

July 24, 2008

Contacts:

Mpako Foaeng and Erin A. Weir

## CHAD: SET THE STAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE RETURN

International aid agencies and donor governments should develop strategies to promote durable solutions for internally displaced people (IDPs) in eastern Chad and to decrease Sudanese refugees' dependence on outside assistance. Although increasing banditry and criminality has hampered access for humanitarian actors and freedom of movement for civilians, international agencies have been able to step up their assistance to displaced people. However, most basic needs still have to be met. Refugees and the internally displaced lack access to livelihood activities and socio-economic opportunities, and children, in particular, remain at risk of abuse and recruitment into armed groups.

The humanitarian crisis, which started in eastern Chad in 2003, is currently affecting more than one million people. Some 250,000 Sudanese refugees have fled fighting and gross human rights violations in the neighbouring Darfur region and live in 12 refugee camps in eastern Chad. There are also 185,000 internally displaced Chadians who since mid-2005 have been forced out of their communities by inter-communal conflict, cross-border raids by militias from neighbouring Sudan, and armed conflict between the government and rebel groups. In addition, approximately 700,000 civilians in eastern Chad are affected by recurrent fighting between the Chadian government and rebel groups based in Sudan, and bear the brunt of the presence of refugees and displaced people. Considering the current security situation, refugees and the majority of the internally displaced will remain displaced for much longer. It is time to start medium- and longer-term development projects that will set the stage for the return and reintegration of displaced Chadians and help refugees move toward self-sufficiency.

### A Strategic Approach to Child Protection

More educational opportunities are urgently needed to reduce the number of children being recruited into Chadian and Sudanese armed groups. The conflict and displacement situation in eastern Chad has exposed refugees and displaced children, including girls, to numerous threats. Some of them are separated from their families, physically targeted, or recruited by fighting forces. As members of militias and armed groups move into refugee camps and IDP sites, refugee and displaced children are particularly vulnerable to child recruitment and forced labor. Children

### Policy Recommendations

- The Special Representative of the Secretary General in conjunction with UNICEF should strengthen the monitoring system of reporting on the recruitment of child soldiers and develop a clear strategy to ensure government compliance to its commitment to end child recruitment.
- The UN Development Program, in conjunction with the UN country team and relevant Chadian ministries, must start supporting sustainable education programs and other early recovery and development projects that can eventually be led by Chadian agencies.
- The US and other international donors should provide adequate three- to five-year funding for longer-term early recovery projects, particularly health sector programs and livelihood activities.

as young as nine years old are being forcibly and/or voluntarily recruited into armed forces. The Chadian national army, militias supported by the Chadian government, and Chadian rebel groups have been recruiting within IDP sites and host communities.

Thousands of children are also recruited from refugee camps located close to the Sudan border by Sudanese armed groups, including the Janjaweed, the Justice and Equality Movement, and the Sudan Liberation Army. In March 2008 alone, UNHCR estimates that rebels have persuaded or coerced as many as 4,700 men and boys to join them from Breidjing and Treguine refugee camps.

Efforts to engage the government of Chad have only been partially successful. On May 9, 2007, UNICEF and the government signed an agreement for the demobilization of child soldiers throughout the country. However, the Chadian government has not fully abided by this agreement. UNICEF and other partners were not allowed to visit government military and training camps. In addition, UNICEF and its partners have not received consent from the government to engage with all non-state actors currently recruiting in Chad. Following the recent visit of the Secretary General's Special Representative for children in armed conflict, the government of Chad agreed to let UN agencies visit army camps and training centres. However, there is still no commitment to allow agencies to access children recruited by non-state armed groups.

Displaced children and adolescents should be given the opportunity to choose between joining an armed force and undertaking other types of activities that suit their age and environment. Once demobilized, there are not enough resources available to ensure the effective reintegration of children and young adolescents into their communities.

Ensuring education for internally displaced and refugee children, particularly girls, is of vital importance since it greatly reduces their exposure to recruitment. Access to education is difficult for all children in eastern Chad. The limited schools available are in rudimentary shelters, with teachers who have little or no formal training and students who lack learning materials. In refugee camps, IDP sites, and host communities, children and young adolescents lack access to secondary school and there are very few alternatives available. Only 6% of youth have access to vocational training in refugee camps. When they complete primary school, some Sudanese children go back to Darfur to continue their education. While the fate of these children is not known, it is likely that many of them are recruited into armed groups.

## Mitigating Tensions between Communities

Continuous support should be provided to host populations who have been accommodating refugees and internally

displaced people despite their own destitution. The population of Chad is generally poor and inhabitants of the conflict-affected southeast already live in chronic poverty, given the harsh climatic conditions and inadequate public infrastructure.

Upon their arrival in eastern Chad, refugees and the internally displaced have been accepted by the local population given the ethnic, linguistic and cultural affinities. However, this coexistence is slowly eroding because of the increasing pressure on land and other resources. Many IDPs and refugees are unable to cultivate because the small amount of nearby arable land is already in use by the host communities. Displaced women and children are often subjected to harassment, including rape, when foraging for wood and clashes between displaced communities and the local population often occur.

Some projects targeting local communities -- such as income-generating projects for women, livestock vaccination or construction of wells -- have been implemented by UNHCR in close cooperation with local institutions. However, as the displacement situation becomes protracted, such projects should be reinforced and long-term plans must be developed.

## Rebuild Confidence between IDPs and Communities in Areas of Origin

Reconciliation between communities is key to ensuring a sustainable return for internally displaced people in eastern Chad. Some 5,000 IDP families have started returning home to areas they deem to be relatively safe. Others returned to work their lands before the rainy season, but will observe how the security situation evolves before taking the final decision to return home. Refugees International met a number of internally displaced in sites in Goz Beida who said that if the violence in their areas of origin subsides, they will still require schools, health clinics, and the presence of local authorities before they would consider returning.

The majority of displaced people, however, are still afraid to return home. Many of them come from border villages where they fled inter-ethnic violence, and have seen their property looted, their villages burned to the ground, and some family members killed. The perpetrators of these acts have occupied their lands in total impunity. UNHCR and its partners have been facilitating a dialogue between the leaders of the displaced communities and those of villages of origin, including traditional and religious leaders. However, such initiatives have been on a small scale. These initiatives need to be revitalised and understood as an integral part of a broader reconciliation process that will re-establish trust among the different communities and set the stage for future durable returns.

*Advocates Mpako Faoleng and Erin Weir just returned from an assessment mission to Chad.*