

EDITORIAL

Movement of populations is an ancient phenomenon, beginning with the expansion of *Homo erectus* out of Africa. In all civilizations, the quests for land to cultivate, for labour revenues and for commerce have been fundamental motives for migration. Whether in the form of outright conquest or slow cultural infiltration and resettlement, migration has affected all epochs in human history. In the form of colonization, it has even transformed the world.

In history, conflicts of all sorts have provoked other types of displacement: exoduses, mass expulsions, and exile of populations. If the 19th century was the century of mass migrations, the 20th century was the century of refugees. In total, more than 100 million people were forced to leave their countries due to the two World Wars. In displacing, deporting or expelling more than 10% of the European population (about 50 to 60 million people), the Second World War created a migratory nightmare. Similarly, with the end of the British Empire, the partition of India and Pakistan provoked the departure of 17 million people from their home areas – the later secession of Bangladesh led to the exodus of another 6 to 8 million people.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that a robust system of passports and visas was fully established to regulate border crossings. Today, despite the progression of human rights and economic interdependence, borders and migration law are often the last bastion of sovereignty in the globalizing world, as the movement of populations has continued in the form of both voluntary migration and forced displacement. Conversely, effective control of cross-border activities is nearly impossible where states have to keep their borders open for goods, capital and services. Thus, tensions arise between legal systems predicated on openness and security-driven rhetoric justifying restrictive and coercive practices against foreigners. States' reaction to their perception of a loss of control was first reflected in the damage done to refugees and to refugee law. After the end of the Cold War, the global crackdown on 'illegal migration' and the tightening of migration restrictions made international refugee law a more important constraint on sovereignty than ever before.

However, displacement of populations also takes place within State borders. At the end of last year, the number of people internally displaced by conflict, generalized

violence or human rights violations across the world reportedly remained at over 20 million. The causes of displacement are of course manifold and complex. Quite apart from natural disasters or development-induced displacement, in most cases the root causes of displacement are the same as those that have triggered, or at least contributed to, armed conflict or situations of violence in the first place. Poverty, the effects of climate change, scarcity of resources, political instability, and weak governance and justice systems may all be catalysts for conflict-induced displacement. These same factors often hamper solutions to displacement and make the task of rebuilding lives and restoring the livelihoods of people affected by displacement all the more difficult. The sanitized acronym 'IDP' cannot convey the faintest idea of the grim realities that confront those people in many parts of the world today.

One of the main causes of forced displacement in armed conflict remains, undoubtedly, violations of international humanitarian law. Attacks that are directed against civilians or indiscriminate in nature – prohibited by humanitarian law – are particularly to blame for civilians fleeing their homes. Parties to an armed conflict are also expressly prohibited from compelling civilians to leave their homes, and internally displaced persons are entitled to the same protection from the effects of hostilities and the same assistance as the rest of the civilian population. If these laws were better respected, internal displacement could to a large degree be prevented from happening in the first place.

The development of legal standards outside of humanitarian law has extended the protection of IDPs to a wider range of situations. Ten years after their adoption, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement remain an important international framework for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. They address issues associated with forced displacement, regardless of the way a particular situation is classified under law. Thus they are as pertinent during and after armed conflict as they are in situations of internal strife, complex emergencies, or natural disasters. On a regional level, the new African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention), adopted by the AU Summit on 23 October 2009 in Kampala, Uganda, takes an all-embracing approach to the phenomenon. This Convention is the first ever international treaty for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons and is as such a significant achievement.

Where severe and sudden crises bring about massive displacement of population groups, an urgent humanitarian response is needed. The often highly complex and fluid nature of displacement on the ground makes coverage of displaced persons' needs a difficult task, and a comprehensive approach to the humanitarian needs of the entire civilian population in any crisis or situation of conflict is required. For humanitarian organizations, it is of paramount importance that they reach out to everyone in need, not only to those who have been forcibly displaced. Only this approach will help those living in remote areas to recover some measure of

self-sufficiency and resilience, ease tensions over scarce resources, and prevent these people from having to move to IDP camps.

In most cases, the vast majority of IDPs living in camps usually express an interest in returning home – often to reclaim land or property and resume their normal lives – as long as security conditions are conducive to this. Additionally, the establishment of camps creates new problems that are complex to tackle, and which may in fact compound the vulnerabilities and risks to which IDPs are exposed.

The challenges relating to the prevention of displacement apply equally to preventing its recurrence once IDPs return to their places of origin, settle in the community that hosted them, or relocate to yet another place. The conditions for return or relocation must be safe, voluntary and dignified. Without long-term commitment to tackle the root causes of conflict, there is a risk of repeated patterns of internal displacement and humanitarian crisis. Unless displaced populations are effectively stabilized through adequate protection and assistance, there can be little hope of achieving sustainable peace.

Tackling the problem of internal displacement in all its dimensions therefore requires a huge concerted effort at both national and international levels. The 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent acknowledged for the first time that migration, in a broad sense of the term, is one of its major strategic challenges of the future. Moreover, the recommendation issued in 2007 was that, in addressing the humanitarian dimension of migration, the Red Cross and Red Crescent should take an inclusive approach, irrespective of the status of the migrants of concern. Needs and vulnerabilities of migrants should be the determining factors in the humanitarian response, whatever the legal status or category to which they belong. Similarly, the ICRC, the Federation and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies developed policy guidelines for addressing the needs and vulnerabilities of people and communities affected by internal displacement. The guidelines adopted in November 2009 highlight the strengths and added value of the Movement in providing a comprehensive response to displacement crises, mainly through its global network which is firmly anchored in communities.

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