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Republic of the Congo:

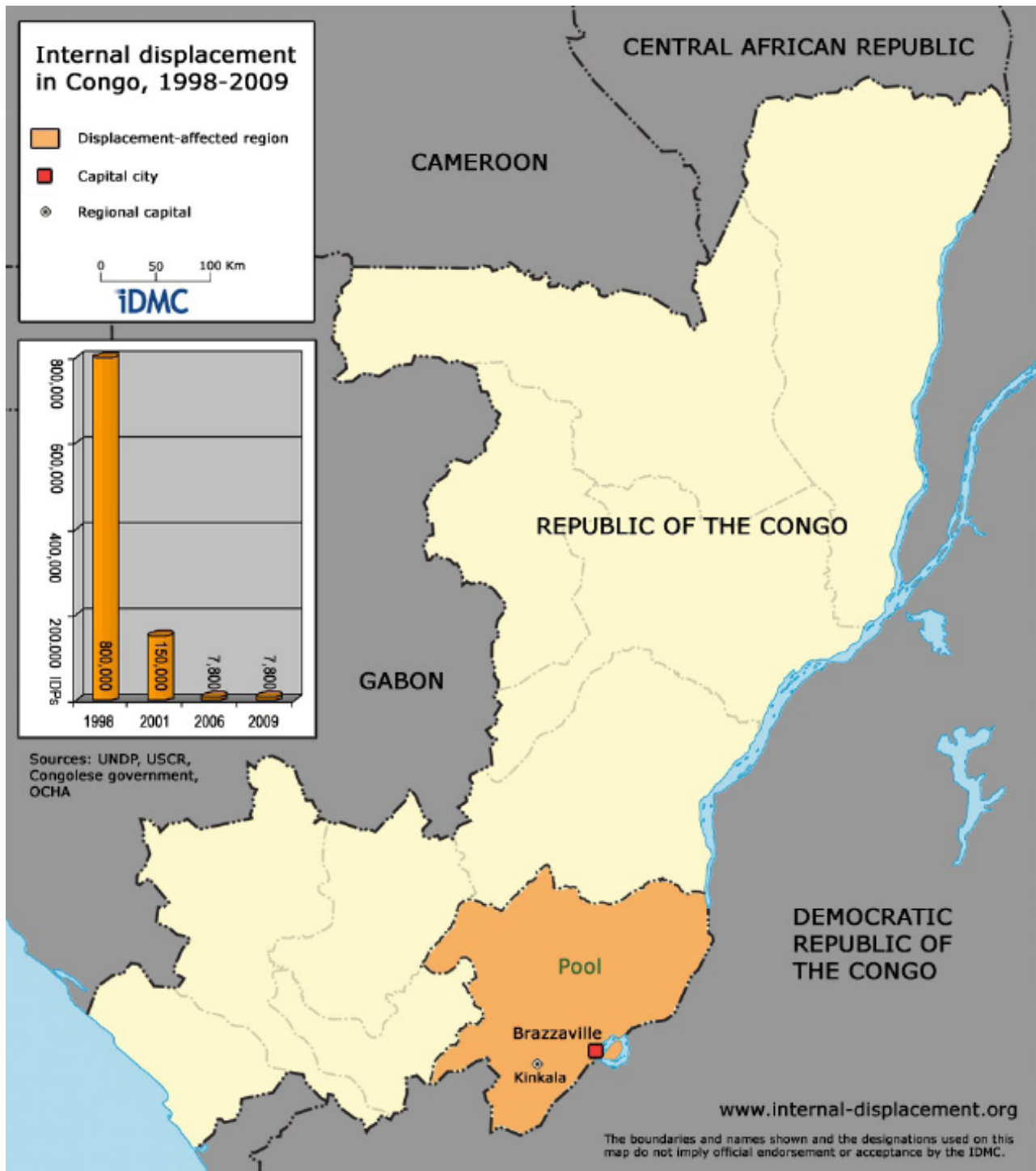
Peace and oil dividends fail to benefit remaining IDPs and other vulnerable populations

Up to 800,000 people in the Republic of the Congo – a quarter of the population – were internally displaced during the 1990s by armed conflict in the Pool region between government forces and rebels originating from among the Lari ethnic group. The conflict ended in 2003, and by 2006, according to a government estimate, only 7,800 people remained displaced in Pool.

Since then no new assessment of the number of IDPs has been conducted, and the UN reported no change to the government estimate in its Displaced Populations Report of January – March 2009. More significantly, no study of whether former IDPs have achieved durable solutions has been carried out, leaving unanswered the question of whether internal displacement has really ended in the Republic.

Despite apparent stability and some progress made towards development in the fifth largest oil-producing country in sub-Saharan Africa, half of the population still lives under the poverty line. Held back by weak governance and corruption, the government has been unable to achieve measurable improvements in the living conditions of the majority of the population.

Internal displacement in the Republic of the Congo



Source: IDMC

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

Background and causes of displacement

A decade of armed conflict from 1993 caused the internal displacement of 800,000 people in the Republic of the Congo. Sparked by disputed parliamentary elections, the conflict lasted until the government and the “Ninja” rebels, the armed wing of the National Resistance Council (*Conseil national de résistance, CNR*) which originated from among the Lari ethnic group, signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003. Analysts believe that a struggle for control of the country’s offshore oil wealth was at the heart of the conflict (BBC, 1 August 2009). The Pool region in the south of the country, near the capital Brazzaville, was the most affected by the fighting and internal displacement (IRIN, 6 June 2008).

Fighting broke out again after the signing of the ceasefire agreement due to unresolved political differences. In the Pool region, intermittent clashes between government forces and Ninja rebels, and attacks by bandits, limited the freedom of movement of civilians. Former CNR child soldiers were believed to be significantly contributing to the insecurity through their involvement with bandits (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 20 May 2008). UN agencies and NGOs were forced to shut down aid programmes repeatedly, interrupting the population’s access to humanitarian assistance and protection.

The signing of a final peace agreement in June 2008 between the government and the remaining rebel leader, Pasteur Ntumi, resulted in improved security for civilians in the Pool region (USDoS, 25 February 2009). As part of the

agreement, the CNR transformed itself into a political party known as the National Council of Republicans (AI, 2008). This led to the dismantling of road blocks that had been erected by security forces and rebel groups (IRIN, 6 June 2008). An estimated 30,000 ex-combatants took part in a demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration programme funded by the World Bank and the Congolese government (IRIN, 10 June 2008). In February 2009, the government launched a three-week operation to purchase weapons from ex-combatants. More than 3,000 weapons were incinerated by government authorities (IRIN, 4 March 2009).

Presidential elections were held on 12 July 2009. Congo’s constitutional court confirmed the re-election for a last seven-year term of President Denis Sassou Nguesso, although opponents alleged widespread fraud. Under Congolese law, the court’s rulings cannot be appealed (Reuters, 15 July 2009).

Latest displacement figures

At the peak of the conflict in 1998, some 800,000 people – a quarter of the entire population – were displaced in the Pool region (UN Wire, 4 August 2000). By 2006, according to a government estimate, only 7,800 people remained displaced in Pool (OCHA, 30 November 2006). Since then, no new assessment of the number of remaining IDPs has been conducted, and the UN has reported no changes to the government figures in its most recent *Displaced Populations Report* (OCHA, March 2009). Likewise, the question of whether former IDPs have achieved durable solutions has not been studied.

Neither the government nor the UN has published plans for a new assessment of the number of people still displaced, or for an assessment of whether durable solutions have been achieved for former IDPs. Although it would be difficult to identify IDPs and returnees because most sought refuge with families and host communities in Brazzaville, the government and the UN must take advantage of the successful peace process and the marked improvement in security to assess whether displacement has really ended, and if there are still conflict-affected communities in need of specialised assistance and protection. Without such assessments, the government remains unable to determine if it should develop national legislation, policies and programmes to address and promote solutions to internal displacement (Brookings, June 2007).

The seven sites in which IDPs received assistance and protection from humanitarian organisations were closed by the government following a small-scale return exercise in 2004 (IDMC, 18 April 2007), which included transportation to support the voluntary return of thousands of IDPs to their home villages in Pool (IRIN, 4 May 2004). The government resumed train services after a six-year suspension, thereby helping some IDPs to return to their homes and to resume farming activities, as they were able to get their produce to markets more easily. Other IDPs, however, returned home without government assistance as they could not withstand the poor living conditions at the sites (IRIN, 4 May 2004).

Congo also hosts 43,000 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Angola (OCHA, January – March 2009).

Main protection concerns

Today, any remaining IDPs and returnees continue to share considerable hardship with other vulnerable populations in the Pool region, which has been affected by extreme poverty and the government's incapacity to deliver basic services. For example, less than half of the population in 2008 had access to clean water, exacerbating the incidence of waterborne gastro-intestinal diseases such as dysentery and cholera (OCHA, 2008).

Protection concerns for vulnerable populations, including women and children, have been voiced by UNICEF and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. According to UNICEF, the country has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the region, and one in eight children dies before their fifth birthday, most of them from preventable causes (UNICEF, 24 August 2009).

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has reported that the reintegration of former child soldiers is being supported by the International Labour Organization (UN GA, 6 August 2009). Approximately 200 former child soldiers, more than 70 of them girls, received professional training or work placements, while over 650 vulnerable children, including more than 200 girls, participated in an anti-recruitment programme (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 20 May 2008).

In May 2009, the UN's Human Rights Council strongly recommended that the Republic ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (HRC, 5 June 2009). This protocol is particularly important because it raises the minimum age for recruitment and use of children in armed conflict from 15 to 18. It also obliges states to provide the children who have participated in armed conflict with any necessary physical and psychological rehabilitation and support for reintegration within society (OP, 25 May 2000).

Congo's Human Rights Commission (HRC) is charged with addressing public concerns on human rights issues. However, it is widely believed to lack independence and to be ineffective, and is not accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (USDoS, 25 February 2009). The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has noted that it lacks the financial resources to monitor the implementation of conventions to which the Republic of the Congo is a signatory, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (HRC, 17 March 2009). The HRC does not monitor the human rights of IDPs or returnees, including displaced or returned women and children.

National and international responses to internal displacement

National response

In 2000, the government created the Ministry of Cooperation, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity as an institutional framework to resolve the problem of internal displacement (HRC, 23 February 2009). However, it has remained severely underfunded and has done very little to

address the needs of remaining IDPs, returnees and host communities, such as assessing their numbers and providing access to basic social services. The UN country team in 2008 noted that very little social protection was afforded to vulnerable populations, including women and children. There was a lack of funding for such protection as only 0.34 per cent of the government's overall budget was allocated to social spending (HRC, 17 March 2009).

In 2008, a positive regional development for the protection of IDPs was the entry into force of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa's Great Lakes region (the Great Lakes Pact). It represents a commitment by states to work to end the conflicts plaguing the region, and to cooperate on security, governance, development, humanitarian and social issues. The Republic of the Congo is one of 11 states that ratified the Great Lakes Pact, which entered into force on 21 June 2008 (UN SG, 24 June 2008).

The Great Lakes Pact has ten protocols, three of which affect IDPs directly: the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children, the Protocol on Property Rights of Returning Persons, and the Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (ICGLR, 14-15 December 2006). The latter commits member states to incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into domestic law. The Republic of the Congo has yet to enact national legislation to protect IDPs.

International response

The Republic of the Congo enjoys high oil dividends but poverty indicators such as maternal mortality and child malnutrition remain alarming. The country's economy is heavily dominated by the oil sector, which in 2008 accounted for approximately 65 percent of its gross domestic product (WB, March 2009). However, this has not translated into measurable improvements in the living conditions of the majority of the population living under the poverty line.

While several international donors do not fund humanitarian appeals because they believe the government has oil dividends at its disposal, and even though the situation in the Republic is no longer considered as a humanitarian emergency, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) disbursed \$2 million to UN agencies in 2008 as part of its underfunded emergencies programme, to assist local communities and refugees from DRC (OCHA, 28 April 2009). The funds were used to provide health care services including emergency obstetrics, agriculture and food security support, and nutrition, water and sanitation projects.

Although no humanitarian funding appeals were made in 2009, the Congolese government signed a joint plan of action for aid and development with UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF for the 2009-2013 period. The three UN agencies will contribute a total of \$68 million for programmes dealing with democracy and rule of law, respect for human rights, efficient and transparent use of public resources, and improvement of and access to public services in health, education,

water and sanitation, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS (UNDP, 23 January 2009).

While one of the main objectives of this joint action plan is to reach the Millennium Development Goals, programming must take into account the specific needs of conflict-affected populations, including any remaining IDPs, returnees and host communities, thereby ensuring that durable solutions are achieved and that durable peace is attained. UNICEF will provide \$500,000 in additional support for health, nutrition and education programmes to help mitigate the effects of the global economic crisis on vulnerable communities (ReliefWeb, 24 August 2009).

Note: This is a summary of IDMC's new internal displacement profile on the Republic of the Congo. The full profile 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.

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