

**Submission from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
to the Human Rights Committee in its 89<sup>th</sup> session to be held in New York, 12-30  
March 2007, related to the discussion of the country situation in Rwanda in the  
absence of the State Party's report.**

In view of the consideration by the UN Human Rights Committee of the country situation in Rwanda in the absence of the State Party's report, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council would like to draw the Committee's attention to a number of concerns regarding the effective enjoyment of several of the rights enshrined in the Covenant by a significant number of the citizens of Rwanda. The note is submitted with a view to adding to the list of issues taken up during the discussion.

The concerns we wish to raise are primarily related to the aftermath of the internal displacement crisis in the country in 1998 and 1999 and, specifically, to the National Habitat Policy ("villagisation" policy) of 1996 and its ongoing effects especially in the Ruhengeri and Gisenyi provinces, in reference to the Covenant articles below:

- Article 12.1 – liberty of movement and freedom to choose one's residence:

Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 27 specifies that, subject to restrictions contained in paragraph 3, Art.12.1 "includes protection against all forms of forced internal displacement" (paragraph 7). The context of Rwanda's "villagisation" policy, however, may indicate that it was arbitrary and forced.

In 1998 and 1999 the Rwandan government and the UN recognised around 650,000 people in makeshift camps as internally displaced (IDPs) in the north-western prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi. These IDPs – most of them Hutus – were uprooted when an insurgency in the two provinces was put down by the Tutsi-dominated government in 1997-1998. In response to the dire conditions in the IDP camps, the government implemented a National Habitat Policy, or "villagisation" policy, which provided for the relocation of all Rwandans living in scattered homesteads into government-created villages, including those displaced in 1997-1998.

The "villagisation policy" policy applied to all Rwandans, but affected different districts differently. In Ruhengeri and Gisenyi there was little need for construction of new houses, whether scattered or in villages, but the Government argued that the implementation of the policy would increase security, as villages would facilitate control of population movements.

As a result, implementation of the policy effectively prevented the IDPs in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi from returning and recuperating their homes. While the initial resettlement of the population in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi could be justified on the grounds that it was a necessary means of ensuring their safety during the military operations, the following collective and permanent resettlement the within the scope of this “villagisation policy” does raise issues related to both necessity and proportionality of the means used.

The National Habitat Policy of 1996 was first seen as a positive step to resolve the situation of the IDPs drawing support of such agencies as the UNHCR, WFP as well as international NGOs. Soon after however, reports of coercion were noted and support was withdrawn. It is impossible to verify how many of those affected by the villagisation policy approved of it and moved to new settlements voluntarily. There are reports, however, indicating that thousands of people have been resettled against their will, particularly in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi.

Finally, hardly any assistance was provided to the IDP camps, which did not give the IDPs any choice but to move into the settlement sites which were supposed to offer better conditions. This kind of conditioning of assistance amounts to forced displacement (For further information, please see the attached report).

- Article 17.1 & 17.2 – prohibition of arbitrary or unlawful interference with home and the protection of the law against such interference, Article 17 alone as well as in conjunction with Article 2.3;

Human Rights Committee General Comment No. 16 on Article 17 provides that “this right is required to be guaranteed against all such interferences and attacks whether they emanate from State authorities or from natural or legal persons” (paragraph 1) and that the term home “is to be understood to indicate the place where a person resides or carries out his usual occupation” (Article 17, paragraph 5). As specified by Human Right Committee General Comment No. 31, it is a general legal obligation on States Parties to investigate allegations of violations of the Covenant’s rights, provide accessible and effective remedies to vindicate those rights and make reparations to individuals whose rights have been violated (paragraphs 15 & 16).

As a result of the “villagisation” policy, internally displaced persons have been resettled and prevented from returning to their homes and lands. During the IDMC mission to Ruhengeri and Gisenyi in May 2005, there was a pattern of reports indicating that villagers could not return and reclaim their property, *i.e.* homes and land, because of the illegal appropriation of land and intimidation by high-ranking military officers and their representatives particularly in Kinigi commune in Ruhengeri. These allegations seem to be substantiated by reports of Rwandan asylum-seekers in Uganda and Zimbabwe describing the difficulties of reclaiming land as reasons for seeking asylum. In the words of one asylum-seeker: “If you get a Major on the land, you cannot order him out” (Refugee Law Project, March 2005)

- Article 25 (a) – right to take part in public affairs;

General Comment No. 25 provides that “the conduct of public affairs...is a broad concept ...it covers all aspects of public administration, and the formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels and that “citizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with their representatives...” (paragraphs 5 & 8).

Human Rights Watch indicates, however, that despite the magnitude and the drastic consequences for so many people, Rwanda’s National Habitat Policy has not been consulted with those whose lives it has dramatically affected.

### Background information and sources

## Ensuring durable solutions for Rwanda’s displaced people: a chapter closed too early

8 July 2005

### Map of Rwanda



Source: United Nations

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## Executive Summary

*In 1998 and 1999 the Rwandan government and the UN recognised around 650,000 people in makeshift camps as internally displaced (IDPs) in the north-western prefectures of Rubengeri and Gisenyi. These IDPs – most of them Hutus - were uprooted when an insurgency in the two provinces was put down by the Tutsi-dominated government in 1997-1998. In December 2000, the UN ceased to consider them as such, arguing that “governmental and international efforts to stabilise the situation through durable solutions have advanced beyond the threshold of what still could be called internal displacement”. These efforts consisted largely of the implementation of the National Habitat Policy, or “villagisation” policy, of December 1996 which provides for the relocation of all Rwandans living in scattered homesteads into government-created villages, including those displaced in 1997-1998.*

*More than four years after the issue of internal displacement was taken off the agenda in Rwanda, conditions in the villages inhabited by the resettled IDPs call for renewed attention to the question of whether internal displacement has ended with the implementation of durable solutions, as required by the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The relevance of this question is underlined by the Rwandan government’s call for continued international support for the ongoing villagisation programme, arguing that the programme would help address poverty and land scarcity. Its request for assistance to improve housing conditions for 180,000 households living in inadequate shelter, out of which more than 100,000 are located in Rubengeri and Gisenyi, is a clear indication that durable solutions have not been found during the more than six years which have elapsed since the IDPs were resettled to their current homes.*

*Indeed, housing conditions in Rubengeri and Gisenyi – once strongholds of the Hutu-dominated regime that orchestrated the genocide of 1994 – have deteriorated drastically since the displaced people were moved into the new settlements. The rest of the country received considerably more assistance from the government and the international community to construct villages. Moreover, the villagisation policy appears to have reduced access to land for many of the affected people and thus increased land scarcity, a problem that is widely considered as one of the decisive causes of the 1994 genocide. Several villagers in Rubengeri and Gisenyi in communes bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo claimed in May 2005 that high-ranking military officers were illegally occupying land they had abandoned. This may further exacerbate the historical animosity between the people in these two Hutu-dominated provinces and the central authorities.*

*The government as well as Rwanda’s donors should address the current misery in the settlement sites as a humanitarian issue. The government should be asked to make a convincing case for its claim that the villagisation policy increases productivity before renewed funding is considered. Efforts should also be made by the government to remove any bias in government policies nurturing perceptions that one group is favoured by the authorities at the expense of another, and to investigate reports of land belonging to displaced people being illegally occupied by members of the Rwandan army.*

### **Background and main causes of displacement**

Rwanda is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in Africa with more than eight million people having to share a little more than 26,000 square kilometres (GoR, 17 December 2002). The land has historically been shared between Hutu farmers, Tutsi pastoralists and Batwa, who make up 85, 14 and 1 per cent of the population respectively. They all speak the same language and share the same culture, territory and religions. The Tutsi have been the victims of massive state-sponsored violence since the end of colonial rule in 1959 which culminated in the genocide in 1994. Between 500,000 and one million of the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus were killed by a Hutu-dominated regime within a three-month period. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), which was formed mainly by Tutsi who had fled to Uganda following repeated massacres and pogroms in the post-colonial period managed to quell the genocide in June 1994 and formed a transitional government shortly afterwards.

Attempts to explain the recurrent violence in the relations between Tutsi and Hutu include factors such as land pressure and poverty, the creation of rigid ethnic categories, and events in neighbouring Burundi.

The territory of present-day Rwanda was in pre-colonial times ruled by an increasingly centralised Tutsi kingdom which reached its peak during the reign of Rwabugiri from 1860 to 1895, only some years before the arrival of the European colonisers. The kingdom's expansion policies involved a drastic alteration of autonomous or semi-autonomous clan-structures and manipulation of traditional socio-economic categories. These categories had allowed for some degree of social mobility; a Hutu who had acquired cattle could become Tutsi and conversely, a Tutsi could become Hutu by shifting socio-economic activity from pastoralism to farming. The current north-western prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi were the last areas to be controlled by the expanding Tutsi kingdom. Hutu in this area had until the arrival of the kingdom almost exclusively been the sole rulers. Rwabugiri increasingly gained control over access to land and managed to a great extent to replace the Hutu ruling elite with Tutsi, paving the way for collective sentiments of superiority and inferiority which should later become characteristic of the relation between the two groups (Prunier 1995).

“With the arrival of central authorities, lines of distinction were altered and sharpened, as the categories of Hutu and Tutsi assumed new hierarchical overtones associated with proximity to the central [Tutsi] court. Later when the political arena widened and the intensity of political activity increased, these classifications became increasingly stratified and rigidified. More than simply conveying the connotation of cultural difference from Tutsi, Hutu identity came to be associated with and eventually defined by inferior status” (New-bury, 1988, cited in Danida, Volume 1, p. 16).

The arrival of the Germans and the Belgians at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a decisive event in the formation of the present-day Tutsi-Hutu identities (Danida, Volume 1, p. 17).

In line with the racial theories of the time, the colonialists found in the Tutsi a superior race and installed an indirect Tutsi rule based on the assumption that the Hutu majority were biologically inferior and therefore unfit to rule. The Tutsi were systematically privileged and

the Hutu discriminated. The result was an inordinately inflated Tutsi identity, victim of a superiority complex, whereas the Hutu interiorised a resentful inferiority complex.

The genocide took place in a country almost exclusively dependent on subsistence farming, with the highest population density in Africa. Many observers therefore consider land scarcity and population pressure when attempting to understand the causes of the genocide. Some have even gone as far as to consider competition over scarce resources, especially access to land, as the main root cause of the genocide. Others have argued that land scarcity and population pressure were elements that simply aggravated ethnic grievances, emphasising the prevalence of the ethnic view of the conflict and the genocide (ACTS, 31 January 2005; Tiemessen, March 2005).

The worsening economic conditions created, regardless of any explanatory hierarchy awarded to ethnicity, an increasingly receptive ground for state-sponsored hate-propaganda. An economic crisis in the 1980s with a sharp fall in coffee prices and the effects of structural adjustment programmes in 1990 and 1992 led to increased poverty and unemployment.

This was further aggravated by a major internal displacement situation caused by incursions of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) in the 1990s. The RPA was composed of Tutsi refugees who had fled several pogroms in the post-colonial period, most notably in 1959-1961, 1963-64 and 1973. Tens of thousands Tutsis had been killed and several hundred thousands fled to the neighbouring countries, particularly Uganda. From there they organised the incursions that fuelled fear that Tutsis would return to power and reinstall the humiliating social hierarchy of the colonial period. By the time of the signing of the Arusha Accords, which ended the fighting in August 1993, the RPA was in control of large parts of the north of the country.<sup>1</sup> The occupation caused the displacement of up to one million overwhelmingly poor Hutu farmers (Danida, Volume 1, p. 58)

In neighbouring Burundi the Tutsi minority retained to a large extent hegemony in the country's post-colonial period, but only by committing massive human rights violations, including killings of several hundred thousand people belonging of the Hutu majority. As a result, at the beginning of the genocide there were some 350,000 Burundian Hutu refugees in Rwanda who vehemently fuelled anti-Tutsi and anti-RPF sentiments among fellow Hutus. Those who had been internally displaced by the RPF incursions were particularly receptive to these activities (Lemarchand 2001).

Moreover, a power-sharing scheme specified in the Arusha Accords would have seriously curtailed the power-base of the Hutu government. The invasion by the Tutsi army made the destitute Hutu farmers even more receptive to the politically-manipulated discourse that the Tutsis would return and reinstall the hegemony and privileges they had enjoyed during the colonial period. Thus, deteriorating economic conditions for ordinary farmers coincided with the weakening of the Hutu elite's grip on power, which was also undermined by internal power struggles (Lemarchand 2001). The Hutu regime reacted by instigating fear and hope among destitute and poor Hutu farmers that later motivated their crimes during the

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<sup>1</sup> The Arusha Peace agreement was signed by the *Rwandan Patriotic Front* (RPF) and the then government of Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania on 4 August 1993. The agreement ended the civil war and remained the basis for power-sharing after the genocide and up to the national elections in 2003, albeit nominally, as the real power is held to be in the hands of RPA officers (UNHCR, January 2000; JRS, August 2004; Willum, October 2002)

genocide. The government made promises to Hutu farmers that they would get the land of every eliminated Tutsi, who paradoxically in most cases were just as poor as the Hutu. Many of the people who were displaced by the Tutsi invasion and the Burundian refugees were soon found among the perpetrators of the genocide (Prunier 1995).

Up to two million people, mainly Hutus, fled during and shortly after the genocide to Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Burundi and Tanzania for fear the victorious RPA would seek revenge and as a result of intimidation by the leaders who had orchestrated the genocide. These are commonly known as “new case-load refugees”. Another 1.2 to 1.5 million people fled to the “zone turquoise” in the south-west of Rwanda established by the French government and became internally displaced until the last camp, hosting around 120,000 people, was violently dismantled by the RPA in April 1995 and people forced to return (Kleine-Ahlbrandt, FMR, August 1998).

The refugee camps, particularly those across the border in North Kivu in Zaire, soon became rear-bases for members of the former Hutu regime to launch counter-insurgency operations inside Rwanda against the newly-established Tutsi-dominated government. In response, the RPA launched massive attacks against the camps in North Kivu at the end of 1996. More than one million refugees were forced back to Rwanda, practically overnight. However, the dismantling of the camps in Zaire did not end the violence inside Rwanda. Supporters of the former regime hid among the returning refugees and committed massacres and ambushes against anyone perceived as a supporter of the new government. The majority of these attacks occurred in the two north-western prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi due to their proximity to the insurgents’ hideouts on the Zairian side of the border. The security situation deteriorated dramatically until the national army got the upper hand and managed to chase the insurgents from the prefectures. The RPA used heavy-handed methods to gain control of the situation, reportedly killing hundreds of people in 1997 and at the beginning of 1998, at the peak of the crisis.

As part of the military strategy to quell the insurgency, the RPA decided to separate the civilian population from the insurgents by force. Around 650,000 people, half of them recently-returned refugees in the two north-western prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi were moved into makeshift camps by the RPA in the course of 1997 and first half of 1998 (WFP, 1 June 1999). Despite the brutality with which the government carried out its counter-insurgency operations, the forced move into makeshift camps was an important part of the military strategy to suppress the insurgency and to ensure the security of the civilians. (UNOCHA 31 August 2000)

### **Villagisation policy and internal displacement**

The National Habitat Policy of December 1996, also known as villagisation policy, provided for the relocation of all Rwandans living in scattered homesteads to government-created villages, and later was supposed to solve the country’s internal displacement problem (HRW, May 2001). The rationale for the policy can be traced back to the RPF victory allowing for the return of hundreds of thousand of Tutsis who had fled in the late 1950s and 1960s, and to the Arusha accords of 1993. Article 28 of the Accord stated that refugees who had been away for more than ten years could not claim the property their families had left behind, but would instead be assisted to resettle in new villages with basic infrastructure. The majority of the Tutsi who came back in 1994 and 1995 had been away for more than ten years and

therefore did not enjoy the right to claim the properties their families had left behind. But the mass displacement of Hutu in the wake of the genocide left large tracts of land free and thousands of houses unoccupied. In many cases the returning Tutsi illegally occupied this property (RISD, September 1999, p.5).

The situation changed drastically when the RPA dismantled the refugee camps in what was then Zaire and the Hutu refugees returned between October and December 1996. Many of the returning Hutus found their houses and land occupied by Tutsis and families from the two groups were sometimes forced to share lots (HRW, May 2001). With some reservations, the villagisation policy was largely welcomed by most of the recently returned Tutsi who either did not have any house or property or were illegally occupying other people's houses and plots. Villages predominantly occupied by old case-load have proven to be sustainable more than six years after completion (Global IDP Project visit to Umutara, 15 May 2005).

Contrary to the Arusha Accords which were meant to provide houses and property to people *in need of new houses*, the National Habitat Policy targeted *all Rwandans*. The government argued that villagisation would reduce pressure on land by creating non-agricultural employment, promote compliance with government policy, protect the environment and improve market access. The government also claimed that access to health, water, education and markets for the residents would be improved and that mixed villages would facilitate reconciliation and reintegration and, not least, contribute to a more rational use of the land. As such, the villagisation policy was a national response to problems far exceeding those strictly related to internal displacement and the reintegration of refugees. Soon after the adoption of the policy in December 1996, the government – with the support of donors, the UN refugee agency UNHCR, World Food Programme (WFP) and NGOs - initiated a hectic construction period which waned only in 1999 when donors started receiving reports of coercion and use of force. The total number of houses constructed under the villagisation programme had reached 300,000 by 2004, the majority between 1996 and 2000. Despite the magnitude and the drastic consequences for so many people, the policy has never been subject to any democratic scrutiny or consultation (HRW, May 2001).

The policy applied to all Rwandans, but has affected the different districts differently, depending on the eagerness with which it was implemented by the local authorities, the number and composition of returnees, resistance from the local population and, not least, access to international funding. A study from 2000 – soon after international donors started withholding funding – , revealed that more than 90 per cent of the population in Kibungo and Umutara prefectures lived in grouped villages, whereas Ruhengeri came third with more than 50 per cent, and Gisenyi fourth with 13 per cent. Only a very limited number of people live in villages established under the programme in the other prefectures (ISS, June 2005, p. 326). The high rates in Kibungo and Umutara reflect the high number there of largely Tutsi pastoralists who had fled to Uganda following pogroms in the 1960s and early 1970s and their descendants.

In Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, two of the most densely populated provinces in the country, there were few Tutsi returnees, and consequently little need for construction of new houses, whether scattered or in villages. The majority of the Hutu who had fled in the aftermath of the genocide could legally regain their property and land they had left less than three years earlier. Nevertheless, the government argued that the implementation of the policy in these

two prefectures would enhance security, as villages would facilitate control of population movements. The insecurity and ensuing internal displacement situation in these two prefectures in 1997 and 1998 was an opportunity for the authorities to separate the civilian population permanently from the insurgents.

Instead of letting the internally displaced return to their scattered homes on the hills, the government therefore decided to relocate the displaced people from the makeshift camps and resettle them collectively in newly-established group settlements under the ongoing national “villagisation” programme. They were relocated to sites near roads or not too far from the land they had left behind (OCHA, 31 August 2000; WFP, June 1999).

### **Protection concerns and obstacles to return**

Many of the 650,000 people who were internally displaced in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi are reportedly still facing protection concerns. Several villagers in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi in communes bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo claimed in May 2005 that high-ranking military officers were illegally occupying land they had abandoned and paying other villagers to cultivate it. Some villagers stated that it was not uncommon to be offered 100 Rwandan Francs a day, around one third of what they used to be paid before the villagisation programme, to work on illegally-occupied land which had belonged to neighbours. There was a pattern of reports villagers claiming that they could not return and reclaim their property because of the land-grabbing and intimidation by these officers or their representatives (Interviews with villagers in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, 17 and 18 May 2005). These allegations seem to be substantiated by recent reports of Rwandan asylum-seekers in Uganda and Zimbabwe describing the difficulties of reclaiming land and land-grabbing by high-ranking military personnel as reasons for seeking asylum. In the words of one asylum-seeker: “If you get a Major on the land, you cannot order him out” (RLP, March 2005; JRS, 16 August 2004). There are an increasing number of Rwandans, mainly Hutu, fleeing the country. Some of the asylum-seekers who have returned to Rwanda have reportedly become internally displaced for lack of means to repossess illegally-occupied property whose current occupants are allegedly protected by the authorities. The government, on the other hand, consistently denies that the refugees are fleeing harassment and discrimination, claiming that they are fleeing the implementation of the popular “Gacaca justice”, traditional tribunals adapted to prosecute cases related to the genocide. There are, however, an increasing number of officially registered disputes linked to land-sharing in the provinces most affected by the villagisation programme, most notably in Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, Cyangugu, Umutara and Kibungo (ISS, p. 275).

It is impossible to verify how many of the people affected by the villagisation policy approved of it and moved into the villages voluntarily. In May 2001 Human Rights Watch issued a report claiming that tens of thousands had been resettled against their will and that many of them had to destroy their homes as part of the government's efforts to stabilise the situation during the counter-insurgency operations in 1997 and 1998. The government responded to the report by saying that the policy “tries to persuade and sensitise the population to adopt the new settlement patterns.” It went on to say if the government had used force, it would have done so to relocate the whole rural population and not just a small percentage of it, as was the case (HRW, May 2001; GoR, 12 June 2001).

Other international NGOs as well as some UN agencies also said that the process of villagisation had not always been voluntary, particularly in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi. For instance, the UN Special Representative for Rwanda reported in 2000 that some coercion had occurred during the resettlement process (CHR, 25 February 2000). Local Rwandan authorities in several communes reportedly recognised in 1999 that more than half of the resettled population in the north-west would have preferred to go back to their original homes as security improved, but that the army could not (or would not) guarantee their safety (WFP, June 1999). The appalling conditions in the IDP camps, though, led many to move into the settlement sites without the authorities having to use force. The move into the settlement sites offered in any case better opportunities than the makeshift camps.

The residents the Global IDP Project mission met in May 2005 all explained that they had had no choice but to move into the villages, and that they did not have any prospects of returning to the houses and land they had abandoned. In the same vein, they said they would prefer to stay in their current locations if only sufficient services and land could be made available. However, most villagers had stayed more than four years in their current locations and seemed to be increasingly frustrated with the misery in the villages.

#### **Appalling conditions in settlement sites**

Housing and living conditions for the relocated people are considerably worse than before the displacement. The conditions in the villages and settlements are appalling, more than four years after the UN stated that “governmental and international efforts to stabilize the situation through durable solutions have advanced beyond the threshold of what still could be called internal displacement”. As of May 2005, there were thousands of makeshift shelters along rural roads in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi. Many have walls of leaves and soil and roofs of plastic sheeting giving very limited protection against rain and temperatures which can drop to 10C (50F) in Ruhengeri. A majority of the households are headed by women and there is a serious shortage of man-power. The hard volcanic soil makes it next to impossible for each household to have proper pit-latrines and access to water and sanitation facilities are reported to be a serious problem in most settlements. One widow in Ruhengeri could only afford to send one of her five children to school, despite the government’s Universal Primary Education scheme. She claimed to have been better off in the house she was forced to abandon in 1998 compared to her current situation. She had only been given a plot of 20 by 25 meters of arable land which was supposed to provide sufficient livelihood for her and her children.

Reduced access to land was reported to be a serious problem with far-reaching consequences for the villagers, not only in terms of food distress, but also in terms of related problems such as access to health and education. One head of household in a village of 1,600 houses in Ruhengeri had a plot of 20 by 20 meters which was meant to provide a livelihood for his wife and two children. He claimed that they would have nothing to eat on the day the Global IDP Project mission visited the village, unless his wife came back in the afternoon with money to pay for food (Global IDP Project mission, 17 and 18 May 2005). The village also hosted a smaller number of old case-load returnees, with whom the villagers had to share plots, which was reported to have caused increased food insecurity. Moreover, the village had no school and water supplies. Another widow in a neighbouring village stated that her original house was burned down during the 1997-1998 war. She had access to a 20-by-25

meter plot in her current location where she had been forced to move from the IDP camps in 1998. She had no money to pay for health care and was surviving on bean leaves.

None of the heads of the household interviewed by the Global IDP Project had access to more than 400-500 square meters of arable land, far below the minimum recommended of one hectare per household.

These findings are supported by reports of reduced productivity in the villages and high rates of chronic malnutrition among children under five years old in Ruhengeri. (Tiemessen, 5 March 2005; SC-UK, 29 August 2003)

### **National and international response**

The government continues to promote the villagisation policy more than five years after international funding dried up and security was restored in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi. Initially the insurgency in these two provinces justified both the internal displacement of more than 650,000 people and the ensuing relocation to the settlement sites under the villagisation policy. Shortly after the massive return of refugees from Zaire, the government argued that the villages would promote reconciliation and were necessary to accommodate the returnees during an emergency phase. In Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, the government justified the villagisation process by pointing out that traditional scattered settlements left people exposed to the actions of rebel groups. Grouped settlements in the north-west were also seen as a way of depriving the insurgents of hideouts and covert support (CHR, 8 February 1999).

As of July 2005, with the emergency phase over and security restored, the justification for the villagisation policy has changed. The grouped settlements policy is supposed to alleviate land scarcity and increase off-farm employment opportunities. As such, it has become part of the government's overall strategy to combat poverty and increase the urbanisation rate (IMF, April 2005, p 61; GoR, November 2002).

Funding for the villagisation policy came to an almost complete halt at the end of 1999, when the donors started having second thoughts about the voluntary nature of the relocation into the villages and their viability. The donors were particularly concerned about the situation in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, where use of force was reportedly widespread. Moreover, there was growing concern among donors that the relocations to the villages would imply a drastic urbanisation of rural areas without proper planning and the required social infrastructure (UNHCR, 2000). Nevertheless, the internally displaced people in these two provinces were effectively excluded from the humanitarian agenda in December 2000 when the UN ceased to consider them as such, arguing that "governmental and international efforts to stabilise the situation through durable solutions have advanced beyond the threshold of what still could be called internal displacement" (UNOCHA, 20 December 2000).

As a response to the criticism that followed soon after the most hectic construction period, the government endorsed a more detailed version of the villagisation policy, specifying technical requirements, minimum size of plots, distances to fields and public services. The effort has not borne any visible fruit; the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has received practically no response to their requests for support for the people in the settlement

sites. Since security was restored in 1999-2000, only around 12,000 out of 192,000 families in need have received housing, mainly due to lack of funding. The government has commissioned two reports on the socio-economic conditions in the villages which are meant to be background documents for a planned donor conference. However, as of July 2005, neither the reports nor the conference had materialised.

The parliament has endorsed a land bill which seems to complement the intentions of the villagisation policy. The bill, which opens up private ownership of land on a large scale, encourages a geographical separation, instead of the traditional way of living in which houses are located on the ground where farming takes place. The bill will thus make it possible to legally purchase land which the villagisation policy has made available. The land bill will reportedly affect around 90 per cent of the population, including those internally displaced people in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi who were moved into the settlement sites in the late 1990s, although it is still unclear in what way (IRIN, 5 October 2004).

### **Conclusion**

The villagisation policy in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi may have been a useful part of the strategy to quell the insurgency in 1997 and 1998. However, it is far from evident that it is or will be a useful strategy to eradicate poverty and thereby present itself as a durable solution to the plight of the more than 650,000 people who were internally displaced in 1997 and 1998. So far the government has failed to make a convincing case for the claim that land will be used more rationally when people live farther away from their fields and gardens. Moreover, the conditions in the settlement sites in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi remain dismal more than four years after the displacement situation was declared over. Villagers have reportedly access to far less arable land than they had prior to the displacement crisis. In May 2005, the Global IDP Project [The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre as of November 2005] collected testimonies from Hutu farmers who had been internally displaced and subsequently relocated to the settlement sites. All those interviewed stated that they had been better off in their original homes and that they had had no choice but to move into the settlements sites from the makeshift IDP camps. The testimonies also included reports of land-grabbing of their abandoned plots by high-ranking Tutsi military officers. The dismal conditions in the settlement sites and lack of livelihood opportunities in addition to the allegations of land-grabbing may present serious threats not only to the sustainability of the sites, but also to the reconciliation policy the government is pursuing.

On the one hand the government's national reconciliation policy prohibits reference or use of ethnic categories for political or economic gain. The government has labelled such attempts "divisionism" and anyone accused of it risks ending up in prison. On the other hand these categories are overwhelmingly present in the daily life of most Rwandans. It is well-known that most of the Hutu, including the relocated people in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi, perceive the Tutsi as the real representatives of the authorities and in control of the army (Willum, 22 October 2001). One woman in Gisenyi answered that "here we are all Hutu", when asked during the Global IDP Project mission who she was. This seems to point at the complicated relation between ethnicity and land issues that is disregarded and even suppressed by the government. From the Hutu perspective, the Tutsi are responsible for moving the displaced into miserable houses, illegally occupying their land and preventing them from returning to their original homes. From the authorities' perspective, ethnic categories contributed significantly to the genocide and should therefore be excluded from

any official discourse. According to the government, all citizens should be considered Rwandans rather than Hutus or Tutsis. The traditional scattered way of living is seen from this perspective as an impediment to development, with the villagisation policy being the only way to increase productivity irrespective of the ethnicity of the affected population.

These statements, regardless of the truth-content, reflect two major discrepancies that may have to be recognised as such before practical recommendations can be formulated. Firstly, while the affected people perceive ethnic differences as still determining their situation, the government denies that this is the case and tries to suppress all references to the issue in an apparent attempt to make it go away. Secondly the government's claim that the villagisation programme increases productivity and reduces poverty does not appear to be reflected in how the affected population sees the effects of the programme.

These discrepancies may be mitigated, although not eliminated, by increased funding and better conditions in the affected villages. The government as well as Rwanda's donors should therefore address the current misery in the settlement sites as a humanitarian issue. The government should be asked to make a convincing case for its claim that the villagisation policy increases productivity before renewed funding is considered. Efforts should also be made by the government to remove any bias in government policies nurturing perceptions that one group is favoured by the authorities at the expense of another, and to investigate reports of land belonging to displaced people being illegally occupied by members of the Rwandan army (Updated July 2005).

*Note: A full country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Rwanda is available online [here](#).*

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## **About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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