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## Great Lakes Pact a welcome step towards better protection of the displaced; implementation must be a priority

GENEVA, 14 December 2006 – As Heads of States from the Great Lakes gather in Nairobi this week to sign a regional Pact on Security, Stability and Development, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the International Refugee Rights Initiative heralded the process as holding out great hope for the approximately 9.5 million IDPs and nearly 2 million refugees in the region. Collectively, the Great Lakes host's more than half of Africa's internally displaced population.

“The signing of the Pact is a signal of the commitment of States to lift the region out of more than a decade of violent conflict and firmly sets the Great Lakes on the path to peace and stability,” said Elisabeth Rasmusson, Head of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. “Progress towards peace and stability is crucial for ensuring durable and sustainable solutions for the millions of displaced people in the region”, she added.

The Pact is a culmination of more than four years of regional negotiations among States. It contains a package of measures which promises to enhance the lives of the forcibly displaced, including a regional protocol on protection and assistance for internally displaced, which when signed, will be the first legally binding regional instrument specifically dealing with IDPs anywhere in the world. A regional protocol on property rights of returning populations, and protocols which address some of the root causes of flight in the Great Lakes are also key elements of the Pact.

“The signing of the Pact is a watershed for the protection of the internally displaced, not just in the Great Lakes region but worldwide,” said Dismas Nkunda, Co-Director of the International Refugee Rights Initiative. “Now the burden rests on national governments and civil society in the region to make the commitments set out in the Pact felt on the ground and create a model for other regions to follow.”

The protection and assistance needs of displaced populations in the Great Lakes are massive, with continued conflict generating new displacement in Sudan's Darfur region, in the Central African Republic, and in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In contexts where return processes are ongoing, such as Burundi, Angola and southern Sudan, IDPs and refugees face enormous hurdles in reclaiming land and other property and accessing services to meet their basic needs.

The IDMC and IRRI are committed to supporting the implementation of the Pact, including through support to local NGOs in the region and advocacy with international partners to the Great Lakes Process.

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*The **International Refugee Rights Initiative** is a non-governmental organisation based in New York and Kampala devoted to enhancing the protection of the displaced worldwide.*

[www.refugee-rights.org](http://www.refugee-rights.org)

*The Geneva-based **Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.*

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