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**Executive Board  
Annual Session**

**Rome, 18 - 21 May 1998**

# **INFORMATION NOTE**

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

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Distribution: GENERAL  
**WFP/EB.A/98/INF/5**

6 February 2009  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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## NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

**This document is submitted for information to the Executive Board.**

Pursuant to the decisions taken on the methods of work by the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1996, the documentation prepared by the Secretariat for the Board has been kept brief and decision-oriented. The meetings of the Executive Board are to be conducted in a business-like manner, with increased dialogue and exchanges between delegations and the Secretariat. Efforts to promote these guiding principles will continue to be pursued by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat therefore invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff member(s) listed below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting. This procedure is designed to facilitate the Board's consideration of the document in the plenary.

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1. Internal displacement constitutes one of the greatest and most pressing challenges facing the international community today. It is estimated that at least 25 million people worldwide are internally displaced. The Secretary-General, in his programme for reform within the United Nations, noted that the provision of assistance and protection to the internally displaced remains one of the humanitarian issues which falls between gaps of the existing mandates of agencies within the system. Although progress has been made in recent years in strengthening the capacity of WFP and partner organizations within the United Nations to address the needs of the displaced, a more organized and coherent response is required. In recognition of this, the Secretary-General has placed on the Emergency Relief Coordinator the responsibility for ensuring that the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons are effectively addressed. WFP welcomes the placement of this subject at the top of the list of 1998 priorities for the new Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
2. Considerable efforts have been made by the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons over the past several years to develop an appropriate normative framework for the protection and assistance of the displaced. In collaboration with a team of international legal experts, the Representative has prepared two studies analysing existing legal standards pertaining to internal displacement and, on the basis of these studies, developed a set of Guiding Principles for comprehensively addressing the needs of the displaced. WFP is pleased with the inter-agency collaborative process which characterized the elaboration of the Guiding Principles. WFP also appreciates the opportunity to have participated in the Expert Consultation on the Guiding Principles which was hosted by the Government of Austria in Vienna in January of this year.
3. As defined in the Guiding Principles, the internally displaced are “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.” The Guiding Principles call attention to the three phases of internal displacement: pre-displacement (the right to be protected against arbitrary displacement from one’s home or place of habitual residence); the period of displacement (when partnerships among those with assistance and protection mandates are essential to addressing the needs of affected populations); and in the return, resettlement and reintegration phases. The Guiding Principles seek to address the special needs of internally displaced women and children as well as those of particularly vulnerable categories of persons among them, such as expectant mothers, mothers of young children, women heads of household and unaccompanied minors.
4. WFP believes that the Guiding Principles will help increase international awareness of the specific problems which the internally displaced face and will provide a benchmark against which to better monitor and assess the treatment of the displaced. WFP finds the Principles to be well formulated, consolidating the principal relevant elements from a wide body of existing international human rights and humanitarian law. They represent a useful tool for the humanitarian community.
5. The Guiding Principles were presented to this year’s 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights as part of the Report of the Representative of the Secretary-



General on Internally Displaced Persons (United Nations Document E/CN.4/1998/53, Add.2). The Commission on Human Rights took note of the Guiding Principles in resolution 1998/50 of 17 April 1998. It also welcomed the cooperation established between the Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, as well as the International Organization for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant international and regional organizations and agencies in exploring methods and means to better address the protection and assistance needs of displaced persons.

6. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee, on 26 March 1998, welcomed the Guiding Principles and encouraged its members to share them with their Executive Boards. It further encouraged members to share the Principles with their staff, especially those in the field, and to apply them in their activities on behalf of internally displaced persons. Pursuant to the decision of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and, in support of the work of the Representative of the Secretary-General to gain their widest possible dissemination, WFP is pleased to present the Guiding Principles to the Executive Board. Steps are also being taken to share the Principles with WFP staff at the field and headquarters levels. Given that WFP provided assistance to approximately 15 million internally displaced persons in 1997, it stands prepared to work with Governments, Inter-Agency Standing Committee members, and all inter-governmental and non-governmental partners in the application of the Guidelines and in efforts to provide assistance, protection and solutions for the displaced.

