

Measures on the Issue of Internally Displaced Persons and the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project in Turkey

'Integrated Strategy Document' adopted by the Council of Ministers on 17 August 2005

Numerous villages and hamlets were deserted in Turkey between 1984-1998 particularly due to the pressure and coercion of separatist terrorist organisations and other factors such as the search for better living conditions, large-scale development projects within the context of the South Eastern Anatolia Project and natural disasters. Total population which has been displaced in this context in 14 provinces throughout Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia is approximately 360.000.

In line with the widespread definition that is used within the context of international law, internally displaced persons could be described as persons or groups of persons who have either been forced or have been obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence without having crossed internationally recognised state borders, 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 man-made disasters.

When compared to similar issues in different regions of the world, the issue of internally displaced persons in Turkey portrays differing features. The issue has a complex structure, with different correlated aspects, overlapping with population movements due to long-standing economic and social factors. It is therefore important to take into consideration this fact while handling the issue and also developing and implementing strategies for a solution.

In developing its activities towards its citizens who had to leave their villages of residence, the Republic of Turkey has declared its intention, at all stages, to provide effective and permanent solutions to the problems that have originated within the context of its displaced population. In this regard, it upholds international legal standards in its national endeavours. Efforts to resolve the issue of internally displaced persons is being carried out in a scrupulous manner, in compliance with international standards and in consultation and cooperation with international organisations, particularly the United Nations (UN).

The Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project, brought to life in 1994, for the displaced population in Turkey, has been developed in order to relocate those families, which previously had to leave their places of residence and which now voluntarily wish to return, in their own villages, in the vicinity of these villages or in other areas with appropriate terrain. The project is also aimed at establishing the necessary social and economic infrastructure and enabling sustainable living conditions in these areas. The 14 provinces within the scope of the Project are Bingöl, Hakkari, Tunceli, Bitlis, Van, Muş, Elazığ, Dairiyan, Are, Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, Mardin, and Şirnak.

Significant progress has been achieved in this project up until now. Approximately one third of our displaced citizens have returned so far. Around 100 million YTL have been spent for this purpose since 1994. This amount has entirely been used for the development of infrastructure of the regions that are subject to resettlement and for the fulfillment of the needs of our citizens displaced due to terror. Furthermore, other budgetary means are also being used by the relevant authorities so as to meet all economic and social needs of the region.

With the enforcement of Law No. 5233 on Compensation of Losses Resulting from Terrorist Acts and the Measures Taken Against Terrorism which entered into force on 27 July 2004, a major step was taken towards the elimination of the difficulties faced by our citizens who are obliged to leave their villages. Thus, the legal ground was set up.

In accordance with the “Guiding Principles” introduced in 1998 by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights for IDPs, which are now widely endorsed in the international arena as well as the recommendations laid down in the report of the Special Representative following his visit to Turkey between 26 May and 2 June 2002, series of meetings were organized with the UN Representative in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 2003 and January 2004. Representatives from the UN High Commission and the relevant national authorities participated in these meetings. During these meetings, it was decided to carry out a pilot project on the issues of internally displaced persons, return to village and rehabilitation with a view to identifying the characteristics and inclinations of citizens concerned. The Institute of Population Studies of Hacettepe University, which has previously practiced cooperation with the UN and the European Union, was designated by the State planning Organisation to undertake a new complementary and up-to-date study with national resources.

The empirical data that will be provided with this on-going study entitled “Migration and Internally Displaced Population Study in Turkey” is expected to guide and contribute to the improvements concerning internally displaced persons in Turkey as well as the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project. This study is planned to be concluded in 2006.

In light of the above, the identification of measures with the below-mentioned objectives, aimed at the development of an integrated strategy in general terms was necessitated with a view to finding a sustainable solution to this multi-dimensional issue in Turkey and in this framework, to implementing efficiently the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project. This integrated strategy shall also take into consideration the UN Guiding Principles of the Special Representative.

I. OBJECTIVES:

1. Ensuring the return of those wishing to return on a voluntary basis to their former settlements in safety and without being subject to any negative conditions;

2. Establishing the necessary social, economic, cultural and educational infrastructure within the framework of return and determining the policies for contribution to and the coordination of development projects to be implemented in this regard;
3. Providing sustainable living conditions in the areas of return, including the re-establishment and revitalization of rural life which has been disrupted in the meantime;
4. Developing a more balanced settlement pattern in rural areas by taking into consideration the preservation of public safety and the need to effectively provide necessary services;
5. Supporting the development of central villages;
6. Exploring the possibilities to provide support and assistance in order to facilitate the new living conditions for those citizens who do not wish to return and their integration into their new places of settlement.
7. Ensuring effective implementation of Law No. 5233 on the Compensation of Losses Resulting from Terrorist Acts and the Measures Taken Against Terrorism;
8. Reviewing the legislation currently implemented concerning returns and integration, and making the necessary amendments therein.

II. IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES:

1. Returns will be on a voluntary basis and will not be subject to any permission.
2. Those wishing to return to their former places of settlement may do so by notifying the highest public administrative official of the area in question. In this regard, the issues related to the security conditions of the places subject to returns will be coordinated by the governorships with the relevant authorities.
3. Assistance within the framework of the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project will be subject to the condition that the population or the number of households of villages available for settlement will be over 150 and 30 respectively.
4. Public assistance for returns may comprise practices such as “centrally located village” and “centers of attraction”, in order to facilitate the consolidation of services.
5. Complaints concerning provisional village guards will be given priority within the framework of returns.
6. Problems caused by landmines laid by the terrorist organizations in the context of returns will be addressed.

7. The planning and implementation stages for the integration and the facilitation of the living conditions of those who do not wish to return will be evaluated in detail.

8. Ministries, public institutions and organizations will give priority to the views and suggestions of the relevant Governorships while drafting their investment programs.

9. The Ministry of Interior shall be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of fundamental policies on these issues, as well as consultation and coordination.

10. Sufficient consultation and cooperation with NGOs will be maintained and confidence-building measures as well as measures to increase public awareness will be developed. Within this framework, information will be exchanged with NGOs by encouraging them to support and take part in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation process. NGO projects on education, health, agriculture and employment will be supported upon the approval of relevant authorities.

11. The administrative, legal and economic framework and the process of implementation will be made public in a transparent manner. The public will be informed in detail of the instruments and mechanisms for addressing the issue, with their economic, social, cultural and legal aspects.

12. Potential national and international resources including project works will be identified and the fundamentals of a realistic arrangement, considering financial discipline and transparency in matters such as areas of usage and limitations will be developed.

13. The legal framework regarding the principles, scope and limitations of the discretionary authority to be granted to institutions and government agencies and their responsibilities will be identified and uniformity in that regard will be ensured.