

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOS  
28 – 30 JUNE 2011, International Conference Center Geneva**

**Background Paper  
Side meeting: Distance Learning: A window of opportunity**

*Tuesday 28 June 2011, 13:00 - 14:00, Room 5*

**The RET  
(Foundation for the Refugee Education Trust)**

Who we are

The RET, headquartered in Geneva, with offices around the world, was founded in December 2000 by Mrs Sadako Ogata, then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The RET is an independent, impartial, non-partisan organisation, with no religious or political affiliation. Although financially independent from UN agencies, we have strategic alliances with UNHCR, UNESCO-IBE, UNICEF, IOM among others.

Mission: At the RET, we are committed to assisting communities to meet the educational needs, in the broadest sense, of young people made vulnerable by displacement, violence, armed conflict and disasters.

Where we work and what we do worldwide

We have been active on three continents – 17 countries – 71 programmes, of which 17 have been over multiple years. Currently, our regional focus is on Afghanistan/Pakistan, Chad/Sudan/Kenya, Burundi/Congo/Tanzania, Haiti and Ecuador/Colombia/Panama/Costa Rica. To date, we have been able to help half a million direct beneficiaries – learners and educators, and nearly three million indirect beneficiaries. We provide a continuum of formal and non-formal programmes in classical secondary education, distance learning, livelihoods and vocational training in marketable trades, teacher training, life skills training, addressing gender issues, psycho-social needs, human rights, peace education, conflict prevention/mitigation and solutions to other community development challenges. Additionally, we provide a bridge to employment and economic development, and to formal tertiary education.

At the RET, we are currently working in areas that are either in conflict, coming out of conflict, or at high risk of violence. Our focus is not only on the emergency relief needs of refugees, but on the developmental needs for the returnees, and of course on the ever-growing numbers of internally displaced arising from conflicts within country borders. The RET helps bridge the gap between humanitarian and development assistance.

## What we do in Chad

There is no likely voluntary return for the Sudanese refugees any time soon, with the violence in Darfur continuing as it is. This has led to a strengthened call for better service provision in the Eastern camps, as the socio-economic situation is already unsteady and the continued influx of refugees is resulting in cramped conditions and a higher level of competition for the few services already provided, such as education. The provision of education in the camps is hindered by the lack of qualified teachers and materials, and exposure to accredited curricula. IN addition, certain cultural practices regularly rob girls and young women of their right and access to education.

The RET provides Sudanese refugees in the Eastern camps with formal and non-formal post-primary education, either directly in schools or via Secondary Education Distance Learning programmes (SEDL). Youth living in these camps have very few recreational or educational opportunities, thus the RET projects ensure their access to accredited secondary education and marketable skills, that will promote social inclusion and job creation for the displaced youth. Along with the International University of Africa (IUA, Khartoum, Sudan), the SEDL programmes provide both refugee and local youth with the opportunity to learn four compulsory subjects (Arabic, English or French, Mathematics and Islamic Studies) and two option courses in both the Arts and Sciences.

In addition to the SEDL courses, the RET also provides activities to teach basic cognitive skills (such as literacy and numeracy) and interpersonal life skills (leadership, learning to live together, human rights, sport and health) to youth aged 12 to 24, to help build their capacities and engage them in meaningful activities, thus eliminating the risks they encounter on a daily basis as a result of being inactive and idle in the camps.