

Sudanese displaced women carry firewood at Abu Shouk camp, in north Darfur, Sudan. The United Nations says about 25 million civilians internally displaced by war and violence remain largely unprotected and unassisted because they are not recognized under international law. The United Nations identifies Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Colombia as having the worst crises in the world.

The United Nations estimates more than 13 million people are internally displaced by war and persecution in Africa. That is more than half the total number of people displaced worldwide and more than the world's 10 million registered refugees.

Dennis McNamara, a Senior U.N. official who coordinates emergency relief for the displaced, says the plight of internally displaced people is largely ignored by the international community.

"Most of them live in miserable conditions with quite inadequate basic humanitarian support," he said. "Many of them receive no international support or national support at all. And, most of them, as I have said, are liable to abuse and have protection problems."

Mr. McNamara refers to them as the de facto new refugees of Africa. He says the world's 25 million displaced people are caught in the cracks of international humanitarian law. Since they have not crossed an international border, he notes they are not considered to be refugees. So, he says they are not entitled to the protections and assistance given refugees under international law.

The UN Official warns that development and peace building are not possible in an unstable environment, where hundreds of thousands of people have been made homeless.

"Unless you stabilize the returning millions to South Sudan or the returning hundreds of thousands in Liberia or the hopeful returning 1.5 million in northern Uganda or the one-half million in Somalia, all of whom should be going back as the peace process moves forward," he added. "Unless you deal with them and stabilize them, not just in humanitarian relief terms, but in livelihood and basic services terms, you have a problem in taking the peace building process forward."

Echoing this warning is the top U.N. humanitarian official, Jan Egeland. He says the world is committing an historic mistake by failing to support the peace deal in southern Sudan.

He says in order to save the fragile peace agreement between the north and south, the international community has to help an estimated 4.5 million refugees and displaced people to return to homes in Sudan.

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