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IDPs in Indonesia: Is there a quick fix?

Michael Elmquist heads the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Indonesia. The following article outlines the scale of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) problem in Indonesia, the steps being taken by the government and outside agencies in improving the situation and the obstacles to rapid progress.

They sleep on the concrete floor of a former cinema in Ternate, North Maluku. They live in wooden barracks in a military camp outside the city of Ambon, Maluku. They live as nomads in the jungle outside Medan, North Sumatra. They crowd a stadium in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, two or three families sharing a tiny cubicle. In Madura they live with private families, having already long overstayed their welcome. In all, they number over 1.3 million. These are the internally displaced persons (IDPs) of Indonesia.

Although a small number from this total of IDPs lost their homes as a result of natural disasters, the vast majority were forced to escape from man-made conflicts. The conflicts that have been raging in the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku have, by far, caused the largest number of IDPs, at over 400,000. The outburst of ethnic violence in Central Kalimantan in February and March 2001 forced some 100,000 persons to flee to East Java and the adjoining island of Madura. Two years earlier, similar ethnic clashes in Sambas, West Kalimantan, caused some 60,000 persons to seek refuge in Pontianak, the provincial capital, where they remain to this day. The ongoing separatist struggle in Aceh creates fluctuating numbers of more short-term IDPs within the province, usually numbering between 10,000 and 30,000. These are in addition to around 50,000 non-Acehnese who are now living in very poor conditions in North Sumatra.

One special case in Indonesia's recent history of IDPs was as a result of the violence that broke out in East Timor following the popular referendum in August 1999. At that time, an estimated 290,000 persons either fled or were forced to leave the province to go to West Timor. Most of these people have since returned to their homes in East Timor, but some 80,000 still remain in camps in West Timor. When they fled, East Timor was regarded (by Indonesia, although not by the United Nations) as still being part of the Republic of Indonesia, but as soon as East Timor formally seceded from Indonesia they became internationally recognised as refugees, i.e. persons who, for reasons of persecution, are outside their country of nationality. As refugees, they come under the protection of the international community, more specifically the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, these people are still regarded by the government of Indonesia as Indonesian citizens and, as such, have the right to resettle anywhere in the country. The Indonesian language uses the same term *pengungsi* to describe both IDPs and

refugees, but for the international community the legal difference between the two groups is significant.

International conventions safeguard the rights of persecuted people who cross borders and become refugees. In contrast, there is no existing legal instrument governing the rights of persecuted people who are forced to flee their homes, but who do not cross international borders, i.e. IDPs. However, Representative of the Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons Dr. Francis M. Deng has developed a set of 'Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement', based on existing human rights and humanitarian laws, which have come to be widely accepted as the framework of reference in all IDP matters. One of the fundamental principles (Principle 3) is that national authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs within their jurisdiction. Another fundamental principle (Principle 25, 2) is that international humanitarian organisations have the right to offer their services in support of IDPs. Inherent in this principle is a moral obligation for the international humanitarian community to assist the host government when that government's own resources prove to be insufficient.

The Indonesian government has shown its commitment towards living up to its obligations in accordance with the 'Guiding Principles'. During the current year, the government has so far spent over US\$150 million on food aid and other forms of aid for IDPs, in addition to the considerable funds spent by various ministries on resettlement housing, infrastructure, medical assistance and education for IDPs. Sadly, however, there often appears to be a great distance separating the central government and the IDPs on the ground. Sometimes, even if the physical distance appears to be short, a disconnect seems to be apparent between official statements and the reality experienced by IDPs themselves. I have experienced this disconnect personally: on one occasion I was told by a local official that IDP children received free education, only to learn a little later from an IDP family 200 meters down the road that they could not afford to send their children to school. In most IDP camps food aid has been slow and irregular, and international assistance has been necessary to stop the gaps.

Sometimes the efforts of the government have been costly and well intentioned but have failed to achieve the expected results. Outside the city of Pontianak, for example, the government built resettlement homes for 2,000 families, but most of them remain empty. The IDPs in Pontianak cite the distance to the (jobs and markets in) the city and the lack of security as the main reasons for not moving to the resettlement areas. Fundamentally, this is the consequence of planning at the central level without involving the target groups in the planning process. In defence of the government, it must be admitted that the IDP problem is relatively new to Indonesia. Unlike many African countries, which have hosted IDPs for 20 or 30 years, IDPs only became a phenomenon in Indonesia about three years ago. However, in those short three years their numbers have grown from almost none to a staggering 1.3 million.

The international humanitarian community continues to provide substantial assistance to complement the efforts of the government. This involves donor countries, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The number of organisations operating in Indonesia is relatively small, given the vast size of the country and the large number of IDPs, and

consequently these organisations have not always been successful in reaching all those in need. The natural tendency has been to give assistance to those who can most easily be reached which, in practice, means IDPs residing in and around the main urban areas. Unfortunately, large numbers of IDPs are to be found in extremely remote locations, for example in the coastal hamlets on Halmahera, North Maluku, in small settlements on Seram Island, Maluku, or hiding in the bush on Buru Island, also in Maluku, scattered over vast areas. Such remote locations make it virtually impossible to provide assistance to IDPs in these areas on a regular basis.

When the Megawati government came to power, it quickly recognised the IDP situation as one of the major problems that had to be addressed. Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Yusuf Kalla was tasked with the development of a new and comprehensive government policy on IDPs and he completed this task with amazing speed. Already by 25 September 2001 he had obtained cabinet agreement on a new policy document, which was officially published on 18 October 2001. In the introductory paragraph the new policy states that, "The numerous efforts by the central/local government, together with the Indonesian people and the international community, have until now failed to provide adequate solutions. Concurrent with the improvement of the social and political situation of the nation and the moving forward of the economy, it is felt that now is the appropriate time to immediately finish the management of IDPs/refugees [*pengungsi*] in Indonesia."

For this purpose, the government has outlined that the problem should be resolved through three consecutive priority patterns for IDPs residing in camps, as follows:

Pattern 1 – The peaceful return of IDPs to their places of origin. The most important step needed to achieve this is to create a feeling of security and comfort, as well as to strengthen the efforts towards reconciliation guided by relevant government officials.

Pattern 2 – Empowerment of IDPs to enable them to start a new life within an existing community. This includes the provision of skills and capital to IDPs to enable them to become self-supporting.

Pattern 3 – Resettlement of IDPs to new sites through a relocation programme. This is the most costly and complicated option, as it includes land clearance, house construction, the provision of public facilities, farming tools and equipment, and the payment of allowances until the IDPs involved become self-sufficient.

The aim of the government is to complete the programme by the end of 2002, by which time the intention is that there should be no more IDPs living in camps. To identify the funding required, and as an incentive for IDPs to leave the camps, the government also has the stated intention of terminating food assistance by the end of 2001.

The reaction of the international community to this new policy has been one of scepticism as to its feasibility and concern regarding the termination of food aid, which is regarded as one of the fundamental rights of IDPs in accordance with the 'Guiding Principles'. The international community does not believe that the primary pattern, namely the return of IDPs to their places of origin, is possible in the vast majority of cases. So far, East Timor and North Maluku are the only areas where

conditions are ripe for a return of the refugees/IDPs. The tensions that caused conflicts in Maluku and Kalimantan still remain and in these cases it is likely to take generations before people can live together in peace, unless the government undertakes a massive effort at reconciliation.

Empowerment is a good alternative if the host communities are ready and willing to accept IDPs, which, in most cases, they are not. IDPs are seen as outsiders, intruders, and potential competitors. One group of IDPs from Ambon managed to become well settled in a community in Biak, Papua. But the reasons for this were, first, that these IDPs were originally from Papua and had been transmigrated to Ambon and, second, that the local community received compensation in the form of improved infrastructure. The same could be said of most of the IDPs on the island of Buton who came from the two Maluku provinces but were originally Butonese, although in this case the host communities have not received any compensation. However, such conditions are not typically present.

The only remaining option for the majority of IDPs is resettlement in new sites. For budgetary reasons, the government hopes that only a small number of IDPs will avail themselves of this option but, in reality, it is the only option available for most of them. So far, the government's resettlement policy has not been a complete success. Much more community involvement is needed in order to ensure that the relocation sites and houses are of a standard acceptable to IDPs, and that the sites are sustainable and accepted by the surrounding population. For instance, rather than using outside contractors to deliver 5,000 standard houses in straight rows, IDP communities should be involved in the design and construction of their own houses, and in the 'urban planning' of the relocation sites. Otherwise, a high risk remains that the IDPs involved will refuse to move from their existing camps.

The greatest fear of the international community is that the government may ultimately be tempted to force IDPs to leave their camps, give each family a token sum of money and regard the problem as solved. Should the IDPs then fail to make a sustainable living with the money they have received, they would simply fall into Indonesia's already large group of poor. This would be a blatant violation of the 'Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement', on top of which it would be economically unwise. Most IDPs were not necessarily poor people before they became IDPs. Often, they were hard working and productive members of society. To deprive them of their status as IDPs would be to deprive them of the right to become productive members of society once again at some point in the future. Simply giving the problem a different label is not a solution.

Pragmatically, acknowledging that the problem will not disappear overnight, the United Nations agencies and ten international NGOs on 27 November 2001 appealed for a total of US\$41 million to enable them to continue and intensify their assistance to IDPs in Indonesia. The humanitarian actors are placing great emphasis on reconciliation, peace building and conflict prevention, and are taking every opportunity to include these aspects in their programmes. The World Health Organisation has initiated a project called 'health as a bridge for peace', establishing medical teams of mixed religious/ethnic background and showing that health care does not depend on religion or ethnic affiliation. UNICEF has opened an Internet library in Ambon where children of the opposing sides in the conflict can sit together

and learn how to make use of modern technology. These are just two examples of numerous programmes and projects, technically falling in the traditional sectors of health, food, shelter, education, etc., but at the same time having peace building as the ulterior motive.

At the same time, the international community is increasingly concerned about the risk of more conflicts erupting, leading to an increase in Indonesia's already high IDP population. Of most immediate concern is the situation in Poso, where a religious conflict has lingered for some years and now threatens to explode. Also the conflicts between the government and the separatist movements in Aceh and Papua run the risk of flaring up, also leading to the displacement of significant numbers of people. A researcher was once asked which areas of Indonesia he saw as potential trouble spots, to which he answered that he considered Bali to be safe. In fact, ethnic conflicts such as the one that broke out in Central Kalimantan in February and March 2001 could theoretically erupt almost anywhere in the archipelago, as the ultimate result of past policies of transmigration.

President Megawati Soekarnoputri has declared the conflict areas to be among some of her main preoccupations, and has assumed personal responsibility for the conflicts in Aceh and Papua, while leaving the responsibility for the conflicts in Maluku, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and West Timor to Vice-President Hamzah Haz. The IDP problems in Indonesia are, of course, closely linked to the continued existence of those conflicts and to the avoidance of future conflicts. Longer-term reconciliation will not be the result of a quick fix, but only of a concerted policy of education, and equal economic and political opportunities. In the meantime, peace, and law and order are essential, highlighting the key role to be played by the national security apparatus, the Indonesian military (TNI) and the national police (Polri). In the Malukus, TNI have proven that it can control the situation in an unbiased fashion ('shoot to kill troublemakers, regardless of religion', as was the stated policy of the former TNI regional commander, Maj Gen I Made Yasa). In Aceh, the elite elements of TNI have demonstrated their ability to identify and neutralise the 'opposition' without having to resort to random harassment of the civilian population (a task which, unfortunately, other less 'elite' elements still seem to be performing).

Nobody is calling for a return to the authoritarian rule of previous times in Indonesia, but a total breakdown of authority and impunity for violent actions is not an attractive alternative. The government's new policy on IDPs needs to be supplemented with a policy on security and protection of IDPs, otherwise there will be no lasting solutions to the problem.