

The Crisis of Displacement and Resettlement of Bakassi People of the Nigeria-Cameroon Borderlands

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Abstract : After many years of a border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula, the International Court of Justice ruled in 2002 that, based on the 1913 colonial boundary agreement between Britain and Germany, the oil-rich Peninsula, inhabited for generations by Nigerians, and hitherto administered as one of Nigeria's 774 Local Government Areas, belongs to Cameroon, and not to Nigeria. Under pressure from the international community, Nigeria and Cameroon signed the Greentree Accord in 2006 to comply peacefully with the ICJ ruling and to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Bakassi people, whether they opted to remain in the Peninsula under the authority of Cameroon or relocate to Nigeria. Sadly, the Nigerian government and the international community underestimated the scale of displacement that would follow the withdrawal of the Nigerian administration and military forces from the area and did not prepare adequately for the massive influx of tens of thousands of Bakassi people hurriedly dislodged by the reported hostility of the Cameroon authorities and their security services. The paper discusses the historical context and contemporary significance of the crisis, the chaotic resettlement schemes and appalling humanitarian relief camps in 'New Bakassi', and the prolonged hardship and disillusionment of the disaffected refugees/returnees. The lesson for African and Asian governments and peoples is to avoid needless conflicts over the 'imported' colonial boundaries, to remove unnecessary border restrictions, and take fully into account the development needs and well-being of borderland communities that sometimes rightly feel that distant central governments negotiate their political and international interests at the expense of the borderlands; and finally, to begin to see the boundaries more as links and bridges for the cooperation and integration of African and Asian states and peoples, rather than as barriers and static lines of demarcation on the map.

Keywords : Africa, forced displacement, resettlement, border conflict, Bakassi

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