively, and factional elites have taken control of state institutions, perpetuating the exclusion of other groups. The lack of a diversified economy is also held responsible for the relative absence of both a private sector and a middle class, and the consequent lack of development of independent civic institutions (NORAD, 24 August 2010), contributing to Nigeria's poor score on the 2010 Failed States Index (The Fund for Peace, 2010).

### *The Niger Delta*

Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States, considered the core of the southern Niger Delta region, have been the scene of violent competition for land, political power and oil wealth. Following the economic decline of the 1990s, the region became vulnerable to ethnic polarisation, with different groups resorting to different means to fight for their rights (Irobi, April 2010). Recent research has suggested that in the context of increasing environmental pollution and reduced farming opportunities, government policies favoured migration of local communities to other states as the most cost-effective solution (Azam, 15 March 2009). With economic indicators worsening across the country, however, many migrants were forced back to the Niger Delta where illegality and violence constituted their most effective coping strategies. The government’s failure to ensure security, limit environmental damage, deliver social development or establish effective local institutions led to an armed insurgency that escalated dramatically in early 2006 (ICG, 3 August 2006).

In 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was created through the merger of different armed groups. In May 2009, thousands of people were displaced in one of the latest clashes between government forces and MEND. The Joint Task Force (JTF) charged with restoring order in the Niger Delta launched Operation Restore Hope in an effort to uproot militant groups. The JTF launched land and air strikes around the city of Warri in Delta State, and later extended its offensive to neighbouring Rivers State (Reuters, 24 May 2009). Numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) reported have varied, from 1,000 people sheltering in a school and hospital in the local capital Ogbeloh to up to 10,000 residents believed to have fled into the forest and unable to return home (IRIN, 22 May 2009; BBC, 21 May 2009; AI, 20 May 2009).

According to news reports, some 8,000 Delta State residents were still displaced at the beginning of

2010 (IRIN, 15 January 2010). In large part from Oporosa and Okerenkoko villages, the IDPs were staying with family and friends while waiting for their houses to be rebuilt. Local authorities had promised support but reconstruction progress was slow. In April 2010, a federal high court looking into compensation claims ordered the JTF to allow experts to enter the Gbaramatu Kingdom in Warri, to establish the property destroyed by the task force (Daily Independent, 25 April 2010).

A government amnesty programme, which includes a comprehensive programme to disarm, demobilise and rehabilitate militants, has been credited for a drop in large-scale violence in the Delta in 2010 (IRIN, 23 April 2010). However, the programme has been beset by delays, in the absence of a comprehensive development strategy for the Delta (AFP, 1 November 2009; USIP, 17 September 2009; ISS, 9 September 2009). Few of the recommendations issued in November 2008 by the federal government’s Niger Delta Technical Committee had been implemented by late 2010 (Vanguard, 27 October 2010). Car bombs set off by MEND in March 2010 in Warri and in October 2010 in Abuja have signalled the militant group’s discontent at the current status of the amnesty programme (IRIN, 23 April 2010; Reuters, 19 October 2010).

### *The “middle belt”*

The “middle belt”, which runs across Nigeria, is the area with the highest concentration of minority ethnic groups. It comprises Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue Kogi States, as well as southern Bauchi, southern Zaria and southern Kaduna (ActionAid, 2008). All these areas have witnessed intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic conflicts that have spread across different states. Researchers have pointed to a “crisis of citizenship” in which “different attitudes to citizenship contribute to political conflicts” (Idowu, 1999), articulated around the “settler-native” identity, with conflicts fuelled by feelings of exclusion and struggles for recognition (ActionAid, 2008).

As in the Niger Delta, mounting poverty, low levels of education and youth alienation have also contributed to the frequent occurrence of violence (AllAfrica, 7 August 2009). High levels of inequality have aggravated the situation: in the past decade, the distribution of income between households has been extremely unequal. Northern regions, including some in the middle belt, have witnessed higher levels of poverty than those in the south (IFPRI, February 2010).

Conflicts have been triggered by a range of events including elections and disputed election results, boundary disputes, challenges to existing customary rights, political assassinations, the creation of new local government districts, land disputes, religious dissent, population movements and the impact of development projects (Reuters, 26 October 2010; The Guardian, 18 January 2009; ActionAid, 2008, p.22).

Impunity for perpetrators of sectarian violence is common. While government authorities have in some cases been under political pressure to bring perpetrators to justice (IRIN, 24 April 2009), in others government security forces have themselves been responsible for arbitrary killings (HRW, 20 July 2009). As the cyclical repetition of violence in Plateau State in 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009 and 2010 has shown, lack of accountability has prevented the sustainable resolution of sectarian conflicts. Frequent smaller-scale episodes of violence, sometimes preceding bigger events, have contributed to stand in the way of long-term democracy and peace (ACCORD, June 2010).

In December 2009, clashes in Bauchi between suspected members of an Islamic group and the Nigerian army (AFP, 31 December 2009) displaced hundreds of residents. Most of the IDPs found refuge in makeshift shelters in the bush, not far from their homes. Some 300 people sought refuge in a disused army barracks (ICRC, 18 January 2010), and around 65 people, mostly children, in the home of a Bauchi official (IRIN, 12 January 2010). Most of the

people involved in or affected by the clashes were believed to be children between the age of ten and 15 (UNICEF, 30 December 2009) and more than half of those displaced were children who had lost one or both their parents in the violence. As calm returned some two days later, most of the residents who had fled were able to go back to their homes to assess the damage (AFP, 29 December 2009). These clashes echoed those of July 2009, which involved members of the Boko Haram sect and which displaced thousands in the city of Maiduguri, in Borno State (ICRC, 31 July 2009; AP, 29 July 2009).

At least 5,000 people were displaced following renewed violence in Plateau State's capital city of Jos in January 2010 (BBC, 20 January 2010; AFP, 18 January 2010). Clashes reportedly broke out in the predominantly Christian Nassarawa Gwom district following a dispute over a Muslim resident's reconstruction of his home, which had been burned down in earlier riots in November 2008 (IRIN, 18 January 2010). IDPs sought shelter in police barracks, mosques and churches as well as with family and friends in the city. Some 4,000 people fled to neighbouring Bauchi State, where they found refuge in camps set up by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (AFP, 24 January 2010). Some sought shelter at the site of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency. With aid slow to arrive, many IDPs in camps reportedly suffered from lack of food and other basic items in the aftermath of the violence (Vanguard, 19 January 2010). As violence spread to other areas nearby, despite an initial curfew imposed by the police, more people fled their homes (VOA, 25 January 2010; AFP, 24 January 2010; Punch, 21 January 2010; Reuters, 19 January 2010). Among around 300 people arrested on suspicion of instigating the violence, many had already been taken into custody in relation to previous similar incidents in November 2008, but were never prosecuted (BBC, 25 January 2010).

The full scope of displacement is not clear. Accounts on the number of IDPs have not been

consistent. Reports have referred to both 18,000 (IRIN, 27 January 2010) and 25,000 (CAFOD, 27 January 2010) people in makeshift camps in and around Jos and to at least 2,000 people in each of the 18 camps registered by NEMA (Leadership, 25 January 2010). Because of the high number of IDPs and due to a lack of coordination among relief agencies, humanitarian aid was mostly ad hoc and insufficient (IRIN, 27 January 2010 and 22 January 2010). Responding to the wish of some of the IDPs not to return to Jos, the federal and the Bauchi State governments were considering resettlement options in Bauchi (Leadership, 24 January 2010). Other IDPs were still trying to return to their villages and rebuild their homes as of October 2010 (Daily Trust, 8 October 2010). No reports were readily available on those Jos residents displaced in November 2008.

## General numbers and patterns of displacement

There were reportedly some 80,000 IDPs in the country at the end of 2009 (USDoS, 11 March 2010). There are, however, no reliable statistics on internal displacement in Nigeria and different numbers exist in the absence of any comprehensive survey. The figures provided by government and non-governmental agencies are generally only estimates referring to localised displacement situations. In general, estimates only include people who have sought shelter at temporary IDP camps, leaving out the many who find refuge with family and friends. In most cases, numbers are not disaggregated by age and sex. As there are no mechanisms in place to monitor durable solutions, it is also impossible to determine whether and when people have ceased to be displaced.

Nigeria also regularly experiences displacement as a consequence of natural disasters such as flooding or soil erosion (Vanguard, 26 October 2010; IFRC, 21 October 2010; Daily Trust, 15 October 2010). In conflict-affected states, natural

disasters have complicated displacement and return patterns and it has in some cases been difficult to distinguish between people displaced by conflict and other causes. In 2010, recognising the need for better figures, the Nigerian government asked the help of the UN to carry out a profiling exercise that would provide a clearer picture of the number and situation of IDPs in the country (UN, 24 June 2010).

There are no official IDP camps of a long-lasting nature in the country. Temporary shelter is normally provided in army or police barracks, schools or hospitals but they serve as IDP camps only for a limited period. The vast majority of displaced people in Nigeria reportedly seek refuge with family, friends or host communities in areas where their ethnic or religious group is in the majority (Je’adayibe, 2008). Many appear to return to their homes or resettle near their home areas soon after the violence which forced them to leave has subsided, but an unknown number also resettle in other areas of the country.

In urban areas, the right of IDPs and other residents to adequate housing has suffered from persistent institutional policies of forced evictions, which have led to new patterns of intra-urban displacement. In Port Harcourt in the Niger Delta, the local government has identified hundreds of buildings in waterfront communities for demolition, both to enable urban development and to eradicate criminal activities in the city, where clashes between security forces, oil militants and other criminal groups have been common. In some cases, preparations for the demolition of buildings have been accompanied by excessive use of force by Nigerian security forces, and in no cases have the relevant authorities properly consulted affected communities or provided effective remedies or compensation mechanisms (AI, 28 October 2010). UN-HABITAT has estimated that at least 200,000 people will be affected by the demolition of the 41 waterfront communities in the city (AI, 28 August 2009).

## National and international responses

There is no national legislation upholding the rights of IDPs in Nigeria. A national IDP policy has been planned since the creation of the Nigerian Presidential Committee on IDPs in January 2004, but it was yet to be approved by the Federal Executive Council in November 2010. At the end of October 2009, however, Nigeria signed the African Union’s Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IRIN, 26 October 2009). Its ratification could provide an opportunity for Nigeria to adopt a comprehensive approach to the continuing internal displacement situations in the country.

In the absence of specific policy and legal frameworks, the responsibility to respond to displacement lies with the local governments, and only if they are unable to cope are state governments called in. State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) exist in some states, but they have varying capacities. Only when this second level of response is ineffective does the state government appeal to the federal government for support. The President takes the final decision on whether the federal government intervenes. At the federal level, NEMA coordinates emergency relief operations and assists in the rehabilitation of victims where necessary.

For coordination purposes, NEMA has divided the country into six disaster-management areas, for each of which it has operational offices. Where SEMAs are established, NEMA collaborates and supports them. In other cases, resources are overstretched and assistance to victims is often delayed (Government of Nigeria, 30 July 2009). NEMA often supports IDPs in the emergency phase of a crisis, but it lacks the resources to assist people displaced for a longer period of time or to help returnees reintegrate, and it has no IDP-specific, age-specific or gender-specific policies.

The National Commission for Refugees (NCFR) has taken effective responsibility for post-emergency situations, and also for long-term programmes

aimed at enabling durable solutions for IDPs as well as refugees. If necessary, it assists NEMA with camp management, and it has a dedicated unit working on IDP issues; but it lacks both the resources and the structure that could facilitate an effective response. Other government agencies are brought in on a case-by-case basis in an effort to overcome this lack of resources. In the 2010 Jos crisis, for example, the Federal Commissioner for Refugees sought the support of the Customs Service to provide shelter and non-food items to IDPs (Daily Trust, 22 April 2010).

Most internal displacement situations are managed on an ad-hoc basis and only in the emergency phase. The Nigerian Red Cross (NRC), the most prominent humanitarian organisation, has the structure and the personnel to respond at very short notice, and often provides immediate assistance ahead of the local governments. Although it is not in their mandate, the military has also been called on several occasions to respond to IDPs’ needs especially when military barracks serve as temporary IDP camps (234NextNews, 15 March 2010). While faith-based organisations play an important role in both immediate relief and long-term support to IDPs of their religion, international organisations have also responded on a case-by-case basis, most often without coordination.

The UN in Nigeria has focused on development rather than humanitarian issues, as no humanitarian agency has been willing to commit the ongoing resources necessary and as the UN community feels there is more to be gained in tackling the development failures causing the recurrent conflicts. Donor support has also reflected a similar approach favouring development assistance. Aid has mostly focused on encouraging democratic processes, rule of law and human rights, as poverty in Nigeria has been seen as a consequence not of a lack of resources, but rather of the misuse of those available (NORAD, 24 August 2010). The American USAID is the largest and most influential donor, followed by the British DFID.

**Note:** This is a summary of IDMC’s internal displacement profile on Nigeria. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people.

In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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