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# RI BULLETIN

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**A POWERFUL VOICE FOR LIFESAVING ACTION**

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## **Democratic Republic of the Congo: Internally Displaced Unable to Return Require Alternative Resettlement Possibilities**

After repeated delays, a large group of internally displaced people who have been living for years in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and in camps on the outskirts, have finally begun to return home. Assisted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Social Affairs expanded their pilot return project to include internally displaced in and around Kinshasa. Despite some problems with the implementation, this return has been a success. However, several hundred people who would like to return are still unable to do so, mainly due to protracted insecurity in their areas of origin. Refugees International is concerned that in its zeal to implement the program, the Government of the DRC will close the camps and the remaining displaced people will be left without assistance or viable options for resettlement.

In October 2004, a team from Refugees International visited the Nganda Musolo camp located in the outskirts of Kinshasa and found displaced people from areas throughout the country who had been living in deplorable conditions for years. Ignored by national authorities and the international humanitarian community, assistance had almost completely stopped and no one was willing to assist the displaced with return to their communities. More than 70 percent of the 4,000 people had formally expressed their desire to return home to a humanitarian agency. A man interviewed by RI stated, "We are tired of living like beggars. We do not want to continue to be dependent on others. I only need some help to go back home and restart my life." RI brought their plight to the attention of those responsible for a joint UNDP/Government pilot project to return displaced persons. Originally designed to benefit approximately 70,000 people living in five camps throughout several provinces, the project was expanded to include 3,000 people from two camps outside of Kinshasa and vulnerable groups of displaced people who had been living in the capital.

UN agencies delayed technical assistance and support to the pilot project for months; hence, the implementation of the pilot project has been plagued with problems. There was inconsistent information transmitted to the returnees and problems synchronizing the lists of who would be included in the project. However, with the appointment of a new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General responsible for humanitarian affairs, the UN agencies in the DRC have finally engaged with the pilot project. An evaluation of the project conducted by the UN's internal displacement division will provide a set of lessons which, if applied, funding and security permitting, will allow the government of the DRC to assist returns for other internally displaced throughout the country. RI congratulates the Government of the DRC for its initial successes in returning people home and recognizes the significant progress in the involvement of the entire UN country team, which is now engaged in assisting and monitoring the returns and reintegration activities.

Not all of the displaced people, however, are presently able to return home due to continuing insecurity in the eastern DRC, particularly the Kivus. The Government and humanitarian agencies are not paying enough attention to those who cannot yet return. Several hundred displaced people wish to remain in Kinshasa until

the situation in their home areas stabilizes and they feel free to return in safety. In mid-March, the Ministry of Social Affairs visited the camps outside of Kinshasa and made statements that led the people living there to believe that the camps would be closed as soon as the people who wish to return are taken away. Fearing for their future, many of the displaced who had not previously wished to return tried to sign up for the return process, leading to further confusion for the pilot project. A group of leaders from Nganda Musolo, told RI, “We do not see security being restored in the next months in the east. We are also afraid that from one day to another the government will close the camp.” Despite assurances from the UN leadership that sustained pressure will be maintained on the Ministry to avert any possible forced return or compulsory eviction of those remaining behind, the fears of the remaining displaced point to the need for increased attention on resettlement options in and around Kinshasa.

The displaced people who will remain behind in Kinshasa are resourceful and not looking to become dependent on international assistance. For example, a group from North Kivu has started an agricultural project near the site of the IDP camps. The leader of this group told RI, “We received 20 acres of land and a tractor from the government, we taxed ourselves to buy the fuel and we prepared the fields. We have asked the return project for some seeds and tools to help us but we were told that the project deals only with those who go home.” RI urges the international community to remember that displacement in the Congo has many different faces. There cannot be a “one-size fits all” approach from the international agencies. Both the Government and international agencies must work to stretch their limited resources to develop simultaneously different options for all of the displaced. This is only possible with support from donors. The UNDP/Government pilot project is the first step in the process of returning all the internally displaced home and deserves support.

**Refugees International therefore recommends that:**

- The UNDP and other UN agencies with expertise in displacement issues provide immediate technical assistance and training to the Ministry personnel in charge of the resettlement process;
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and the entire UN Country Team work together to continue return, reintegration and resettlement activities in the other camps as demonstrated by the pilot project;
- The Ministry of Social Affairs refrain from closing displaced camps until alternative and sustainable resettlement possibilities are made available. IDPs themselves should be included in the all decision-making processes to ensure clarity;
- Donors provide funding for return, reintegration and resettlement process, in particular supporting farming, income generating activities and rehabilitation of basic community services such as health centers and schools.

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*Advocates Sarah Martin and Andrea Lari assessed the internal displacement situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in April and May.*