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UNITED NATIONS

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR REFUGEES

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20 March 2001

Dear Mr. Oshima

It was good to see you in New York recently, and to pursue the valuable discussions we started during your recent visit to Geneva. One issue about which I would like to share my thoughts with you is our action vis-à-vis internally displaced persons. I am regularly asked about my opinion on this -- including during my meetings earlier this week in Tokyo. I have spoken a few times with Dennis McNamara and, following those conversations, would like to convey to you my views on the matter.

I would start by stating that I do think that we need an inter-agency mechanism to initiate action on IDPs, and that it is appropriate that OCHA should be in charge of that mechanism, with the support of the inter-agency IDP bureau as I expect Dennis McNamara to propose. OCHA would have the responsibility to activate it, any time it is considered necessary, given the number of a specific group of IDPs, and their situation and condition. OCHA could do this at its own initiative, or on the recommendation of one of the humanitarian agencies (in the UN or Red Cross movement). This initiative by OCHA would be the first step for an international intervention in an IDP situation.

The second step would be that OCHA should obtain the Secretary-General's consent to proceed. This would be the first in a series of three consecutive green lights. The third step (and second green light) would be that OCHA should obtain the consent of the government of the country where the IDPs belong, for an international intervention to take place. Once that is agreed, OCHA should invite one or more of the humanitarian organisations to develop, as an implementing agency, a plan of action. The invitation should take into account the respective mandates, capacity and expertise of agencies. The agency can be UNHCR; it can be another organisation. If it is the former, UNHCR may decide to partner with another agency in developing a plan of action. As you know, UNHCR has clear criteria for its involvement, endorsed by the UN General Assembly and set out in its policy paper of March 2000, endorsed by the UNHCR Executive Committee.

OCHA and the agency(ies) would then jointly address the question of funding. Only when donors for this IDP situation assure specific funding, would the intervention move ahead. This is the third green light. After that, a formal letter from the implementing agency(ies) would be addressed to the Secretary-General and to OCHA to confirm the action. From thereon, OCHA's direct role in the inter-agency mechanism would end, as the implementing agency(ies) take charge of the implementation of the plan of action. OCHA would of course be kept informed of developments as they unfold.

Mr. Kenzo Oshima  
Under-Secretary-General for  
Humanitarian Affairs  
and Emergency Relief Coordinator  
New York

To summarise, I would say that we should become involved in an IDP situation after we have obtained a full sequence of three green lights: from the Secretary-General, the concerned government, and the donors.

I have just seen a draft interim report from Dennis McNamara. On behalf of UNHCR, Irene Khan will discuss it with Dennis McNamara on Wednesday, 21 March 2001.

I look forward to your reaction to this proposal, and to discussing the matter further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Ruud Lubbers