

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency
Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos
Remarks at the launch of the IDMC Global Overview 2011
International Peace Institute, New York
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Can I start by thanking NRC and IDMC for inviting me to help launch this year's global overview? I gather that I am in a long line of Emergency Relief Coordinators who have participated in this event and I am delighted to be able to do so.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, one of the reasons why I am pleased to be here is because there is tremendous value and importance which we in OCHA and the wider humanitarian community attach to IDMC's monitoring, analysis and advocacy on internal displacement around the world. Elizabeth has very clearly set out this year's global overview, which I think provides a very stark indication of the magnitude of the challenge posed by internal displacement. It is a horribly bureaucratic term which describes a situation that can be grim, terrifying, demeaning and tragic, and a situation that no one in the world should have to endure. Yet millions of people are facing this reality everyday.

Internal displacement may be as old as war itself. But it must not be considered inevitable. More can, and should be, done to prevent it. We've spent years raising awareness of the importance of international humanitarian law, seeking to ensure that the responsibilities enshrined in that legislation are understood worldwide. Now more than ever there is greater interest around the world; we have 24/7 media, but we also have populations in many countries that are much more interested in the impact of conflict and disasters on ordinary people.

It is a sad fact that today many parties to conflict have little or no respect for the international laws which would spare civilians from the effect of hostilities. Continued and serious compliance with the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in international humanitarian law would mean fewer civilians having to flee their homes in search of relative safety. And when displacement happens, returns would be simplified if residential areas and essential infrastructure were left undamaged. We of course all recognize that conflict brings casualties, but so much of the destruction is deliberate. We would also see less displacement if the trend in some countries towards using forced

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displacement as a deliberate tactic by warring parties was stopped. Experience shows that most parties to conflict have a long way to go to make these principles meaningful on the ground in terms of their practice, and we have to I think continue our advocacy on these issues on all levels.

No less serious, as I myself have seen, is the displacement caused by natural disasters. In the aftermath of major disasters, affected people often need protection as much as they need material assistance. This means, for example, protection in the form of ensuring access to assistance for vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as older people, people with disabilities, or particular ethnic or religious groups. It means protection for orphaned and other vulnerable children. It means protection in the form of replacing lost identity and other documents that are often essential for access to services and assistance. And of course it means protection from sexual and gender-based violence in the often highly charged and over-crowded environment of evacuation camps and centres. The recent decision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to play a more predictable role in coordinating protection in natural disasters is a critically important step, in my view, towards remedying this and it is one that I fully support.

One final reflection: Displacement is being driven to higher levels today by violence in Cote d'Ivoire, which Elizabeth mentioned, and Somalia, instability in North Africa and the Middle East, and the continuing impact of natural disasters on poor and vulnerable communities worldwide. The work of IDMC and others on monitoring and tracking these trends is an essential tool in helping those of us who must respond and need to respond and we need to focus our resources and efforts appropriately. It also helps to make the case to the international community that more must be done to prevent it. I think that we all have a role to play. It's our collective responsibility to continue to press for adherence to the principles which can make such a difference. I very much hope that this year's report will continue that trend, will help us to make that case, and will really help to make a difference for ordinary people on the ground.